CHAPTER

14

IRELAND

VOLUNTEERING
INFRASTRUCTURE
IN EUROPE

AUTHOR
Yvonne McKenna,
Volunteer Ireland

1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE CONCEPT DEFINITION

Volunteering infrastructure can be defined as those organisations, programmes or projects, which exist solely to support volunteering. This support can take a variety of forms, from helping non-profit organisations to involve volunteers, public bodies and educational organisations to promote volunteering, profit-making organisations to support volunteering, to helping individuals find volunteering roles and so on.

There are several elements of volunteering infrastructure, which are considered particularly important or relevant. For example, an integral element is the promotion of volunteering, alongside the facilitation of volunteering. Effective training, both of volunteers and staff and to non- and for-profit organisations, is a fundamental role played by a volunteering infrastructure. This predicates the successful placement of volunteers and ensures quality volunteerism in a country. Legislation in the field can be argued to be important to the foundation of a facilitating volunteering infrastructure. Last but not least, if there is to be evidence-based policy in relation to volunteering, which would represent the cornerstone of a volunteering infrastructure, then there needs to be accurate and comparable research into volunteerism, of both a qualitative and a quantitative nature. These things together would create an environment where volunteerism can begin to meet its full potential.

In Ireland, the volunteering infrastructure comprises the following organisations: the national volunteer development agency, Volunteer Ireland; a network of local Volunteer Centres (20+) affiliated through their membership of Volunteer Ireland; Boardmatch, a national organisation dedicated to identifying and placing prospective volunteers on the boards of management of non-profit organisations; and various and several initiatives within third level educational establishments that promote and facilitate student volunteering.

2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

In Ireland, the most recent government relevant policy document - the *White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity* (2000) - defined volunteering as *"the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, and individuals outside the immediate family, the environment or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment (except for re-imbursement of out-of-pocket expenses)"*[1].

This definition relates to formal volunteering specifically which infers that voluntary work is undertaken with or through an organisation. Formal settings include not only voluntary organisations, but also workplace settings, the public sector, school or other educational establishments. For practical reasons, this definition excludes informal volunteering – voluntary work done for an individual or a relative. Though this vein of volunteering is essential in community life it is difficult to measure the extent and prevalence of such activity among citizens.

There has been a long tradition of voluntary activity and charitable service in Ireland that has been shaped by religious, political and economic developments. For example, there has been a tradition of 'caritas' in Ireland dating back to the medieval times. This concept is broader than the notion of charity and incorporates doing good works for the benefit of other individuals. Volunteering is implicit in the concept of caritas and has been a large part of the Christian tradition in Ireland[2]. Christian monasteries were known for their provision of shelter and medical aid for the homeless and the sick.

By the 19th century, many voluntary hospitals had been established that were dependent on voluntary effort, by Catholic, Protestant and non-religious groups. Many of these institutions and organisations still exist today such as the St. Vincent de Paul[3]. The historical dominance of the Catholic Church supplying essential social welfare services in Ireland continued up to the 1960s.

> A very important influence on the development of the voluntary sector is the tradition of "self help".

Volunteerism in 19th century Ireland was also apparent in the Gaelic cultural revival before independence from Great Britain. These organisations made a distinct contribution to refining an Irish identity through organisations like the *Conradh na Gaeilge* (formally known as the Gaelic League[4]) and *Gaelic Athletic Association*[5] (GAA) which still thrives today. Not only did they contribute to developing a sense of shared identity they also *'created a sense of social solidarity and community, or a sense of social capital'*[6].

While the Catholic Church played a sizable role in voluntary activity 'a second very important influence on the development of Ireland's present-day voluntary sector is its tradition of *'self help'*[7]. This tradition of self help emanated from Protestant and secular voluntary action in the

---

1. Supporting Voluntary Activity: A White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector (2000) Dublin p. 8
2. National Committee on Volunteering (2002) Tipping the Balance: Report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland . Dublin
3. The St. Vincent de Paul Society is one Ireland's largest volunteer organisations, with a proud tradition of supporting and championing the rights of the poorest members of our society.
4. Conradh na Gaeilge is the main voluntary and community organisation that is involved in promoting the Irish language
5. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is one of Ireland's oldest voluntary and community organisations. It was founded on November 1st 1884 with the aim of establishing a national organisation to revive and nurture traditional, indigenous pastimes in Ireland.
6. Tipping the Balance (2002) p. 9
7. Helen Ruddle and Raymond Mulvihill (1999), Reaching Out: Charitable Giving and Volunteering in the Republic of Ireland- The 1997/1998 Survey, NCIR: Dublin.

18th and 19th centuries and was epitomised by the dairy farming co-operative movement in the 1930s and *Muintir na Tíre*[8] - a local community self help initiative (which was organised on the basis of Catholic parish units). Whilst conservative and supported by the Catholic Church, its principles of empowerment and direct democracy fuelled further self help volunteerism later in the century. This found expression in the form of women's groups and housing groups and organisations which catered for marginalised members of the population such as individuals with physical and mental disabilities[9].

The government aims to inspire a "participatory society & economy with a strong commitment to social justice" by participating in negotiations on the recent social partnership agreement. The Agreement takes a life cycle approach - it will address key social challenges that people face throughout their life.

Given the influence of the Catholic Church, which advocated that social welfare was a matter for the family and the parish, the State was reluctant to engage with the delivery of social services until the mid 1960s. There was a noticeable shift in this policy by the 1970s and voluntary sector provision of social services and education began to receive increased State support. However, rather than being replaced by State services, the voluntary sector has complimented or provided an alternative and the role of volunteers has remained pivotal in the delivery of these services[10].

Supporting Voluntary Activity is the most important national document to offer support to the smaller community and voluntary groups. The White Paper recognises the importance of the voluntary sector and the effectiveness of 'bottom-up' responses to various social issues such as drug abuse and homelessness and the consequent need for State agencies to consult with and support local groups in order to organise appropriate responses to pressing social problems.

