



Disability Rights UK

**DPO Capacity
Building
Project**

DPO Sector Analysis

Part 2. The DPO Sector Assessment

Capacity, relations, challenges
and foresights



About this report

To form part two of a three-segment research report, **Part 2. The DPO Sector Assessment**, provides an in-depth discussion of the thematic analysis model released by Disability Rights UK's DPO Capacity Building project.

For a review of the research method, data analysis and complete thematic analysis table, please review **Part 1. The DPO Sector Research Report**.

For the recommendations, projections and values of Disability Rights UK's DPO Capacity Building project, grounded in these research findings, please review **Part 3. The DPO Capacity Building Recommendations and Projections**.

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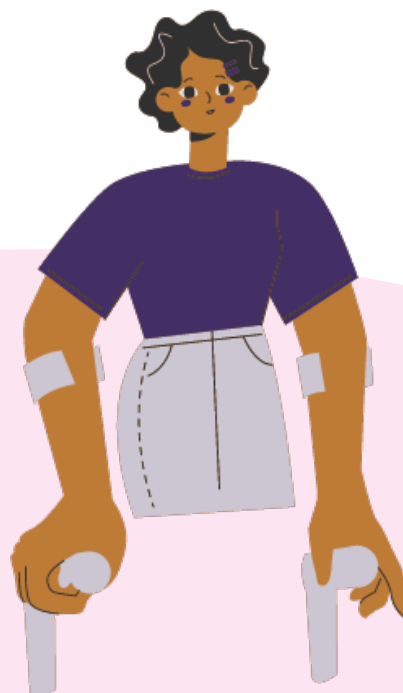
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Executive summary

In a 4-month, mixed-methods research study, consisting of informal interviews and focus groups with n=61 participants from n=32 DPOs in the UK, a thematic analysis method was employed to generate a model of the DPO sector, with reference to capacity building and development.

The model describes n=4 overarching themes, which outline the fundamental messages about the climate and values of the sector.

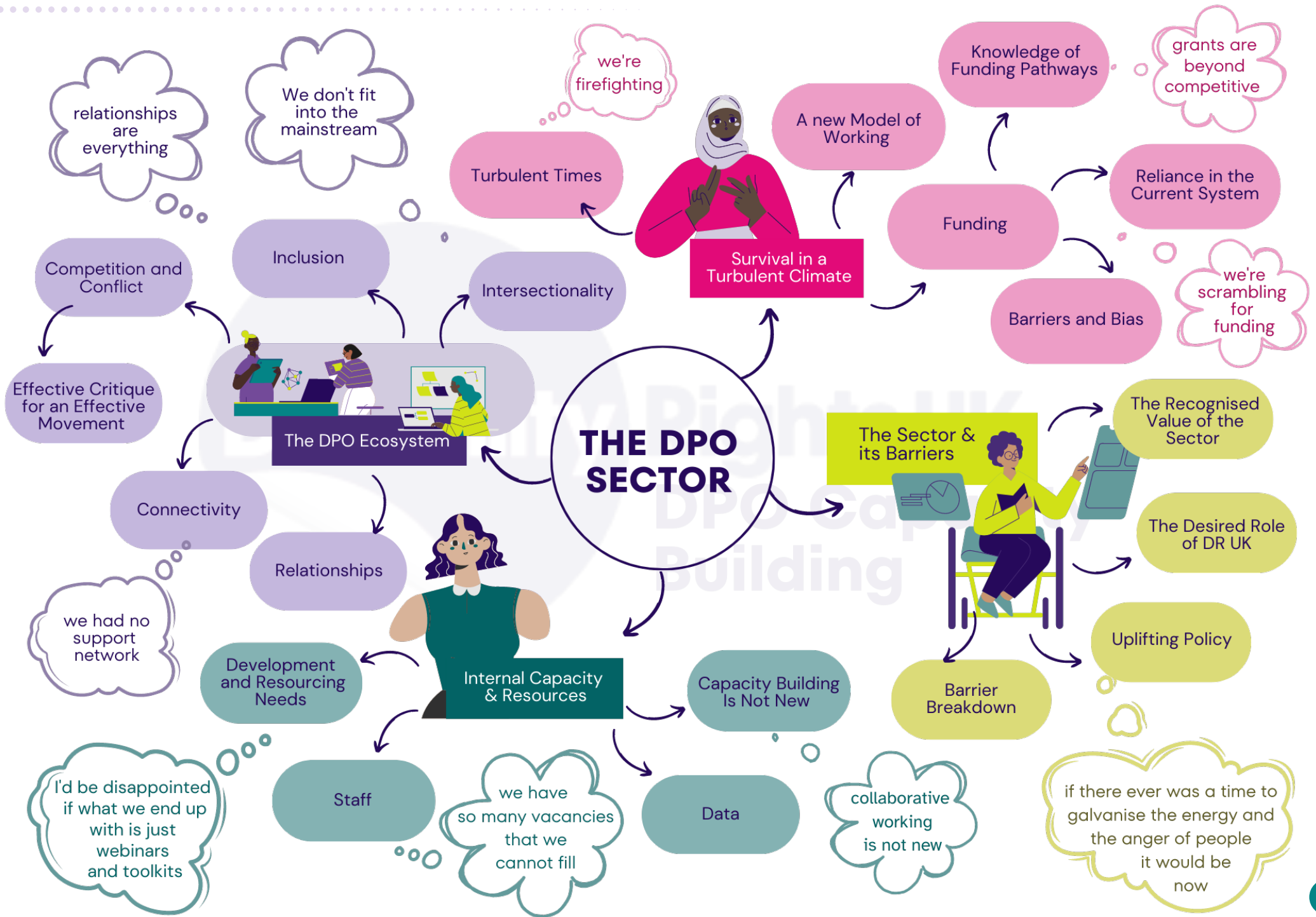
The DPO Ecosystem explores the overall relational environment in which DPOs operate, including issues of inclusion, intersectionality, competition and conflict, the desire for effective critique for an effective movement, relationships, and connectivity. It provides insight into the dynamics and relationships within the DPO sector, and the challenges and opportunities faced by organisations in this field.

Survival in a Turbulent Climate focuses on the challenges faced by DPOs in today's environment. Equally, it explores the desire for a new model of DPO operations, and funding issues: reliance on the current system, knowledge of funding pathways, barriers and bias. It sheds light on the difficulties DPOs face in securing resources and maintaining their operations.

Internal Capacity and Resources explores the staffing, data, development, and resourcing needs of DPOs. It highlights the importance of having adequate resources, including personnel and data, to support the work of DPOs and the ongoing need for capacity building resources within the sector.

