



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025



Prepared by the Department of Rural and Community Development  
[gov.ie](http://gov.ie)





The purpose of this Strategy is to recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society.

The Strategy also provides an opportunity for Government to acknowledge how important volunteering is to the well-being of the nation and to steer the delivery of an agreed and ambitious vision.

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# National Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025



## Case Study

# Managing a Volunteer Programme in a Testing Centre – SDCVC

On 13th March, South Dublin County Volunteer Centre received a query from the HSE in relation to help with recruiting volunteers to deliver a meet and greet service for a new Testing Centre to be set up in Tallaght Stadium (this was the first community testing centre established in Dublin).

On the weekend of 14th/15th March, two members of staff from the VC spent the weekend working alongside HSE staff and members of the National Ambulance Service as they established the testing centre in Tallaght Stadium. Our purpose was to establish if there was need for volunteer involvement and see what the role involved before we invited others to volunteer.

We established that the role of the volunteer was to be a first point of contact with those arriving for testing, gathering essential bio-data from the client, ensuring that those arriving were met by a friendly face and answering other questions that people might have pre-testing.

We felt that the Volunteer Centre could step into this space and manage a team of volunteers in a safe and risk averse way. As our centre already had a Volunteer Corps in place, we had access to high vis jackets, hats, sweaters and other clothing to keep people warm and dry. Alongside this, we already had a Volunteer Management database that would help us with managing a large team of volunteers with scheduling and shifts of importance.

Over the next few days we recruited a team of 30 volunteers via IVOL (and supported by five staff from South Dublin County Partnership who were seconded to the centre for the duration). In recruiting volunteers, we established that people needed to be in good health, have really good spoken and written English, be able to stand for long periods and be calm and reassuring under pressure. All the volunteers, on their first shift, were shown how to put on the requisite PPE and manage risk in terms of dealing directly with people, many of whom will be COVID19 positive

During the first week, we received a call from the HSE who had heard great feedback on the volunteer program in Tallaght Stadium. Their request was for us to establish another volunteer program in the Lucan site. We were conscious of not over-stretching the team, so we invited our colleagues in Dublin City Volunteer Centre to take up the management of the site in Lucan which they duly did.

Eight months on and we're still volunteering each day but have now moved to the Citywest testing site as testing numbers have grown. Our volunteers are happy to be there - they also get great satisfaction from feeling that they are able to do something in this time of crisis. In some respects we have become part of a new family.



# Minister's Foreword



At its essence, volunteering involves a generosity of spirit and kindness combined with a decision to act. These are not just attributes or values that are nice to have. They are essential to how our society and communities function and grow. Volunteering can bring profound positive change to people's lives, communities, our country and indeed the planet. In this context Government has decided to acknowledge, support and commit to volunteering in a new and ground breaking manner by adopting the first National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025.

The purpose of this our first National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025 is to recognise, promote and grow the unique value and contribution volunteers make to Irish society.

Volunteering benefits large sectors of society in the areas of education, arts, heritage, education, health, sport and the socially marginalised. It also benefits the volunteers themselves. The National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025 was developed through partnership with local and central government and the community and voluntary sector.

We want the strategy to help bring new people to volunteering. We want to develop an environment and set of support structures that facilitates the highest standards so that all involved can benefit to the greatest degree. We will publicly and persistently communicate the variety of ways that volunteering brings value to our lives. The strategy will bring a new level of recognition of the importance of volunteering across government Departments.

When the first Call for Input into our National Volunteering Strategy was issued in December 2018, the world was a very different place. And while we were well aware, even then, of how much Government and communities depended on volunteers to deliver vital programmes and assist our most vulnerable people, Covid-19 and the trojan work of volunteers during this time has particularly highlighted the position of volunteering and volunteers as the backbone and mainstay of community resilience.

However, we cannot take the work of volunteers for granted. Volunteering is not free and it needs to be harnessed, encouraged, supported and also be representative of our diverse communities which make up Irish society. This is exactly what this Strategy aims to deliver.