In relation to volunteering, the White Paper supports the active involvement of people in community and voluntary groups as essential components in society and that volunteering is a key determinant of the health of a society. The Paper provided a formal definition of volunteering for the first time in a policy document.

The White Paper also provided for the establishment of the National Committee on Volunteering in 2000, in anticipation of the United Nations International Year of Volunteers in 2001. The Committee was charged with the responsibility to devise strategies and actions to help develop and support volunteering in the long term. Its recommendations included the development of a national policy on volunteering, the implementation of which should be in the hands of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Such a policy should include financial support for socially inclusive volunteer strategies, the development of volunteer infrastructure including the support and development of a National Volunteer Centre and nationwide local volunteer centres. The Committee also highlighted the need for a programme of research on volunteering and voluntary activity which could be executed by means of the Census and Quarterly National Household Surveys.

In 2005 the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas, conscious of the perceived lack of progress in the field since the publication of the 'White Paper' and 'Tipping the Balance', published a report stating that a clear strategy on volunteering was needed[11]. This report has underpinned government policy on volunteering since its publication in 2005.

Some research has been undertaken by the *Taskforce on Active Citizenship*. This taskforce was established in April 2006 to advise the government on policy measures which could

---

8. Muintir na Tíre is a national voluntary organisation dedicated to promoting the process of community development.
9. Ruddle and Mulvihill (1999).
10. Freda Donoghue (2001) Volunteering in the Republic of Ireland: History, Socio Economic Context and Meaning – Paper presented at Tipping the Balance Conference, UN International Year of the Volunteer
11. Houses of the Oireachtas, Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2005) (Sixth Report) Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland, Dublin

be undertaken to support, encourage and promote citizenship in a changing Ireland. The Taskforce comprises 20 members and membership represents a broad spectrum of interests and organisations across Ireland including young people, senior citizens, the arts, Irish language, education and public and private sectors. Senior government officials also make up the membership. The taskforce has published a number of works looking at particular aspects of active citizenship in Ireland, for example, Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland[12], Active Citizenship in Faith-based Communities[13], and The Concept of Active Citizenship[14]. These works have emphasised the proposal that the "state of Active Citizenship should be a national priority" and that the government needs to ring-fence funding to pursue the specific initiatives and recommendations of the Taskforce.

The government have also shown a desire to encourage a *"participatory society and economy with a strong commitment to social justice"*[15] by participating in negotiations on the most recent social partnership agreement. This Agreement takes a life cycle approach whereby key social challenges that face people throughout the various stages of their life will be addressed. A formal review of the Agreement was conducted in 2008.

In 2009, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs issued a policy on local Volunteer Centres, committing its support for a national network of local Volunteer Centres providing full national coverage. Unfortunately, the economic recession the country had entered into by this time meant that no funding was available for the Department to fulfil its policy and this remains the case today (2012).

While some progress has been made in recent years many of the stated ambitions of the White Paper and other publications remain unfulfilled and voluntary activity is still being carried out in a relative policy vacuum, although there have been a number of notable developments regarding volunteering infrastructure and research in the Republic of Ireland since 2001. Volunteer Ireland and the national network of local Volunteer Centres advocate for a national policy and strategy for volunteering to be introduced. The Government that came to power in February 2011 announced in parliament that they expected Volunteer Ireland to work with the relevant government department (responsibility now residing in the newly formed Department of Environment, Community and Local Government) in creating one. A steering committee comprising organisations across the non-profit and public sector created as part of European Year of Volunteering (EYV) 2011 have worked on developing a framework for a national policy. Volunteer Ireland will draw on this preparatory work and the EYV Alliance Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe in developing proposals for the relevant Department.

Volunteering trends

The main sources of data available on volunteering are the 1990s National College of Ireland surveys on volunteering which was conducted at three separate intervals in 1992, 1994 and 1997/1998 and surveys from the National Economic and Social Forum (2002) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (2006). However, in Census 2006 a question on voluntary activities was asked for the first time[16]. This inclusion seems to suggest a move towards acknowledging the

12. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, (2007) Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland, Dublin.

13. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, (March 2007) Active Citizenship in Faith-based Communities, Dublin.

14. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, (2007) The Concept of Active Citizenship, Dublin.

15. Department of the Taoiseach (2006) Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015. Dublin.

16. The question was phrased as follows: In the past 4 weeks have you done any of the following activities without pay? (Activities include: helping/voluntary work with a social or charitable organisation, helping/voluntary work with a religious group or church, helping/voluntary work with a sporting organisation, helping/voluntary work with a political or cultural organisation, any other voluntary activity, and no voluntary activity.)

fact that data on volunteering needs to be gathered at a national level. Hopefully future Census and other government surveys will support the collection of this kind of data. Results from this census data were published on 1 November 2007.

## What proportion of the Irish population volunteer?

Studies from the 1990s suggested that between 33% and 39% of the population were engaged in voluntary activity. However, voluntary activity peaked in the early 1990s at 39% and had decreased to 33% by 1997/1998. The average contribution however remained steady over the 1990s, hovering between 4.6 hours per month in 1994 to 5.1 per month hours in 1997/1998.

More recent studies suggested a decrease in volunteering in the last decade, however these studies employed different survey tools; thus reported volunteering trends from the 1990s and the period 2000-2006 are not necessarily comparable. For example, a survey designed to measure social capital was employed by the National and Economic Social Forum (NESF, 2003)[17]. 17% of adults reported engaging in unpaid voluntary activity and 22% reported being actively involved in some sort of voluntary or community group. A follow up study in 2006 using similar survey tools for comparison reported an increase in voluntary activity, 23% reported engaging in regular unpaid voluntary activity and 29% were engaged with voluntary and community groups[18]. Both these surveys claimed to be nationally representative. As one of the authors notes, while the 21st Century surveys from the NESF and ESRI (The Economic and Social Research Institute) report an increase in voluntary activity, it essentially suggests that in 2006 that three out of four adults did not engage in any type of regular unpaid voluntary activity. The Census data reported lower numbers with 16.4% of the population aged 15 and over being involved in voluntary activity. While it is difficult to compare all the results as different tools were used in each study the important factor is the large numbers of people who are not involved in any voluntary activity (2.8 million people according to Census 2006)[19].