The Sector and its Barriers focuses on the recognised value of the DPO sector, the desire for Disability Rights UK's (DR UK) role in barrier breakdown, uplifting policy, campaigning and the movement, and the overall desired role of DR UK. It provides insight into the external barriers faced by DPOs and the role that organisations like DR UK can play in supporting the sector and breaking down these barriers.

Within the overarching themes are a total of **n=17 themes** and **n=53 subordinate themes**.



Overview

The findings from this study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by the DPO sector.

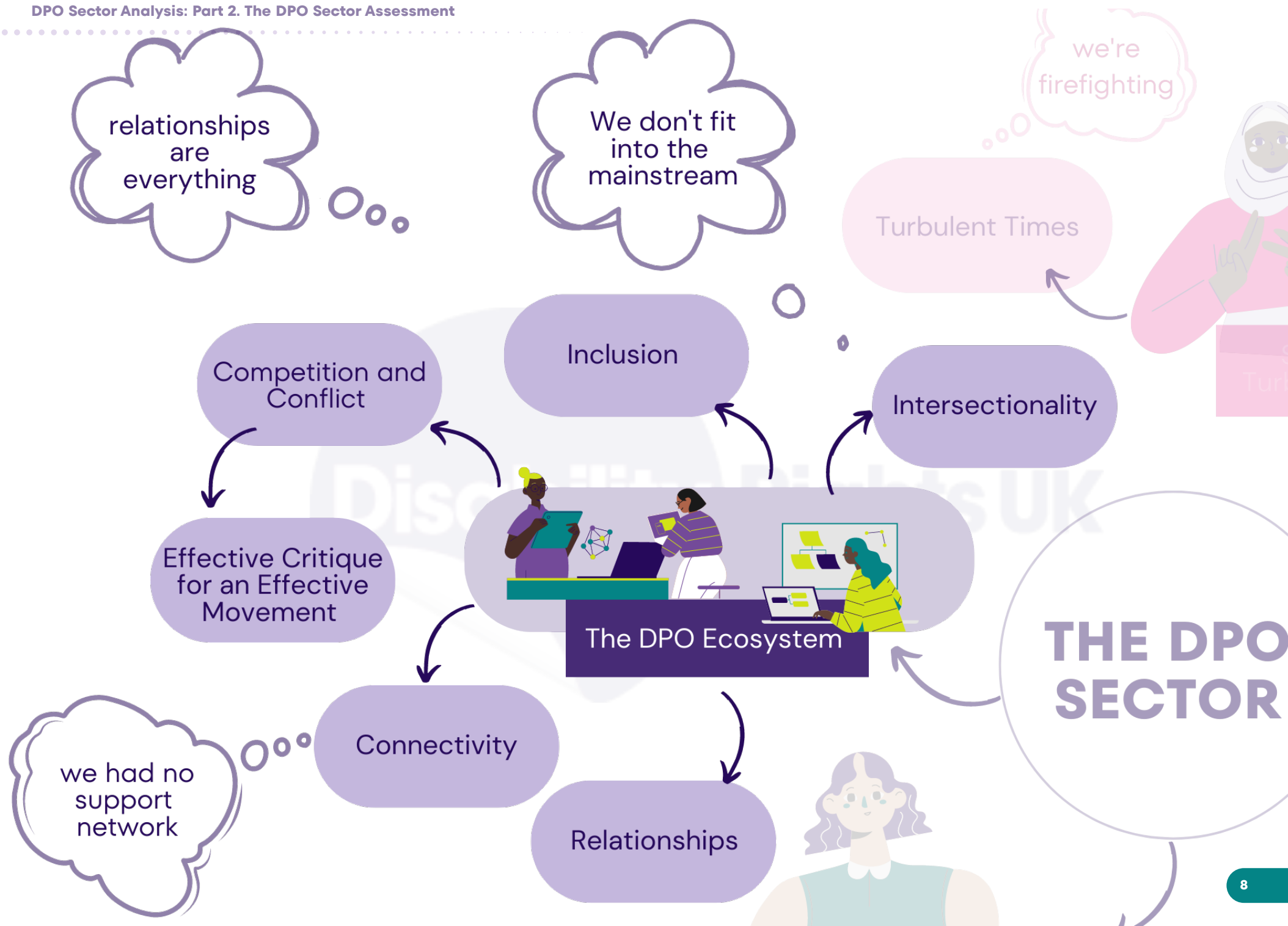
While the themes identified in this study are not exhaustive, and are by nature, dynamic and interactive, segregating the observations into four overarching themes is beneficial to organise and understand the data, and can provide insights into the key issues and challenges facing the DPOs and the sector as a whole. Importantly, the four overarching themes can guide the development of targeted solutions and Disability Rights UK's (DR UK) capacity building initiatives and identify areas for future research.

The DPO Ecosystem highlights the need for better collaboration and networks among DPOs, while the **Survival in a Turbulent Climate** theme emphasises the need for stability and financial sustainability in uncertain funding and political climates.

Internal Capacity and Resources highlight the importance of effective operational management and resource allocation specific to the needs of DPOs, while **The Sector and its Barriers** highlight the need to address macro systemic barriers to facilitate the success and survival of the sector.

This report will delve into these themes in more detail and explore the implications of the findings for the future of the DPO sector.





The DPO Ecosystem

This theme explores the overall environment in which DPOs operate, providing insight into the dynamics and relationships within the DPO sector, the challenges of connectivity, inclusion, and conflict. The DPO ecosystem is perhaps most reflective of the history of the Disability movement and the community of disabled people in the UK.

Within the DPO ecosystem, six main themes have been identified.

Connectivity

The first theme, **'Connectivity'**, explores the fragmentation in the DPO sphere, the external stakeholder sphere, the wider disabled community, and emphasises the need for network support.

Dominant in interviews and focus groups was the discussion of national connectivity and networking as a pillar of DPO development, vital for collaboration, resourcing and knowledge sharing. Yet, connecting with DPOs, particularly those outside of regular contacts, exceeded the day-to-day capacity of the participants.

"We're only familiar with other organisations in our immediate facility."

This was considered a detriment, not only to the effectiveness of DPOs, but the overall reach of the disability movement.

"It's not just about delivering services; it's about amplifying the voice of Disabled people – we can only do this if we're together."

To address this, DPOs identified a need for sustainable mediums for connection; digital formats such as maps, forums, and directories were more frequently discussed, and valued for their potential to facilitate networking swiftly and without exhausting capacity. However, with all digitally facilitated capacity building suggestions, many DPOs emphasised the digital divide; requesting supplementary non-digital mediums for connection. Similarly, opportunities to connect with DPOs in person were valued.