This Strategy articulates the commitment in the Programme for Government "Our Shared Future" to publish

“

a strategy to support volunteering, including development of comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice”

The Strategy forms part of a trio of policies to support a range of organisations who provide services to communities. Along with Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024 and the National Policy on Social Enterprise, the Strategy sets a direction for government policy in relation to volunteers and the voluntary sectors. And in tandem, it sets out a long-term vision for our volunteers in Ireland with actions to be implemented over the next five years.

Implementation will be led by my Department, though many actions will be dependent on, and implemented jointly with, other relevant Government Departments, State agencies and sectoral stakeholders.

I am delighted to acknowledge that the partnership approach in the preparation of this Strategy has further strengthened the relationship and understanding between government and the voluntary sectors. I would like to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to all the members of the advisory group for your expertise, knowledge, and not least of all, your time.

I cannot emphasise enough that through the approval and publication of this Strategy, government is recognising the value of volunteering and how important it is to our communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Joe O'Brien, T.D.**

Minister of State for Community Development and Charities

# 1 | About this Strategy

## 1.1 | Purpose

The purpose of this Strategy is to recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society. The Strategy also provides an opportunity for Government to acknowledge how important volunteering is to the well-being of the nation and to steer the delivery of an agreed and ambitious vision.

Volunteers make a vital contribution to Irish society, developing communities as vibrant, inclusive and sustainable places where people want to live. The economic, cultural and social benefits of volunteering permeate through an incredibly diverse range of activities which include providing supports to arts and heritage, education, health, sport and the socially marginalised.

Therefore, as we look to the future we must ensure that we put the best possible supports and infrastructure in place so that volunteers and volunteer bodies continue to prosper and that the volunteering needs of present and future generations will be met.

The publication of the Department of Rural and Community Development's (the Department) five year Strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland – Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019 – 2024 addresses broader issues that affect the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS). These include issues relating to governance of CVS organisations, regulatory and compliance requirements, funding mechanisms and general developmental supports.

The first National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 is also part of this suite of policy initiatives from the Department of Rural and Community Development to support those who work with communities and disadvantaged groups. The development of this policy on Social Enterprise was underpinned by a research exercise conducted by the Department in partnership with the Social Finance Foundation. The aim of this research was to better understand social enterprise in Ireland and to identify the issues that needed to be addressed for it to develop and grow.

Taken together these three Strategies support the delivery of a coherent policy framework that promotes and encourages a partnership approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector in delivering on shared visions for the future of the sector. We are all stakeholders in this Strategy. Accordingly, the Strategy serves as a road-map for us all. It will provide a way forward for Government, volunteers, potential volunteers, Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIO), Volunteer Ireland, Volunteer Centres (VC), educational bodies, the corporate community and for the people and communities whom volunteers support.

The purpose and value of volunteering has never been more prevalent than in recent months. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the civic spirit and hands-on approach of volunteers willing to help fight and do their part as we support our communities and people. This volunteering experience has had a profound impact on all volunteers, many of whom volunteered for the first time and headed straight into the frontline to save lives, support contract tracing and to provide vital supports to those most vulnerable members of our communities.

## Case Study

# Student Volunteer Response to COVID-19

At the start of the crisis University of Limerick (UL), in partnership with the HSE, set up the UL Virtual Hub with over 50 volunteer health sciences students trained to engage in contact tracing. UL staff are managing the volunteer based virtual contact tracing hub and are providing technical support and advice.

The UL student volunteers are currently carrying out up to 70 calls a day to those who have tested positive for COVID-19.

Two of those volunteers, second year medical students at the UL Graduate Entry Medical School, Conor Clancy from Monaleen in Limerick and Aubree Worobetz, from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, spoke about their experience of the contact tracing so far and how they are glad to be contributing "in any way possible".

Asked what it was like to be playing a role in the fight against COVID-19, Conor said:

"It is nice to be able to do something positive to help, but it still feels very surreal to be doing it from lock-down at home. The work is all done remotely due to social distancing procedure so it is difficult to see the impact. But we have a good team of callers from UL who are helping each other out. Like everyone else, we are just waiting to see.

Aubree added:

"I think we all saw the same thing in this opportunity - a chance to support our community."