Who volunteers?

Studies from the 1990s suggested that those most likely to volunteer were women, middle-aged people, people with higher levels of education and people living in towns. It was concluded that voluntary organisations may have to adjust their recruitment efforts to attract younger people, the less educated and the unemployed.

Volunteers and age

Source:
Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007)

---
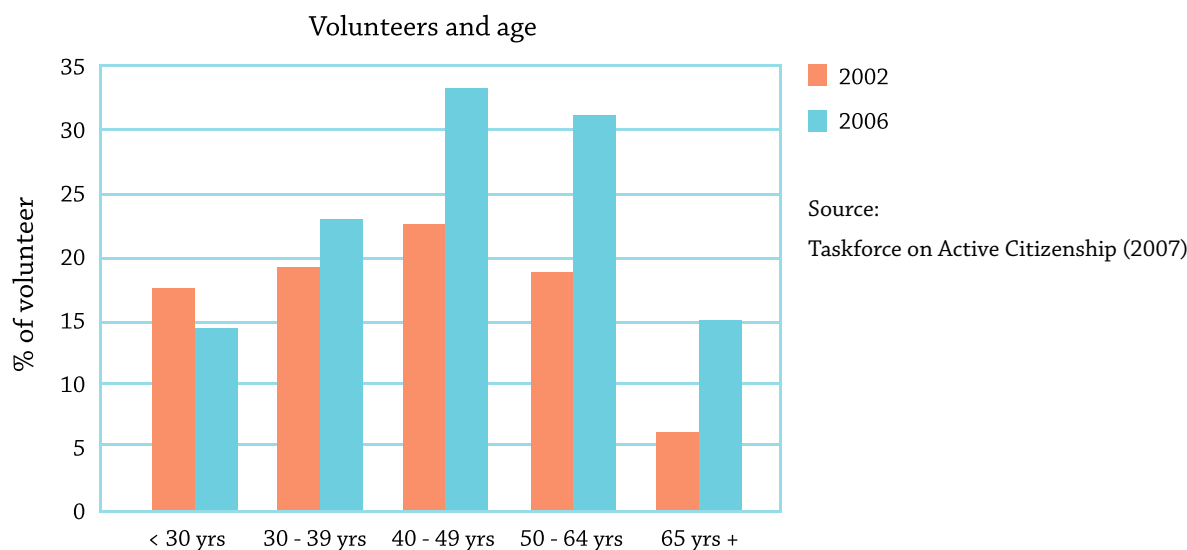
17. National Economic and Social Forum (2003), The Policy Implications of Social Capital, Forum Report No. 28.Dublin, NESF.
18. Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007) Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland, Dublin.
19. Central Statistics Office (2007) Volume 11 – Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activities. Stationery Office: Dublin

Surveys since 2000 reinforced these findings suggesting that there had been little success in attracting these groups since the 1990s. The figure on "Volunteers and age" highlights the relatively substantial increases in all the 40 plus age categories since 2002 with only a minor increase or decrease in the two youngest categories. In addition, it is evident from this survey data that middle-aged individuals (40-64 years) were more likely to volunteer. The Central Statistics Office uses different age categories in the Census but findings would be similar with data indicating that the 35 to 44 age group had the highest participation rate[20].

Highest level of completed education

Source:
Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007)
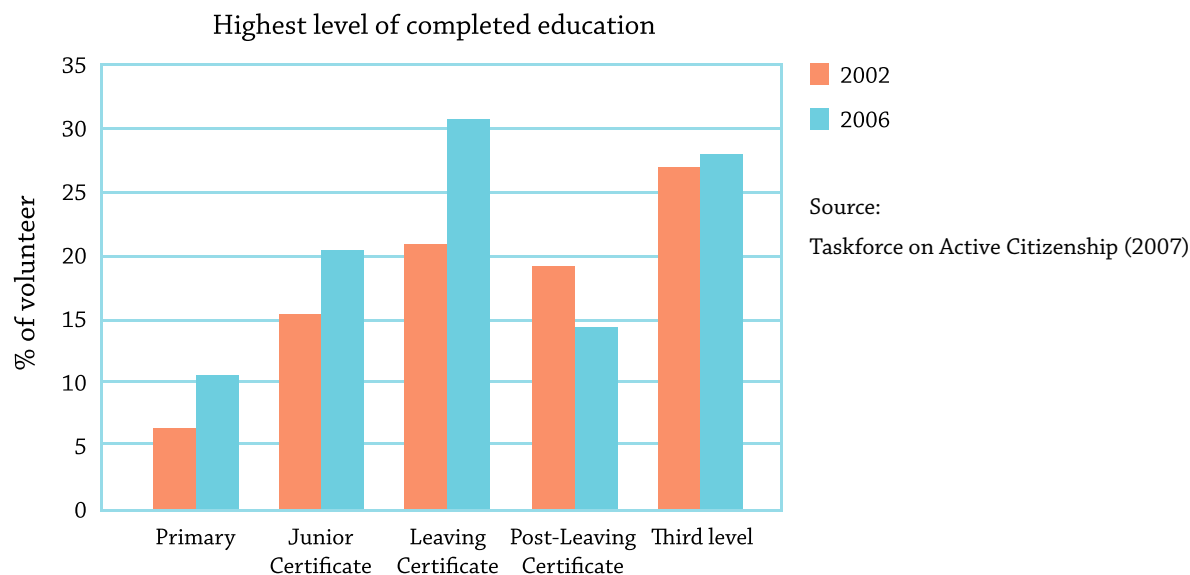
Data from 2002 and 2006 also suggested that people who were well educated were more likely to give time in volunteering or community service. The figure below illustrates the higher levels of volunteering among those who achieved a Leaving Certificate or equivalent, though there was little increase among those with a post leaving certificate qualification. Census data was not presented by educational qualification; social class grouping was used instead. According to Census 2006 those in the "managerial and technical" social class (35.5%) are far more likely to be involved in voluntary activity.