Facilitating peer advice, partnership forming, and mentoring opportunities were discussed as features of an effective connection platform. Interviewees in leadership positions valued the sounding boards, expertise and resources of management in other DPOs.

“It’s being able to ask for help; ‘we’re making a risk assessment; would you mind sharing yours?’”

From a strategic standpoint, interviewees in leadership positions suggested an effective platform would monitor and advertise other DPOs activity and openness to a partnership. One interviewee provided the example of identifying if another DPO in a region of interest wasn’t currently running a project that overlaps with their own, so they may offer them the opportunity of taking over their expanded services.

“How do I know the DPOs willing and ready to work in partnership? How do I know DPOs that aren’t in my inner circle or interacted with before?”

In the external stakeholder sphere, DPOs commented on a similar fragmentation, particularly in the welfare and social care sector. Here, there was an identified need for referral and contact routes in an accessible format.

Equally, DPOs commented on their disconnection from the wider disabled community, excluding their regular service user profiles, particularly among young people.

Overall, the need for network support was equated to the capacity development of the organisation; with connectivity, sharing, and learning from other DPOs in the sector a highly valued feature.

Connectivity sub-themes:

1. Fragmentation in the DPO sphere.
2. Fragmentation in the external stakeholder sphere.
3. Limited connection in the wider Disabled community.
4. Need for network support.

Relationships

The second theme, 'Relationships', explores the high value placed on relationships in the sector and how Covid-19 provided a relational unifier.

"Relationships are everything."

This theme notes heavily on the history of the disability movement; valuing the sense of community and pride.

Fostering successful relationships, however, have become increasingly difficult to navigate in a pressured sector and movement. DPOs often lack the capacity to develop the healthy relationships for a conscious and relational movement.

Covid-19, however, provided a unifying factor and DPOs commented on the success of the Our Voices model, to provide a sounding board to the movement's highs and lows.

Navigating the complexity of relationships in a sector that roots its action in passion, justice and values over profit, still poses a challenge; DPOs disagree on methods to propel the movement, and so, express a desire for a space to develop a healthy community and tools to form and maintain partnerships effectively.

Relationship sub-themes:

1. Relationships are everything.
2. Covid-19 provided a relational unifier.

Competition and Conflict

The third theme, 'Competition and Conflict', is intrinsically linked to the former theme, 'Relationships'. This theme examines the disputes in the sector on how to propel the movement, the competition among DPOs, marginalisation and representation in the DPO space, and the perceived value of the diversity in DPO action strategy.

As it did in the early disability movement, there remains a dispute in the sector on the effectiveness of mediums for propelling disability rights. The movement has historically critiqued itself over who is the authentic voice of the disability community and who speaks on behalf of the movement continues to be a living thread in the sector.

"The contest of who is the authentic true voice over the past 40 years..."

Equally, competition among DPOs for funding results in barriers to working together and to the capacity building project. Smaller DPOs, intersectional DPOs and northern DPOs are underrepresented in the DPO sphere, leading to concerns about losing independence when collaborating with other organisations.

However, some DPOs stressed that diversity in DPO action strategy enables the movement to be self-critical and facilitates variation in targeting a horizontally oppressive society.

"The contest of who is the authentic true voice over the past 40 years can be useful to help us be self-critical – as long as we don't let it pull us apart."

Competition and Conflict sub-themes:

1. Dispute in sector on how to propel the movement.
2. Competition among DPOs.
3. Marginalised representation in the DPO Space.
4. Perceived value of the heterogeneity in DPO action strategy.

Effective Critique for an Effective Movement

The fourth theme, **'Effective Critique for an Effective Movement'**, focuses on opening mediums for effective self-critique and promoting a critical movement and project. There is a need for effective communication, critique, and feedback, both internal to the capacity building project and in the DPO sector.

"How can we facilitate conversations better? How can we talk to people to update on experiential pot of learning; Creating a safe space to learn, and get it wrong?"

There is a desire for the space to effectively debate and propel the movement.

"We need the space to debate and propel the movement. There is no one facilitating these conversations because we're too busy firefighting and directing emergency reactions."

"In this sense we need to go back and do that basic stuff to have that space to grow their [young disabled people's] pride; to understand who they are."

Effective Critique for an Effective Movement sub-themes:

1. Opening mediums for effective self-critique.
2. Promotion of a critical movement and project.

Inclusion

The fifth theme, **'Inclusion'**, examines the mainstreamed definition of disability and its impact on the disability movement.

The marginalisation and neglect of invisible disabilities, mental health, and learning disabilities in the greater disability movement was reflected by DPOs. This theme not only highlights the need for a more inclusive understanding of disability, but for action to target the inclusivity of DPOs.

Inclusion sub-theme:

1. Mainstreamed definition of disability.

Intersectionality

Linked to **'Inclusion'**, the final theme, **'Intersectionality'**, examines both the experience of Intersectional DPOs in their connection to the mainstream DPO sphere, and non-intersectional DPOs, in their attempt to develop their inclusive practise.

The theme sheds light on the marginalisation of intersectional DPOs in the disability sphere. There are barriers to discussing race, gender, and sexual orientation within mainstream DPO forums and critical discussions; often, leading to barriers to networking, connection, partnership projects, and funding opportunities.

"We don't fit into the mainstream... DPOs don't know about us because of this."

Intersectional DPOs discussed their, and similar organisations, self-distancing due to a lack of inclusive practices and identifying as a non-DPO; which impairs the opportunity for a collective movement. Here, Intersectional-DPOs suggested that intersectionality should be integrated into the core of the DPO capacity building and DR UK's strategic plans to facilitate an inclusive movement.

Non-intersectional DPOs pointed to their limited familiarity with the intersectional practice, which impaired their access to intersectional terminology, inclusive models of Disability and connection with intersectionally marginalised service users.

"Our networks don't reach to people from POC communities."