## 1.2 | Government Commitment

The Government recognises the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society. It is intrinsic to the fabric of our communities. The Programme for Government has committed to publishing "...a strategy to support volunteering, including the development of comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice".

Through this Strategy, we acknowledge that Government Departments depend on volunteers and volunteering structures to deliver on our own commitments, particularly in the area of service delivery. We are fortunate to have one of the highest levels of volunteering in the world but, that said, the challenges facing volunteering require that we take action now to ensure that we retain this position into the future.

We recognise:

- that volunteering is diverse – it happens formally and informally and ranges from decades of continuous commitment supporting community events to lending a hand when needed;
- that the nature of volunteering is changing and that we need to have the structures in place to respond and support this changing environment; and
- that while volunteering is a critical part of the community and voluntary sector, it also sits outside, in the private sector, in politics, in sport and with the individual amongst others.

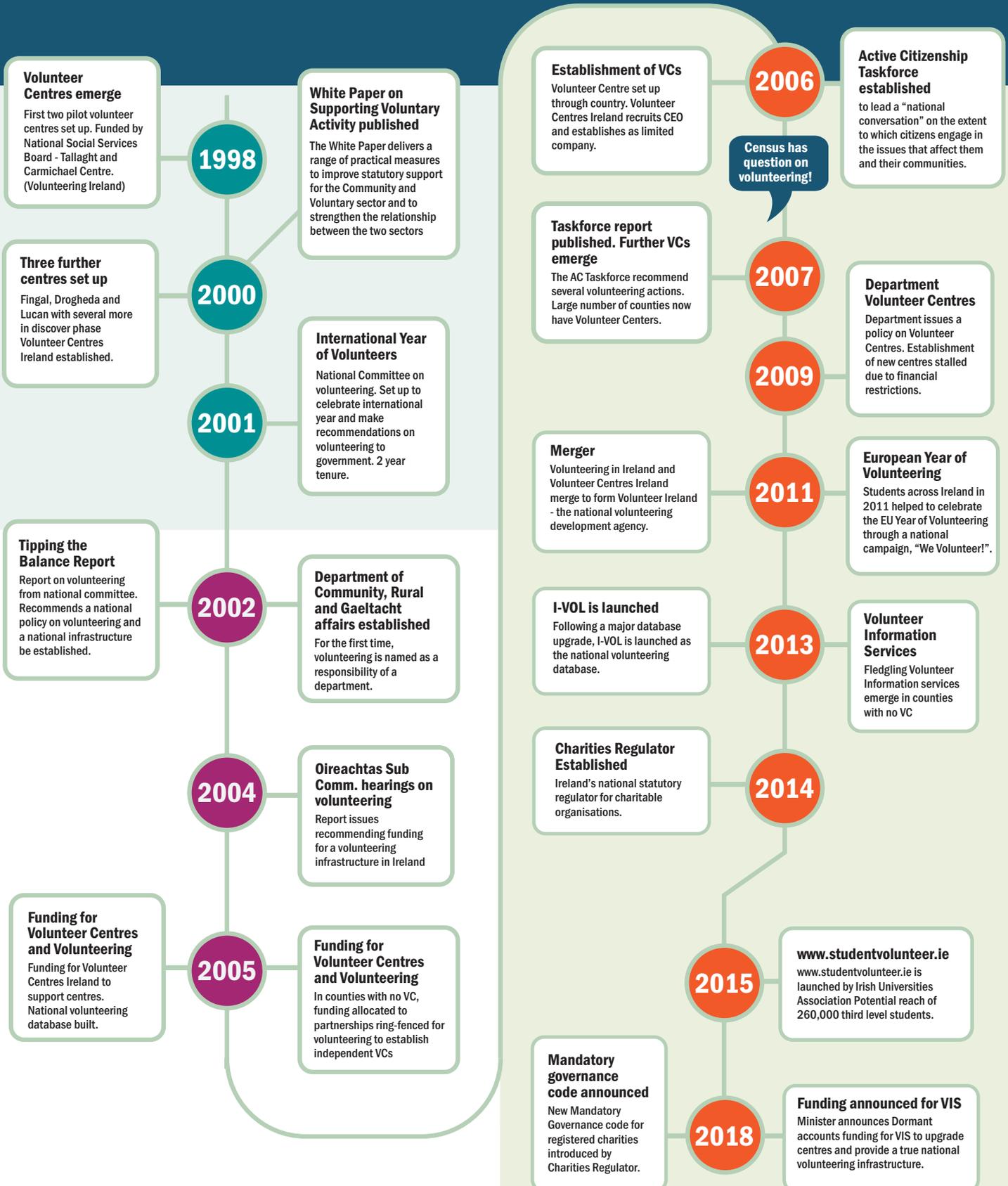
Volunteering is inherently good for the individual, for the community and for the services that volunteering underpins. However volunteering is not free, and investment is essential to creating a dynamic and thriving volunteering culture. Ireland as we know it would not exist without the input of volunteers and for that reason, the Government is committed to supporting and facilitating volunteering through the implementation of this Strategy.