Married individuals or those with a long-term partner were more likely to volunteer followed by those who were separated or divorced. For example, less than 17% of unmarried individuals reported regular voluntary activity in 2006 compared to 27% of married individuals surveyed.

Working individuals and those in full time education were most likely to volunteer. There was reported growth amongst all employment categories except in the case of those who were disabled, sick or unemployed where there was more than a 5% decrease (see figure below). Census 2006 does not report on the marital status of volunteers.

It also emerged that participation by women in the labour force did not appear to be associated with lower levels of volunteering and community involvement – even controlling or comparing for other factors such as income and education (Healy 2005).

Looking at trends in the location of volunteers the statistical report on active citizenship[21] suggested that there has been an increase in all locations from 2002 to 2007. This increase seems to be stronger outside the Dublin City and County areas: "Dublin City and County" indicated

---

20. Central Statistics Office (2007) Volume 11 – Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activities. Stationery Office: Dublin
21. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, (2007) Statistical Trends on Active Citizenship in Ireland, Dublin.

Employment status

Source:

Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007)
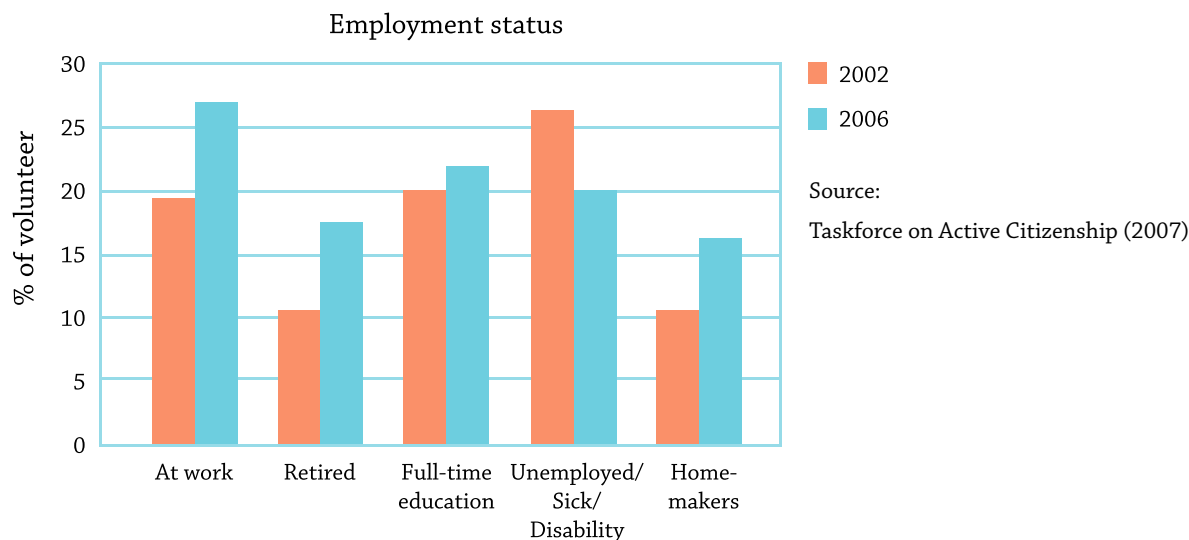
an increase of 15.3% (2002) to 16.7% (2006) whereas the "Open countryside" indicated larger increases 19.8% in 2002 versus 29.8 in 2006. The Census 2006 uses different categories based on county of residence so their data cannot be compared with that of the Taskforce, however, census data suggested that 20.7% of those living in Dublin City and County volunteered in 2006. Data from the Census 2006 also indicated that over half (57.1%) of those who volunteered in 2006 were resident in Leinster. This is not surprising considering half of voluntary organisations were based in Leinster[22].

Volunteer Activities

Evidence of volunteer activities is available from data from the Reaching Out survey's in the 1990s and the ESRI Survey of Civic Engagement (2006). Data from 1997 suggested that the most prevalent types of activities were fundraising and committee work. In addition sports' coaching was a popular area of voluntary activity for over one third of men (compared to 3% of women). Over one fifth of women (21%) volunteered for church related activities compared to eight% of men.

Data from 2002 and 2006 suggested that sports was the most prevalent area of voluntary or unpaid activity in addition to community/residential associations, social services and church related activities (see table below).

Census 2006 data indicated that "helping or voluntary work with a social or charitable organisation" is the most common form of voluntary activity (35%) followed by voluntary activity with "a sporting organisation" (33%). Women were more than men likely to be involved with a charitable organisation while men were more likely than women to be involved with a sporting organisation. Involvement with other activities was also recorded, for example, volunteering with "a religious group or church" (26%) and with "a political or cultural organisation" (8%). A further one quarter of people indicated that they were involved with some other form of voluntary activity not specified in the Census form.

As the question posed in the 2006 census specifically asked individuals if they were involved in voluntary activity in the preceding 4 weeks, individuals who volunteered outside of that time period were not recorded as volunteers. For this reason, it is reasonable to assume that the figure of 16% is an underestimation. Added to this is the fact that the question specifically

22. Donoghue et al. (2006) The Hidden Landscape

asked respondents about their involvement in volunteering activity, rather than participation in community or unpaid work. Many people who participate in their community do not self-identify as a volunteer.