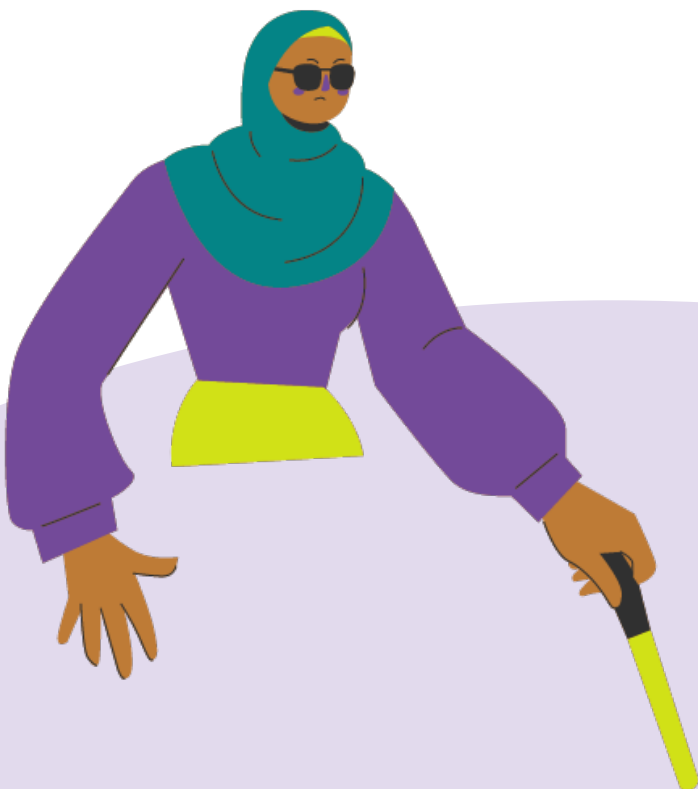
Intersectionality sub-themes:

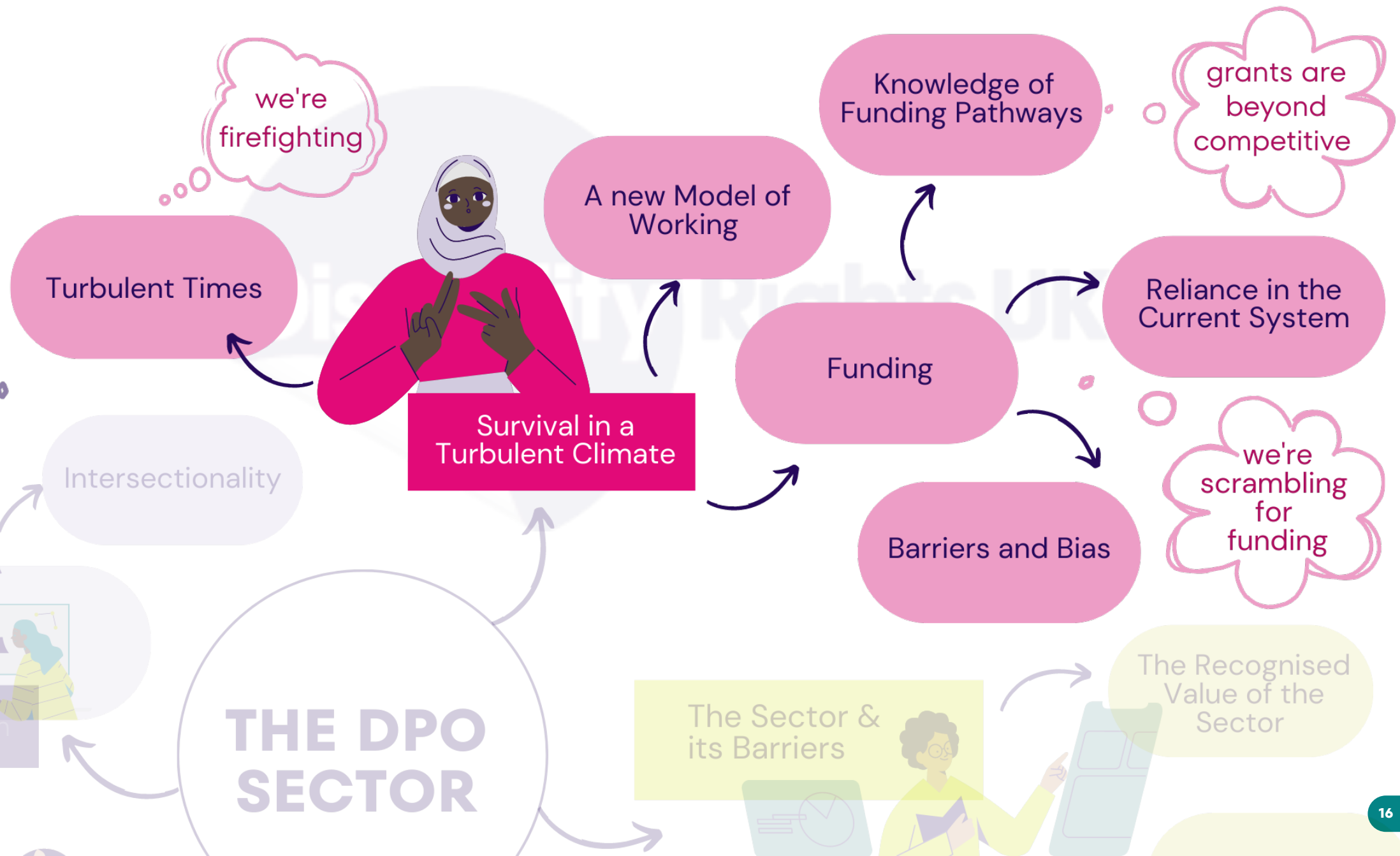
1. Intersectional DPOs marginalised from the DPO sphere.
2. Intersectional needs service users uncatered for by DPOs, supporters and funders.
3. Intersectional strategy is perceived as capacity building.
4. Limited familiarity with the intersectional practice.

The DPO Ecosystem: In conclusion

Overall, The DPO Ecosystem highlights the challenges faced by the DPO community in terms of connectivity, relationships, competition, effective critique, inclusion, and intersectionality.

To address these challenges, there is a need for sustainable mediums for connection, peer advice and collaboration, mentoring opportunities, a space to develop community, effective communication and critique, a more inclusive definition of disability, and the inclusion of intersectional perspectives in the DPO sphere.





Survival in a Turbulent Climate

The overarching theme of **'Survival in a Turbulent Climate'** is a critical issue faced by disabled people-led organisations (DPOs) in the current environment. This category examines the challenges faced by DPOs specifically in the backdrop of a post-lockdown Covid-19 UK, and within a context of the cost-of-living crisis and a rapidly changing political arena. Primarily, **'Survival in a Turbulent Climate'** sheds light on the difficulties DPOs face in securing resources and maintaining their operations.

The overarching theme was broken down into three main themes that highlight the challenges faced by these organisations: **A Turbulent Climate, A New Model of Working**, and **Financial Pressures**. The themes were further broken into nine subordinate themes, as outlined below.

A Turbulent Climate

'A Turbulent Climate' provides the backdrop to the daily operations of DPOs, influenced exclusively by DPO's external environment. Due to the rapidly altering political arena, challenges to human rights and service user's increased the need for effective welfare provision in the cost-of-living crisis, DPOs found themselves 'firefighting'.

"We're firefighting."