The Government recognises the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society. It is intrinsic to the fabric of our communities.

1.3 | Background

# Volunteering in Ireland

## the last 20 years



In Ireland, volunteering has developed naturally and passed down traditionally through generations. This culture of volunteering has always played an important role in the development and delivery of a range of services to our communities. The past 20 years have seen the development and evolution of a volunteering infrastructure underpinned by central government policy and strategy initiatives seeking to address the challenges of changing demographics, societal structures and regulatory environment.

The Government's 2000 'White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector' (2000) published by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs described the community and voluntary sector as a continuum, and suggested that many organisations contained both community and voluntary elements. The White Paper recognised that it is not the role of Governments to control and be involved in every aspect of volunteering, but to put in place an enabling framework that strikes the right balance between nurturing volunteering and also having proper accountability.

The 2002 report of the National Committee on Volunteering 'Tipping the Balance' highlighted the diversity of organisational forms of volunteering. Formal volunteering takes place in organisational settings, particularly through voluntary organisations, non-profit organisations, or the social economy, but also under the aegis of employers, political and social activism or in conjunction with statutory schemes. Informal volunteering occurs outside of an organisational setting, often by individuals who may not even regard themselves as volunteers.

The 2007 Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship looked at the wider landscape of people's participation in the society around them through communities, neighbourhoods, political structures, educational institutions and workplaces. Volunteering through the community and voluntary sector forms an important part of active citizenship.

At a very broad level, some consider the community and voluntary sector to comprise all organisations that are non-Government and non-private sector; forming a 'third sector.' But for this Strategy it is important to have a clear focus on volunteering. It is also essential that this Strategy is additional and complimentary to the Strategy for the community and voluntary sector which addresses broader issues that affect the CVS. As underlined in the responses to the public and stakeholder consultations undertaken in the preparation of this Strategy, volunteering is a part of but also broader than the CVS.

## 1.4 | Volunteering at a glance

- 28.4% of the population or 1 million people aged 15 and over volunteer.
- 54.7% of volunteering is carried out directly by individuals and not through an organisation - this is informal volunteering.
- 45.3% of volunteering is carried out through an organisation – this is formal volunteering.
- Formal volunteering through organisations happens in the 29,300 community and voluntary sector (CVS) organisations in Ireland.
- There are an estimated 81,500 volunteer directors and trustees in the CVS.
- 9,700 organisations in the CVS are registered charities, with volunteer charity trustees alone making up 51,000 volunteers.
- 189,800+ volunteering hours logged on the StudentVolunteer.ie website with over 15,700 students and 1000 VIO's registered (April 2020). The numbers formally recorded through StudentVolunteer.ie represent a portion of the huge amount of volunteering taking place across the member HEI's.
- Volunteering also happens outside the C&V sector with many employees volunteering on company time, donated by their employer – 2019 research by Amárach commissioned by CII, showed that 14% of respondents' volunteering was organised by their employer. Business in the Community Ireland's Business Impact Map showed that in 2018, employees of 60 of the biggest companies in Ireland volunteered almost 265,000 hours.

- According to the 2019 Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) Report, 12% of people regularly volunteer for sport, with 52% of all adults in Ireland having volunteered for sport at some stage in their lives.
- In the same report, 39% of sports volunteers identified as coaches, with 20% identifying a transport role and 17% as an activity organiser.