The Census of 2011 omitted a question on volunteering. For this reason, problematic as the Census 2006 data may be, there is no comparable data with which to identify trends since 2006.

Why do Irish people volunteer?

The most recent data comes from 1997/1998 and reported that "belief for a cause" and altruistic factors such as wanting to be neighbourly or wanting to help/being asked to help as the most important reasons for getting involved. Just over one tenth of volunteers cited liking or enjoying volunteering as the most important reason and less than eight% cited having spare time as a reason. Women were more likely to be proactively altruistic (wanting to help or be neighbourly) while men were more likely to volunteer after being asked for help. In terms of the perceived benefits of volunteering, over half of men and women cited seeing results as the most important benefit. Men were more likely to cite enjoyment of volunteer activities as the prime benefit while women were more likely to cite the feeling of "doing good".

> "Belief for a cause" and wanting to be neighbourly/ wanting to help are cited as the main reasons for getting involved. Over half of people feel "seeing results" is the most important benefit.

In 1997/1998 social networks remained the most important route into volunteering, followed by becoming involved in an organisation (for example, by membership or attending meetings). Women were more likely to use social networks while men were more likely to choose the organisational route. As only one question on volunteering was contained in Census 2006 the data gathered does not allow for any explanations as to why people become involved in volunteering.

Why not volunteer or why stop volunteering?

Over a third of respondents who had ceased volunteering perceived 'new demands on time' to be the chief reason. Other barriers included loss of interest and getting older (10% each). Half of those who did not volunteer cited 'having no time'. However, over one quarter (26.7%) of those who did not volunteer, reported never even thinking about volunteering and over one fifth (21.9%) reported that they had never been asked. Perceived drawbacks of volunteering was the belief that too much was expected of volunteers and they were taken for granted (almost 50% indicated these as drawbacks). Insufficient volunteer numbers and a negative outlook by others in the organisation were other prevalent perceived drawbacks (15.8% each). Interestingly, despite those with third level education being most likely to volunteer they were also the most likely to have cited 'never thinking about volunteering' or 'never being asked to volunteer' as the main reasons why they did not volunteer.

Volunteer-involving organisations

In the Centre for Non-profit Management's Mapping[23] survey almost half of the respondents (1,975) reported data on their volunteers. Using this data a profile of volunteer-involving organisations in Ireland can be established. It must be noted that in this report 'volunteer-involving organisations' referred to organisations where volunteers were reported but did not include board members as volunteers.

---

23. See O' Donoghue et al. (2006) The Hidden Landscape

Volunteer numbers, importance and contribution

The number of reported volunteers within organisations ranged from 1 to 380,000. The total number of volunteers was 1,071,108. The average (mean) number of volunteers amongst the sample of 1,975 organisations reporting volunteers was 542. However, a very small portion of organisations distort this statistic. In fact only 11% of organisations reported 100 or more volunteers. The table below indicates the breakdown of volunteer numbers amongst the study's sample, just over 50% of organisations reported 15 or less volunteers.

Number of volunteers	% of organisations (N=1,975)
1-7 volunteers	26
8-15 volunteers	24
16-39 volunteers	25
40 + volunteers	25
Total	100

## What fields of activity are volunteers involved in?

In the table below it is apparent that volunteer-involving organisations are dominant in a few fields, sports and recreation, development and housing, social services and arts culture and heritage.

Field of activity	% of organisations (N=1,975)
Sports and Recreation	21.9
Development and Housing	19.5
Social Services	16.1
Arts, Culture and Heritage	10.2
Education and Research	8.5
Environment	6.9
Health	5.4
Advocacy, Law and Politics	5.3
International Development	2.0
Religious Groups	2.0
Trade Unions, Bus/Prof Groups	1.4
Philanthropy	1.0
Total	100

Importance of volunteers

Over half (54%) of organisations regarded the volunteer contribution essential in carrying out the organisations mission and another 25% considered it very important. Only a minor proportion of organisations (less than 6%) did not depend on volunteers for essential tasks. As the figure below illustrates, fields such as sports and recreation, the environment and the arts, culture and heritage were more likely than organisations involved in areas such as health, social services and education and research to regard volunteers as essential.

Unsurprisingly, variations in importance appeared to be related to an organisation's income. Of the minor proportion of organisations (just over 6%) that regarded volunteers as not very or not at all important, the majority reported incomes greater than 200,000 EUR per annum. On the opposite end of the scale, of those organisations that regarded volunteers as essential, the majority reported incomes less than 30,000 EUR. It would appear that volunteers were considered more important to organisations that had smaller incomes.