Whether it be through heightened reactionary human rights campaigning or welfare advice, many DPOs struggled to keep up with the political environment – exceeding temporal, physical and financial capacity. In this challenging environment, service and advice-giving DPOs found it challenging to monitor changes in UK policy and welfare rights; viewing the advice, communication and campaigning delivered by DR UK as a source of resolution to this challenge. Notably, this theme related to a later discussed theme, **'Uplifting Policy'**, discussed in the overarching theme, **'The Sector and its Barriers'**.

Some DPOs, particularly campaigning based DPOs, however, noted that they are advantaging the political changes to propel the movement and meeting all of their targets.

Not merely affecting their service-users, the cost-of-living crisis threatens the daily operations of the DPO sector. DPOs face downsizing, losing their premises and streamlining their projects due to inflation, which internal reserves and funders, particularly after delivering emergency funding in 2020-2021, cannot match for.

“Not even progressive core funders can match inflation.”

A Turbulent Climate sub-themes:

1. Firefighting: welfare rights and the cost-of-living crisis.
2. Turbulent environment.
3. Survival Pressures.

A New Model of Working

In the backdrop of **‘A Turbulent Climate’**, some DPOs expressed interest in **‘A New Model of Working’**: propelling the disability movement beyond the traditional charity model.

Primarily, this concerned exploring new models of funding and financial input: developing internal streams of revenue; acquiring medical/integrated health funding opportunities; and modifying their finance model.

However, some, but not all, DPOs commented on their critique of a professionalised disability movement, suggesting that the charity model alone is insufficient to challenge disablement nationally.

“We can’t carry on as normal.”

A New Model of Working sub-themes:

1. Expressed interest in models of propelling the movement outside of the charity model.
2. Expressed interest in new models funding and financial input.

Financial Pressures: Qualitative Themes

This theme focuses on the financial challenges faced by DPOs, including their reliance on the current system and their knowledge of funding pathways.

Many DPOs face difficulties accessing horizontal funding opportunities, maintaining their independence, and writing larger bids. The challenges faced by DPOs in the sector are further compounded by a perceived privileging of larger charities and non-DPOs and the inaccessibility of funding bids; this was a trend seen in other themes of the overall model, including **'Barrier Breakdown'**.

To address these financial pressures, it was deemed crucial to provide resources to assist funding applications and break down barriers to funding the sector.

Despite these challenges, some DPOs have expressed a competency in applying for funding and have had a long-standing and successful relationship with progressive funders.

As this theme was the broadest in the thematic analysis, sub-themes were categorised into three groups:

1. Reliance on the Current System.
2. Knowledge of funding Pathways.
3. Barriers and Bias.

Financial Pressures: Reliance on the Current System

Commissioning and core funding maintains DPOs, long-term sustainability; where threatened, small organisations may look non-viable to other funders.

Yet, simultaneously, DPOs critique this model of financial maintenance for its impairment on political independence and governing on service delivery. DPOs described prior aversive relationships with local councils because of their critique of the inclusiveness of their projects, and their fear of challenging funders due to potential aversive consequences, such as losing funding applications.

Consequentially, DPOs limit their critique of funders preference for short term, vertical funding, preference for visible disability projects and the competitiveness of local government tenders.

"Gone are the days where local authorities give core grants, it's beyond competitive."

"We're scrambling for funding."

"We can't get funded for mental health work."

Reliance on the Current System sub-themes:

1. Fear of adverse consequences of challenging funders.
2. Difficulties accessing horizontal funding.
3. The challenge of maintaining independence.
4. Loss of campaigning DPOs in the sector due to primary funding of service delivery.

Financial Pressures: Knowledge of funding Pathways

DPOs varied on their comfort and knowledge of accessing traditional tenders and funding bids.

Some experienced DPOs maintained their competency in accessing funding and setting targets for their financial year.

"We're relatively comfortable; meeting all of our targets."

Yet, some DPOs, particularly smaller organisations, new organisations or organisations managed by new directors expressed the challenge and intimidation of writing a funding bid. Joint tenders and larger funding were problematic for newer DPOs. Finding capacity to write an effective funding bid within a short time frame was particularly challenging for small DPOs; made up of 1-4 staff members and traditionally without a fundraising manager.

This theme is linked to a theme under **'Internal capacity and resource: staff'**; due to the challenge of resourcing in an understaffed organisation, acquiring experienced applicants and applying for funding for a fundraising manager position.

Knowledge of funding Pathways sub-themes:

1. Intimidation and challenge of writing larger bid.
2. The challenge of organising joint tenders.
3. Challenge of monitoring and evaluation.
4. Some DPOs expressed a competency in applying for funding.

Financial Pressures: Barriers and Bias

Here DPOs, specifically highlighted the inaccessibility of the funding application process for a disabled people's organisation.

DPOs describe local governments, accreditors and funding organisations increased preference for large, non-DPO, charities and the complicated jargon, heavy funding submission process. Equally, despite their expertise, lived experience and representing the community of disabled people, few local authorities and funders other than *Sport England's Together Fund* prioritises DPOs in commissioning tenders and funding.

"It's totally ironic: the form is inaccessible but your after [work is campaigning for] access."

DPOs highlighted Disability Rights UK's role in breaking down, barriers to DPOs funding success.

Barriers and Bias sub-themes:

1. Privileging of larger charities and non-DPOs.
2. Inaccessibility of funding bids.
3. Some DPOs expressed a long-standing and successful relationship with progressive funders.

Financial Pressures: Quantitative trends

By analysing the financial information available on the charity commission website, specifically total gross income and total expenditure from 2018 to 2022, three major trends can be identified:

1. The financial diversity within the sector

There is considerable variation in financial conditions within the sector. In 2018, the range of profit/over-expenditure that year was £315,000 with millions of pounds flowing through some organisations; smaller DPOs were dealing in the low thousands.

2. The financial diversity following Covid-19

The financial diversity in the sector has only increased from 2018 to 2022. The only outlier in the positive trend over the last five years was 2020, likely explained by the national release of funding to counteract the immediate effects of the pandemic.

In 2022, the range of profit/ over-expenditure for the respective DPOs analysed stood at £543,780, a percentage increase of 73% in 2018.

3. Profit in the sector from 2018-2022

The annual average profit made by the DPOs in the data set has fluctuated dramatically in the last couple of years. The mean average of DPO profits between 2018 and 2020 only had a range of £5,139, increasing from 2018 to 2020 by 358%. This is in comparison to 2021, where the mean average profit skyrocketed to £53,093, a 4853% increase in 2018, before dipping in 2022 to £30,705, a percentage decrease in 2021 of 42%.

Such findings are mirrored when looking at the median average of the DPOs' profit. They are likely explained by the release and restriction of national funding in response to the pandemic.