## 1.5 | Shaping this Volunteering Strategy

In late 2018, a Call for Input (CFI) was issued by the Department, seeking input from the public and stakeholders, to establish in broad terms the current position of Irish volunteering, and to inform our collective aspirations for its future. Responses to the CFI suggested a new National Volunteering Strategy is needed to set a direction for volunteering, volunteering infrastructure, Volunteering Involving Organisations, volunteering supports and the volunteer. Following the CFI:

- a new volunteering National Advisory Group was convened to inform the new Strategy;
- a draft Strategy was agreed; and
- a second public consultation was carried out to further inform this Strategy.

The Strategy also reflects the volunteering experience and the key role played by VIO's and volunteers in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented event has reinforced the need for a National Strategy that supports volunteering.

The draft Strategy was finalised and approved by Government as the National Strategy on Volunteering 2021-2025 in December 2020.



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It is important all stakeholders are involved from the very beginning in the development of a national volunteering strategy, so that their views are captured and reflected in the development of the final strategy which emerges”.

Minister Seán Canney, T.D. (launching the public Call for Input into the Volunteering Strategy)

## 1.6 | Shared Vision

Ireland has one of the highest levels of volunteering in the world but we need to be mindful of challenges facing volunteering and the actions we need to take now to ensure we retain this position into the future. Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland recognises "... the strength of voluntary activity is that it emerges organically from communities, but it needs support if it is to flourish".

Agreeing on a shared vision for the future of Irish volunteering is essential to the effectiveness of a Volunteering Strategy. We need to move forward together with a collective end goal that keeps us focused on meeting the existing and emerging challenges facing volunteering.



Our vision is of "a society where volunteering is promoted, valued, facilitated and supported so that people can contribute to developing and maintaining vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities."

### An Organisation needs to be supported in -

#### Involving Volunteers

- Think about and develop volunteer roles
- Develop diverse roles to suit different volunteers and different organisational needs
- Understand where volunteering fits within the organisation
- See the value of volunteering across the organisation

#### Releasing Volunteers

- Be able to ask a volunteer to leave
- Get advice if needed
- Ensure the volunteer speaks well of the organisation
- Conduct an exit interview

#### Keeping Volunteers

- Insure volunteers
- Make the most of volunteers as ambassadors
- Provide training and support
- Garda vet volunteers where necessary
- Ensure volunteers are trained to meet needs of the organisation
- Make the most of volunteers across the organisation
- Evaluate the impact of volunteers
- Ensure the volunteer programme is valued within the organisation
- Have access to training, advice and progression
- Thank volunteers
- Pay expenses

#### Finding Volunteers

- Have attractive and well-written role descriptions
- Advertise volunteering roles
- Find volunteers with right skills and competencies
- Recruit, screen and select volunteers
- Match volunteers to the right roles
- Reach diverse audiences
- Induct volunteers

#### Managing Volunteers

- Manage volunteers
- Know what rights the organisation has in terms of volunteers
- Get advice on a difficult situation
- Have the resources to deal with a difficulty
- Have a volunteer policy to refer to
- Have a code of conduct
- Have a volunteer agreement

## 1.7 | Shared Values

To move forward towards our shared vision, it is necessary to recognise that volunteering is diverse. Consequently, while we all want to support and enhance volunteering, our values and motivations may be informed by different experiences and circumstances. This Strategy represents Government's clear commitment to supporting volunteering in all its forms. It is underpinned by the following core values:

Commitment to a vibrant volunteering landscape and to the people within the communities it serves	Central to this Strategy is an acknowledgement of the diverse and innovative ways in which people volunteer. Through this Strategy, this diverse volunteering landscape will be supported, encouraged to grow and be innovative in its development.
Trust and integrity	All partners and stakeholders are committed to acting with integrity and maintaining a sense of trust in the implementation of this Strategy.
Inclusion	This Strategy demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity in volunteering, so that everyone who wants to can volunteer and feel that their contribution is supported and valued.
Partnership	We developed this Strategy through partnership and a collaborative approach and this will continue as we implement the Strategy actions over the coming years.
Quality and excellence	This Strategy will support volunteers and volunteer-involving-organisations to achieve quality and excellence in their contributions to communities and to wider society.
Appreciation	The purpose of this Strategy is to recognise, support and promote the unique value and contribution of volunteering to Irish society.