Importance of volunteers & field of activity (N=1922)
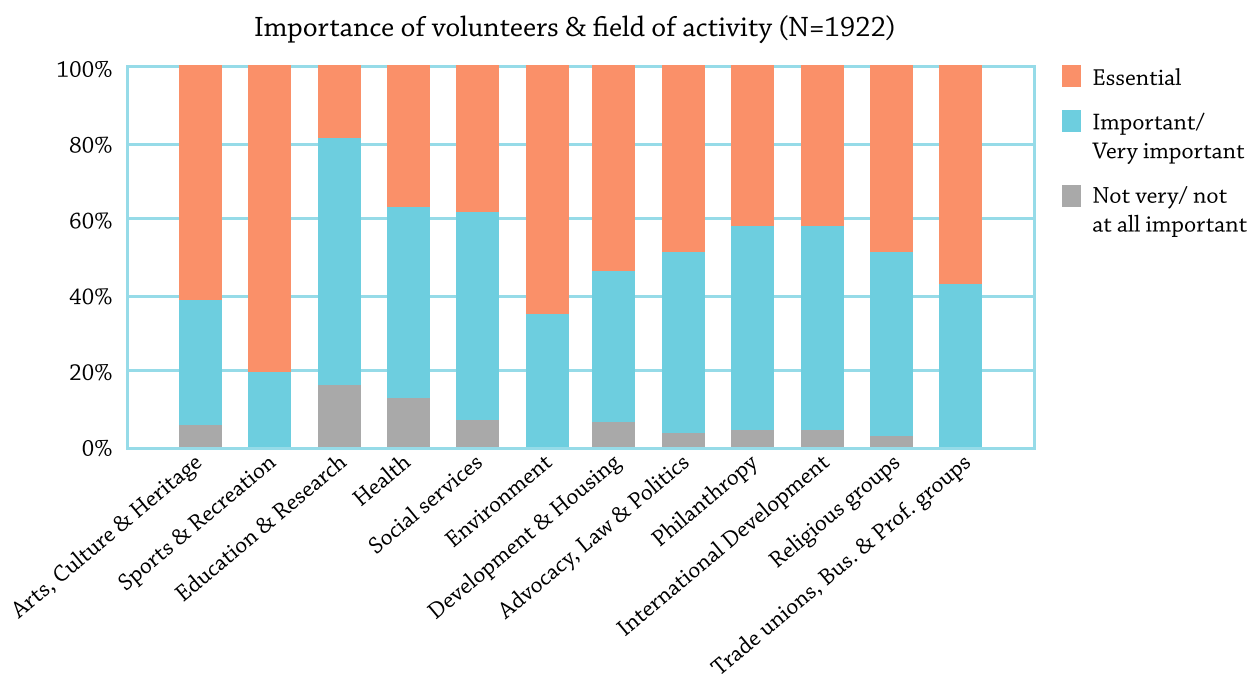
Economic contribution of volunteering

Economic estimates on the value of volunteering have been a popular method of underlining the importance of volunteering in society by highlighting volunteers as a source of free labour in society. Though it is difficult to accurately gauge the economic value of the volunteer contribution, the most recent estimation -based on figures for 2002 and the reported minimum wage of that year- calculated a conservative estimate of 204.4 million EUR. However, if the average industrial wage is utilised rather than the minimum wage, the replacement cost of volunteer labour could be valued at 382.2 million EUR. These figures can be put in context by comparing the conservative estimate of 204.4 EUR with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA) expenditure budget for community and rural affairs in 2005 which was 196 million EUR. Thus *'if volunteers would have to be paid, this expenditure would, at a minimum, have to be doubled just to pay for the wages of the replacements of the volunteers'*[24].

24. DKM Consultants (2004) Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland: Report for Joint Committee o Arts, Sports, Tourism, Community , Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dublin

Volunteer Infrastructure Volunteering Trends

Volunteer Ireland and the national network of local Volunteer Centres track volunteering activity as it occurs through the volunteering infrastructure i.e. individuals and organisations that engage with the volunteering infrastructure to find opportunities or source volunteers. The source of this information is the online database of volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and volunteering opportunities. The figures from 2011 tell a slightly different story to the research noted above. First, most people who register to volunteer are aged 35 or under (+/- 62%), of which just more than 50% are aged 25 or under. 60% had never volunteered before and the motivation to volunteer for 50% was 'to give something back'. As Ireland entered recession, the demand for volunteering increased significantly: there was a 70% increase in the number of people registering to volunteer in 2009 compared to 2008 with 10% of those who registered describing their motivation with respect to un- or under-employability.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

There is no specific legal framework or legislation for volunteering in Ireland. The only legislation relating to volunteering is a recently passed "Good Samaritan" law. This serves to protect individuals who lend a hand to someone in an emergency situation, as it prevents them from being sued afterwards if the intervention has an inadvertent negative impact. Alongside this, other legal Acts touch upon and regulate volunteering. For example, all legislation related to health and safety, equality and anti-discrimination.

The steering committee of NGO and public sector organisations created as part of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, considered the necessity of advocating for volunteering legislation and came to the conclusion that Ireland did not require legislation, but would benefit from a national policy on volunteering.

Volunteer Ireland and local Volunteer Centres are funded directly by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government as the Community section holds the brief for volunteering. The relationship between the Department and the national and local volunteering infrastructure is a positive one and they are the principle funders for local and national volunteering infrastructure.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING

In Ireland, the volunteering infrastructure comprises the following organisations: the national volunteer development agency, Volunteer Ireland; a network of local Volunteer Centres (20+) affiliated through their membership of Volunteer Ireland; Boardmatch, a national organisation dedicated to identifying and placing prospective volunteers on the boards of management of non-profit organisations; and various and several initiatives within third level educational establishments that promote and facilitate student volunteering.

Volunteer Ireland (the result of a merger mid-2011 of the two national volunteering organisations Volunteer Centres Ireland and Volunteering Ireland) and local Volunteer Centres have been the

main actors promoting and developing volunteerism in Ireland for the last 10 years and more. There are more than 20 local volunteer centres throughout Ireland.

Volunteer Ireland is the national volunteer development agency and a representative and support body for all local Volunteer Centres in Ireland. Volunteer Ireland's vision is people connecting with one another and participating in their communities to build a better Irish society. Our mission is to contribute to this vision by increasing the diversity, range and quality of volunteering in Ireland through inspiring, supporting and facilitating volunteering on all levels.

The role of Volunteer Ireland is:

To inspire, promote, recognise and celebrate volunteering and active citizenship by informing and engaging with individuals, organisations, policy makers, the media and other stakeholders. To support and develop, as part of a national strategy for supporting volunteering at national level, a network of local Volunteer Centres, by facilitating networking, training, the exchange of ideas and best practice, and a quality standards and evaluation framework.