Survival in a Turbulent Climate: In conclusion

In conclusion, the overarching theme of survival in a turbulent climate sheds light on the challenges faced by DPOs in the post-lockdown Covid-19 UK, the cost-of-living crisis, and a rapidly changing political arena. The sub-themes in this category highlight the difficulties DPOs face in securing resources, maintaining their independence, and writing funding bids.

To develop the sector, it is crucial to consider these themes in all actions taken and to address the barriers that prevent the DPOs from accessing resources and maintaining their independence. Additionally, exploring new models of funding and financial input and supporting funding applications will provide the sector with the resources they need to continue their operations effectively.



SECTOR

DPO Sector Analysis: Part 2. The DPO Sector Assessment

Connectivity

Relationships

we had no support network

Development and Resourcing Needs

Internal Capacity & Resources

Capacity Building Is Not New

Staff

Data

I'd be disappointed if what we end up with is just webinars and toolkits

we have so many vacancies that we cannot fill

collaborative working is not new

Internal Capacity and Resource

The overarching theme of **'Internal Capacity and Resource'** positions itself within the operational functions of a DPO in the UK; highlighting the importance of having adequate resources to support the work of DPOs and the ongoing need for development within the sector.

This category was explored in the study with four main themes: **Staff, Data, Development and Resourcing Needs**, and **Capacity Building is Not New**.

Staff

The fundamental backbone of the DPO sector and the disability movement broadly, are the dedicated workers, volunteers and activists. Yet the study found that recruitment was a major issue for the sector, with staff shortages, difficulty in filling posts, and people leaving the sector for more competitive roles.

"We have so many vacancies that we cannot fill."

Prior research in this area ^[5-8] highlighted the challenge of offering young workers a competitive career pathway and opportunities for leadership in this sector; this was mirrored in the thematic analysis.

This study supplemented prior research by linking recruitment challenges to the disability movement over the last 5-10 years. A general decline in political discourse, campaigning, and progressive activism, particularly with the younger generations, has prevented opportunities for young disabled people to connect with the movement, advertising the DPO sector to young disabled people, and offering a policy rooted career.

"When I joined this movement 30 years ago, it was loud and proud. It's quiet now."

"Younger disabled people are not getting the space to explore Disability."

To address this challenge, there was interest in new working models, and the development of a career pathway in the sector. Some DPOs highlighted the importance of training the next generation of disabled leaders, as well as mentoring and supporting young disabled activists and professionals.

“What I see missing here: this links to leadership development of individual disabled people.”

DPOs struggled to recruit highly trained individuals, specifically in finance and evaluation; connecting and advertising the sector in educational institutions may address this.

Staff sub-themes:

1. Staff shortages with simultaneous challenge of recruitment.
2. Challenges of funding for roles.
3. Losing and struggling to attract a young workforce.
4. Challenges of remote working.
5. Limited pool of disabled recruits with professional skill training.

Data

The theme of **'Data'** was explored through three subordinate themes, including External push for rigorous evidence, Rigorous data generation outside of the current capacity, and Lack of data synthesis across DPOs.

"The collection of data is powerful from a policy standpoint."

The study found that while DPOs, along with other charities and human rights groups were expected to support their value and political campaigns with empirical data, rigorous data generation was a challenge. DPOs commented on a lack of time, staff, and training.

Linked to the former theme, **'Staff'**, DPOs commented on the recruitment challenges in hiring disabled employees trained in evidence generation or impact evaluation.

DPOs advocated for mediums of data synthesis across the sector; accessible for all DPOs in their funding applications and policy campaigns.

"All these DPOs have an incredible reach in terms of accessing information."

"We gathered evidence from 45 participants for our AGM and I would love to see that replicated across multiple DPOs."

However, pre-established mediums of data synthesis have showed poor uptake, accessibility and sustainability.

"My biggest headache is online systems."

To address these challenges, there was a need for facilitating evidence generation and training to evidence impact, as well as the generation of a digital databank and collection medium and re-developing existing online systems.

Data sub-themes:

1. External push for rigorous evidence, where the absence of data limits our outreach.
2. Rigorous data generation outside of the current capacity.
3. Lack of data synthesis across DPOs.

Development and Resourcing Needs

The theme of **'Development and Resourcing Needs'** was explored through six subordinate themes; identified when DPOs expressed their specific development needs or described the features of successful capacity-building resources.

Here, the study found that there was a need for accessible advice and training. Accessibility defined both mediums and delivery; digital tools, for example, were deemed overall beneficial, yet supplementary non-digital options were promoted to address the digital divide. Easy-read, practical advice and modifiable tools were, too, highlighted.

"You've got to reach the learning styles of people."

Many existing development models in the charity sector aren't suited to DPO's complexity. Simultaneously, DPOs expressed the need to address the variation of capacity building needs within the sector. Advanced training programs tools for benefits advice was considered here.

One surprising finding was the lack of attention on accreditation generally; DPOs that were primed on this subject described accreditations' anticipated benefit but a poor understanding of its processes. Some DPOs were accredited, and some described the process as a 'tick box' procedure.

To address these challenges, there was a need for training and promotion of strategic action, as well as a need for an advanced and heavily marketed updater for welfare advice and a professionalised program for advice giving.

However, some DPOs critiqued training and tool-based capacity building in isolation; suggesting that, alone, these resources cannot target the barriers to our sector nor propel the disability movement.

"I'd be disappointed if what we end up with is just webinars and toolkits."

Development and Resourcing Needs sub-themes:

1. Tools and Training guides.
2. DPO specific resources.
3. Written guides are inefficient alone.
4. Advanced tools for benefits training.
5. Training and promotion of strategic action.
6. Limited relationship with accreditation.

Capacity Building is Not New

Finally, the theme of **'Capacity Building is Not New'** was explored primarily through one subordinate theme: *History of capacity-building in the sector*. DPOs highlighted a rich history of capacity-building across the movement; formally and informally generating development resources and connection mediums.

"Collaborative working is not new."

DPOs that had prior developed capacity building resources also highlighted the barriers to such projects' success. This included: a loss of funding; poor uptake; neglect of marketing and collaboration; neglected targeting of organisational behaviours.

Along with resource sharing and co-creation, DPOs advised greater considering the impact of these barriers and dedicate resources to re-developing DPO's internally generated models.

Capacity Building is Not New sub-themes:

1. History of capacity building in the sector.
2. Desire to share learnings across the sector.

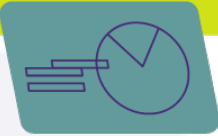
Internal Capacity and Resource: In conclusion

Overall, this overarching theme highlights the challenges faced by DPOs in the area of **'Internal Capacity and Resource'** and the need for continued development of DPO specific capacity building resources in the sector to address these challenges.