- To support communities in enabling and facilitating voluntary activity as an expression of active citizenship and participative democracy by providing a range of supports and services.
- To lead the continuing development of a coherent volunteering infrastructure in Ireland in all its forms, locally and nationally, in collaboration with a range of partners and stakeholders.
- To build the capacity of and support organisations to make volunteering a fulfilling and rewarding experience for both the organisation and volunteers.
- To lead in the development, implementation, evaluation and promotion of best practice standards in volunteering
- To engage in research on volunteering trends and issues, and to disseminate information to better inform national and local policy and shape the development of an enabling environment for volunteering
- To advocate for volunteering and to work strategically and collaboratively across all sectors to achieve our vision

Volunteer Ireland administrates www.volunteer.ie as a conduit to volunteering in Ireland and a depository of information and resources for individuals wishing to volunteer, organisations seeking volunteers or anyone who wishes to find out more about volunteering; Volunteer Ireland also manages a national database of volunteering opportunities in Ireland, populated by organisations, individuals and Volunteer Centres, which is housed on www.volunteer. ie. Volunteer Ireland supports the network of local Volunteer Centres through facilitating regular meetings to share best practice and for training, administering the national database of organisations, individuals and opportunities and leading the evaluation of local Volunteer Centres by peer review according to a quality standard framework developed by Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres. Volunteer Ireland co-ordinates, in partnership with the local volunteering infrastructure, National Volunteer Week, a National Volunteer Awards programme and other campaigns. In addition to working directly with local Volunteer Centres, Volunteer Ireland works directly with for- and non-profit organisations, providing training, consultancy and other services (including providing access to the national criminal record checking system in Ireland, Garda Vetting). Volunteer Ireland will be introducing a quality standard framework for involving volunteers in 2012.

Volunteer Centres are local volunteer development agencies. They exist to improve the extent, range and quality of volunteering through providing a range of supports to individuals wishing

to volunteer and not-for-profit organisations seeking volunteers. Volunteer Centres are a vital part of the volunteering infrastructure of Ireland. Whilst each Volunteer Centre in Ireland is different, they all offer the same four core services:

- *A volunteer-centred placement service*
- *Supports for volunteer-involving organisations*
- *Marketing and promotion of volunteering*
- *Best practice in volunteer centres*

Volunteer Centres provide a publicly accessible list of volunteering opportunities for individuals and support to individuals in finding a volunteering role that suits them. The supports they provide to organisations include advice and one-to-one consultation on involving volunteers, modular and bespoke Volunteer Management Training and Garda Vetting.

5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government holds the 'brief' for volunteering (under Community). Primarily, they support volunteering via third parties (i.e. direct funding to volunteering infrastructure organisations and volunteer programmes and in-direct funding via local development companies). There is some resistance to involving volunteers in public bodies, especially given the economic environment.

Many companies have employer supported volunteering programmes as part of their commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR). They engage directly with community/voluntary organisations or via Volunteer Ireland, local Volunteer Centres, Business in the Community etc.

> Schools have volunteering as part of curricula. It is incorporated into a civics-based subject that students in senior school undertake during the junior certificate cycle, generally aged about 12-14.

Schools have volunteering as part of curricula. It is incorporated into a civics-based subject that students in senior school undertake during the junior certificate cycle, generally aged about 12-14. The subject is called Civic, Social and Political Education. The extent to which volunteering is studied or practiced, however, very much depends on individual teachers' championing of the topic. In addition, there is a 'transition year' (a year following the first level of state exams called the Junior Certificate). Transition Year is not open to all students as some schools choose to go straight from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate (final year exams) curriculum. Where it is offered, Transition Year offers students an opportunity to focus on education in a broader sense and volunteering and/or active citizenship can be part of that. Likewise, the impact and extent of focus on volunteering depends on individual teachers.

6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Ireland there are a significant number of Community and Voluntary or non-profit organisations. For historic reasons, the state 'outsources' many services to these organisations (including hospitals, schools, housing associations, health and social care organisations, not to mention culture, recreation, social justice, civil and human rights etc.). The main source of financial support for volunteering (for both Volunteer Ireland and local Volunteer Centres) is the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government. Annual funding for voluntary

support is in the region of €3.5million. Most direct grants from this pool of funding go to volunteering infrastructure organisations. With the exception of 2012, the allocation has been receiving cuts since 2009. The direct funding from government is straightforward. Local Volunteer Centres also receive indirect funding from the same Department. This occurs through Local Development Companies drawing down funding from a semi-state body (local City or County Councils) that is specifically ring-fenced for volunteering.

There is a plethora of other sources of funds for the voluntary sector, but because government core-funds volunteering infrastructure organisations, such organisations would be ineligible to apply for many. For particular programmes and campaigns, the main funders outside of the government are for-profit corporations and European Union grants.

7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

There is no real systematic and reliable research into, or measurement of volunteering in Ireland, as alluded to previously in this chapter. Volunteer Ireland records trends and figures on volunteering as it occurs through volunteer centres. They report on trends identified through our database system. For example, there was a significant increase in the number of people registering to volunteer when the recession hit. They also report on trends relating to age, gender etc. The database system is web-based and maintained in the cloud so it allows the creation of up-to-the-minute reports on any aspect of it.
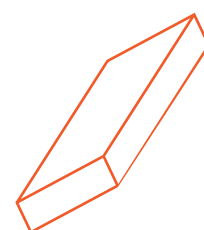
Volunteer Ireland and the network of local Volunteer Centres advocate that the Central Statistics Office in Ireland begin to collect information about volunteering and the non-profit sector through implementing the International Labour Organisation Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work.

8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer Ireland was awarded the European Funding for the European Year of Volunteering flagship project. The application was made in partnership with three other organisations: Business in the Community Ireland, Focus Ireland and the National Standards Authority of Ireland to develop a national quality standard for involving volunteers.

The proposal was to develop a quality standard framework for volunteer-involving organisations in Ireland, one that would serve as a benchmark for organisations to achieve best practice in volunteer engagement, provide a roadmap to take them there and an awards system to allow for public display of commitment to quality.

Volunteer Ireland engaged a sister-organisation in Northern Ireland, *Volunteer Now*, to undertake an assessment of sector needs and research models currently in use. To advance the project, a working group comprising representatives from the partner organisations, local Volunteer Centres and volunteer-involving organisations to liaise with Volunteer Now and the steering committee.

Based on a full review of the needs of the sector in Ireland and the context in which it operates, it was agreed that the best course of action to take was to explore the viability of introducing Investing in Volunteers (IiV), a UK-wide standard, to Ireland.

Investing in Volunteers is a framework comprising nine indicators and 46 associated practices (approximately five per indicator) and is "owned" by the UK Volunteering Forum. Organisations seeking to achieve the award undergo a six-step process that involves the following stages:

1. *An introduction to the award and an opportunity to hear about the standard and what will be expected of them in order to achieve it;*
2. *Self-assessment on which they get support and feedback from an advisor;*
3. *Support and assistance to develop an action plan to address gaps in practice;*
4. *Support to implement the gaps;*
5. *Assessment by the awarding body and local/national quality assurance;*
6. *Granting of the award.*

There are many benefits to choosing to adopt an award that is already in place, not least the fact that the framework has been tried and tested: Investing in Volunteers was developed in the mid-1990s and piloted in 1998. The pilot was then independently reviewed and a full roll-out was recommended. The framework was fully revised in 2009. Since its inception, more than 550 organisations have achieved quality accreditation, ranging from small community groups that are totally volunteer-led to large national multi-branch organisations with thousands of volunteers.

Volunteer Now are currently testing Investing in Volunteers with a group of organisations in Ireland. Meanwhile, Volunteer Ireland are exploring with the UK Volunteering Forum, the logistics of Volunteer Ireland becoming the "agent" for IiV in the Republic.

A quality standard framework for volunteering will revolutionise volunteering in Ireland and make Ireland a better place to volunteer. Volunteer-involving organisations will be provided with an awards programme for best practice in volunteer engagement and the supports and tools necessary to achieve it. Volunteers will have an improved volunteer experience; there will be better access to quality volunteering roles and this will lead to greater levels of participation in Irish society.

volunteer.ie is home to Ireland's only online database of volunteering opportunities and acts as an online resource for volunteers and potential volunteers, volunteer involving organisations and companies who involve volunteers. The website attracts thousands of visitors each month.

9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteer Ireland raise public awareness about volunteering through a number of high profile national campaigns. Following five successful years of their National Day of Volunteering campaign, this year will see Ireland's first National Volunteering Week (NVW) take place. NVW aims to encourage the public to give volunteering a go and highlight routes in to volunteering. As part of the campaign, hands on volunteering projects and volunteer fairs are held around the country. Volunteer Ireland also promote and celebrate volunteering through the Ireland Involved Awards, an annual volunteer awards ceremony, which attracts hundreds of nominations and widespread media coverage.

Volunteering is also promoted through a proactive year-round communication strategy by Volunteer Ireland. Regular press releases are issued to Irish media highlighting research findings and trends in volunteering. Volunteer case studies are profiled in media, publicising the work of volunteers and encouraging the public to volunteer. Volunteer Ireland also has a strong online presence. Their online portal www.volunteer. ie is home to Ireland's only online database of volunteering opportunities and acts as an online resource for volunteers and potential volunteers, volunteer involving organisations and companies who involve volunteers. The website attracts thousands of visitors each month. The organisation also has a strong social media presence, using Twitter and Facebook to highlight volunteering opportunities, news and events

10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

An Ireland North and West Member of the European Parliament, Marian Harkin is a great supporter of volunteering at the European Union (EU) level, bringing greater credence to volunteerism in Ireland from the EU level. Her commitments and achievements have meant a great deal to volunteering in Ireland. Her stance and work in the area is unique in the European Parliament, and she was spearheaded the campaign which ensured the positive vote for 2011 to be the European Year of Volunteering, whilst being co-President of the European Parliament's Volunteering Interest Group.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

At a European level, it would be recommended to implement the *International Labour Organisation Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*.

At a national level, several recommendations could be made:
- *More cohesion across the volunteering infrastructure*
- *A national policy/ commitment to volunteering*
- *The accurate and comparable measurement of volunteering, again with use of the ILO Manual*
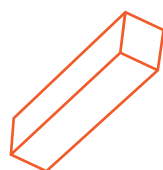
Resources

Central Statistics Office Ireland. Available at: http://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2006reports

Central Statistics Office, 2007. *Volume 11 – Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activities. Stationery Office: Dublin*

Department of the Taoiseach, 2006. *Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015. Dublin*

DKM Consultants, 2004. *Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland: Report for Joint Committee o Arts, Sports, Tourism, Community , Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dublin*

Donoghue et al., 2006. *The Hidden Landscape*

European Volunteer Measurement Project www.evmp.eu

Freda Donoghue, 2001. *Volunteering in the Republic of Ireland: History, Socio Economic Context and Meaning – Paper presented at Tipping the Balance Conference, United Nations International Year Volunteers*

Helen Ruddle and Raymond Mulvihill, 1999. *Reaching Out: Charitable Giving and Volunteering in the Republic of Ireland- The 1997/1998 Survey, NCIR: Dublin.*

Houses of the Oireachtas, Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2005. *(Sixth Report) Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland, Dublin*

Irish Nonprofits Knowledge Exchange, 2012. *Irish Nonprofits: What do we know?*

National Committee on Volunteering, 2002. *Tipping the Balance: Report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland.*

National Economic and Social Forum (2003), *The Policy Implications of Social Capital, Forum Report No. 28.Dublin, NESF.*

Government of Ireland, 2000. *Supporting Voluntary Activity: A White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing The Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*

Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007. *Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland, Dublin*

Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007. *Active Citizenship in Faith-based Communities, Dublin The National Economic and Social Forum, 2003. The Policy Implications of Social Capital*