The findings of the study can inform the development of new capacity building programs to support the growth, resilience and sustainability of DPOs.

THE DPO
SECTOR

The Sector &
its Barriers



The Recognised
Value of the
Sector

The Desired Role
of DR UK

Uplifting Policy

Barrier
Breakdown

Capacity Building
Is Not New

Data

collaborative
working
is not new

if there ever was a time to
galvanise the energy and
the anger of people
it would be
now

The Sector and it's Barriers

The final overarching theme of the research report is **'The Sector and its Barriers'**, which seeks to understand the challenges faced by the DPOs and how these barriers can be overcome.

This overarching theme focuses on the perspective of DPOs and what they want from DR UK and its DPO capacity building project to break down the macro barriers facing the sector.

Recognised Value of the Sector

The first theme, **'Recognised Value of the Sector'**, highlights the importance of recognising DPOs as a unique sector and the need for advertising, marketing, and identity-forming efforts, both internally and externally, to enhance their visibility and value.

The theme also acknowledges that the DPO sector is often undervalued, especially by local authority contractors, infrastructure organisations, and broader forums who don't fully understand its value. This theme links closely with the themes of **'Funding'**, particularly where it related to **'Barriers and Bias'**; where DPOs describe a preference for London-based larger organisations and charities with well-known brands over local organisations run by disabled people.

"It's a question of who is considered in best position to do our work."

Recognised Value of the Sector sub-themes:

1. DPO sphere as an individual sector.
2. The DPO sector is undervalued.

Barrier Breakdown

The second theme, **'Barrier Breakdown'**, explores capacity building in terms of breaking down the distinctive barriers that DPOs face compared to the general voluntary sector.

Funding processes are biased towards large infrastructural organisations, which have poor awareness of disability, and often make inaccessible funding applications. This theme links closely with the themes of **'Funding'**, particularly where it related to **'Barriers and Bias'**.

To break down these barriers, DPOs urge DR UK to strategically target funding organisations and local authorities to make their funding and accreditation processes more accessible. As prior discussed, despite their expertise, lived experience and representing the community of disabled people, few local authorities and funders prioritise DPOs in commissioning tenders and funding.

"Tools to maintain our competitive edge in the tendering processes must stand alongside a policy call to require distribution to DPOs."

Notably, DR UK, working with other large DPOs, have prior conducted similar work with moderate efficacy. Large DPOs with the capacity have discussed their continued efforts in this domain, describing the need for DR UK's support and collaborative campaigning.

"There's scope in law to do this, which requires a campaign."

As there is a lost recognition of the expertise of services run by disabled people, DPOs want DR UK to bring DPOs into opportunities to lend expertise as consultants.

"You have mandate; its influence over policy makers and government – opening the doors for organisations."

Barrier Breakdown sub-themes:

1. Distinctive barriers compared to the voluntary sector.
2. Neglected value of a disability movement led by disabled people.

Uplifting Policy

The third theme, **'Uplifting Policy'**, explores the policy opportunities in the disability movement and the need to uplift DPOs within the political arena.

The prior discussed theme, **'A Turbulent Climate'**, outlined how many DPOs struggled to keep up with the political environment – exceeding temporal, physical and financial capacity. Equally, **'Funding: Reliance on the Current System'**, described DPOs concern of critiquing local authorities due to fear of the aversive financial consequences. DPOs both value, and advocate for an enhancement of, the role that DR UK plays in its political campaigns.

"It can be challenging for a DPO to challenge political decisions, but having a national organisation with more capacity and remit is beneficial to have someone to support them and take risky stances against the status quo."

Here, there is a desire to generate mediums to amplify DPOs' stances on political challenges, enhance their campaigning reach and speak on subjects that DPOs do not have the capacity to speak on.

However, like **'Barrier Breakdown'**, this theme is linked closely to the function of DR UK's power and positionality and should be conducted co-productively and considerately. For instance, while some DPOs advocate for speaking 'for' the sector, other DPOs value their independent expertise.

"However, it raises the question of who's representing who?"

Methods that maintain regular communication and feedback were promoted, as DR UK continues to facilitate the reach of DPOs both in its national campaigns and supporting DPOs political stances.

Simultaneously, some DPOs, particularly campaigning based DPOs, noted that they are advantaging the political changes to propel the movement: considering the current political climate as a window for progressive social change. Here DR UK plays a role in *facilitating* the Disability rights movement.

Advantaging the perceived policy window in disability rights might provide a solution for many capacity-building challenges discussed in this review. For example, facilitating the disability movement offers the opportunity to connect with the younger disabled people and groups of disabled activists outside the mainstream sector.

"If there ever was a time to galvanise the energy and the anger of people it would be now."

Uplifting Policy sub-themes:

1. A policy window in the disability movement.
2. Uplifting DPOs **in conversations they don't have the capacity to speak on.**
3. Generating a movement.

A desired role for Disability Rights UK (DR UK)

The fourth and final subordinate theme, **'A desired role for Disability Rights UK (DR UK)'**, focuses on the perceived role DR UK should play in breaking down the barriers facing the DPO sector and overlaps with the two prior themes **'Uplifting Policy'** and **'Barrier Breakdown'**.

The first subordinate within this theme, *'Power sharing and distribution'*, highlights the importance of DR UK using its mandate and influence over policymakers to bring DPOs into opportunities and hotbeds of the disability movement. To remain considerate of its positionality, some DPOs recommend DR UK to conduct an internal investigation into its power and privilege and come up with a strategy to distribute power across DPOs.

The second subordinate, *'Collaborative work'*, emphasises the need for DR UK to work collaboratively with DPOs, highlighting the effectiveness of collaborative action in generating change for the disability movement.

A desired role for Disability Rights UK (DR UK) sub-themes:

1. Power sharing and distribution.
2. Collaborative work.

The Sector and it's Barriers: In conclusion

In conclusion, the research in this overarching theme sheds light on the barriers facing the DPO sector and highlights the need for DR UK and its DPO capacity building project to take action to break down these barriers.

From recognition of the sector's value to uplifting DPOs in policy discussions, to power sharing and collaboration, this overarching theme provides an understanding of the DPO sector's needs and desires for DR UK's role in its growth and development.



Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, **'The DPO Ecosystem'**, **'Survival in a Turbulent Climate'**, **'Internal Capacity and Resource'**, and **'The Sector and its Barriers'**, all play a crucial role in the development and sustainability of DPOs.

The findings of this research highlight the challenges faced by DPOs in navigating the complex and ever-changing disability sector landscape.

The lack of recognition of the value of DPOs, inaccessible funding processes, and the absence of a supportive policy environment pose significant barriers to the growth and sustainability of DPOs. The importance of the DPO ecosystem, including the need for DPOs to collaborate and build internal capacity and resources, cannot be overstated.

However, the findings also highlight the determination and resilience of DPOs in overcoming these challenges. The desire for DR UK and its DPO capacity building project to support DPOs in breaking down the macro barriers facing the sector, as expressed by the DPOs interviewed in the study, highlights the potential for collaboration and change. A focus on uplifting policy, creating a movement, and promoting a more equitable distribution of power and resources within the sector can contribute to a more supportive and enabling environment for DPOs.

In summary, this research provides valuable insights into the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of DPOs, and underscores the importance of DR UK and its DPO capacity building project in supporting and empowering the sector. By working together, DR UK, DPOs, and other stakeholders can help to create a more equitable and sustainable society; in the words of an interviewed DPO:

"It's about amplifying the voice of Disabled people."

Glossary

1. **Accreditation:** Evaluating and certifying that an organisation or individual meets certain standards or qualifications.
2. **Cohorts:** Participant groups.
3. **Consultancy:** Providing professional advice or expertise to individuals or organisations for a defined fee.
4. **Coproduction:** A process of involving service users or community members in the design and delivery of services or programs.
5. **Cost-of-living crisis:** A situation where the cost of basic necessities, such as housing and food, has risen to a level where many individuals, organisations or families struggle to afford them.
6. **Data analysis:** Reviewing information gathered from interviews and think cafes to create conclusions.
7. **Data synthesis:** The process of combining and analysing multiple data sources from multiple organisations or researchers to share collective conclusions.
8. **Digital divide:** The gap between individuals or communities who have access to digital technologies and those who do not.
9. **Directory:** A listing or database of organisations or services.
10. **DPO sector:** The collective of disabled people-led organisations and advocacy groups.
11. **DPO Support Hub:** The digital resource support platform for disabled people-led organisations hosted on the Disability Rights UK website.
12. **DPO:** An organisation run by and for disabled people.
13. **Duplication:** When multiple organisations or programs provide similar services or resources without coordination or collaboration.
14. **Evidence-based campaigns:** Advocacy or awareness campaigns based on research or data.
15. **Focus groups:** A process of gathering our own information personally in casual think cafes/groups of participants all talking together at the same meeting.
16. **Forum:** A platform or space for discussion and exchange of ideas, either, written or in person.
17. **Funding tenders and bids:** Applications submitted to organisations or institutions to request funding for a specific project or program.

18. **Governance:** The rules and structures that guide and regulate an organisation or institution.
19. **Horizontal Funding:** A type of funding where resources or funds are distributed across various activities, projects or programs that are on the same level or have a similar focus. In other words, if you imagine a horizontal line representing the different stages of a project (such as research, development, and implementation), horizontal funding will involve allocating resources equally across all the projects operating at each of these stages. Horizontal funding aims to achieve a broader impact by supporting multiple initiatives in a particular sector.
20. **Imposter syndrome:** A psychological pattern where individuals doubt their own achievements and feel like a fraud or imposter in their work.
21. **Inductive thematic analysis:** A qualitative research method used to identify patterns or themes in data without predetermined models.
22. **Informal interviews:** A process of Gathering our own information personally in casual meetings and catch-ups.
23. **Intersectional DPO:** A disability-led organisation that, is run by and addresses the intersectional experiences of disabled people who also belong to other marginalised groups.
24. **Intersectionality:** A concept that recognises that individuals can experience multiple forms of discrimination and oppression simultaneously and that these different aspects of a person's identity interact in complex ways.
25. **Iterative:** A term used in scientific research which refers to a method's flexibility. In iterative research, the method continues in cycles and is continually refined or tweaked in response to the success or error of its work.
26. **Local authority:** A government body responsible for providing public services and administering local government within a specific geographic area.
27. **Macro barriers:** Systemic or structural barriers that prevent or limit access to resources or opportunities for marginalised groups.
28. **Marginalisation:** The process of pushing individuals or groups to the margins or periphery of society, often resulting in exclusion or disadvantage.
29. **Mixed method:** Assessing qualitative and quantitative data.
30. **Opportunity sampling:** Finds people from the target population available at the time and willing to take part. It is based on convenience. An opportunity sample is obtained by asking members of the population of interest if they would participate in your research.
31. **Overarching themes:** Broad themes that encompass multiple themes.
32. **Participants:** Whom we are talking to/ gathering information from / People participating in a research study.

33. **Policy window:** An opportunity or favourable political climate for a policy change to occur.
34. **Primary Data Collection of Qualitative Data via Focus Groups, Informal Interviews and Shadowing:** A process of gathering information personally in casual meetings, think cafes and spending the day with the organisation to observe their work and needs.
35. **Qualitative:** Information that appears in written, visual or audio form.
36. **Quantitative:** Information that appears in numerical form, or in the form of statistics.
37. **Regulatory partnership frameworks:** Collaborative frameworks between organisations and government bodies to regulate and oversee a particular industry or sector and how to form effective partnerships in that sector.
38. **Secondary Data analysis:** Using existing research data to find the answer to a question different from the original work.
39. **Shadowing sessions:** spending time with the organisation or a forum meeting to observe their work and needs.
40. **Snowball Sampling:** Snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling is where existing participants provide referrals to recruit participants required for a research study. In this research, DPOs and members of DR UK will make recommendations of other DPOs, and Disabled people who they think will be suitable to recruit for the research.
41. **Subordinate themes:** More specific observations that fall under themes.
42. **Thematic analysis model:** The results of a thematic analysis, laying out the collection of overarching themes, themes and subordinate themes into a model.
43. **Thematic analysis:** A method that involves reading through a notes or transcripts from in interviews or think cafes and finding patterns in meaning across the data; patterns create 'themes'.
44. **Themes:** Common or recurring ideas, concepts, or topics that emerge from data.
45. **Vertical funding:** This refers to a funding model where resources are allocated in a more targeted way, with a focus on supporting specific projects or initiatives at different stages of development. In other words, if you imagine a vertical line representing the different stages of a project, vertical funding would involve allocating resources more heavily to projects at certain stages, such as research or implementation, based on their specific needs and potential for impact. This approach aims to promote a more focused and effective use of resources but may not support as wide a range of initiatives.
46. **Welfare rights:** Legal entitlements to social welfare benefits or support.

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Disability Rights UK

DPO Capacity Building Project

Disability Rights UK is the UK's leading organisation led by, run by, and working for Disabled people.

We work with Disabled People's Organisations and Governments across the UK to influence regional and national change for better rights, benefits, quality of life and economic opportunities for Disabled people.



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