## 1.8 | Economic Value

There is currently no comprehensive analysis of the economic value of volunteering. As a result, further data gathering of such economic value and the establishment of a national baseline of volunteering activity will be a priority under the Strategy. An analysis of the available data is outlined as follows.

In economic terms, the 2013 Quarterly National Household Survey conducted by the CSO outlined that the value of volunteer work amounted to over €2 billion annually (after annualising the hours and applying the national minimum wage at that time).

More recently, research produced by Indecon (2018) has estimated that the economic value of volunteering in registered Irish charities is €649 million and that the charity sector supports 289,197 employees.

These figures relate to registered Irish charities only and represent only a part of the impact of volunteering in wider Irish society.

In 2019 Indecon produced a second report on the impact of student volunteering, demonstrating that university students in Ireland are actively engaged in a variety of volunteering activities. The report stated that over 17,500 students from the 2017-18 academic year engaged in volunteering, representing a value of €28.4 million. However, it in turn also recognised that the actual levels of volunteering were potentially higher.



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Over **1 million** people in Ireland volunteer with about half of those volunteering in sporting activities.

(Volunteer Ireland - Migrant Participation in Sports Volunteering in Ireland 2019)

The role of volunteers is vital to the basic running of sporting activities and maintenance of sporting structures. The Irish Sports Monitor 2019 Mid-Year Report notes 12% of the population regularly volunteer for sport and approximately 875,000 people have volunteered for sport during the past year. Sport-related volunteering activity is estimated to have an economic value of between €322 million and €582 million per annum. Every sports club and event relies on volunteers who play a wide variety of roles e.g. coaching, transport, kit management. This contribution is recognised and valued in the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, where significant support and investment for volunteering in sport is committed.

While it is possible to estimate the monetary value of volunteering hours, the broader socio-economic and counterfactual benefits, including to mental health, are not easily quantified. For example, it is difficult to measure in monetary terms the value of weekly visits under befriending programmes.

As a nation, Ireland trades on an artistic, cultural, heritage and environmental identity that is famous worldwide. Volunteers play an intrinsic role in the cultivation, protection and sustaining of these sectors from grassroots to national level. Again, it is difficult to quantify the value that the volunteers who run our literary festivals, etc. have on our tourist sector.



# Emmanuel's Story

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is the largest festival of traditional Irish Culture in the world, with hundreds of thousands of visitors travelling to attend it every year. It is also the largest volunteer led and delivered event in Ireland. Emmanuel Ntemuse heard about Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann after the Louth Volunteer Centre team had given a presentation at his local church on volunteering and mentioned that they were recruiting volunteers for the event.

Despite developing a 'grá' for Gaeilge in school, he found it difficult to make connections to develop his language skills outside school. Emmanuel was delighted to hear about the Seachtain na Gaeilge programme at the Fleadh and signed up to help out in any way he could.

Emmanuel volunteered throughout the week, including being a representative of the Irish speaking volunteers at the Seachtain na Gaeilge launch event. From Emmanuel's perspective he was thrilled to have the opportunity to speak a language he loved and to connect with other Gaeilgeors living in his own area.

He subsequently applied through the local Volunteer Centre to become a volunteer youth leader with Ógra's, the Conradh na Gaeilge youth club programme, so that he could share his dedication and passion for Irish with other young people.

Emmanuel stated:

**"The preservation and promotion of the Irish language has long been an issue very close to my heart and I am always looking for new ways to use the language in my everyday life and to hopefully encourage others to do the same. Volunteering gives me the opportunity to do this"**

From the perspective of visitors to the Fleadh the sight of Emmanuel and other young African Irish volunteers speaking fluent Irish and demonstrating their love of Irish culture had a profound effect, with many Gaeilgeorí and festival attendees commenting on the diversity of Fleadh volunteers and their confidence in the future of Irish culture and heritage as a result of this diversity.



**Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann is the largest festival of traditional Irish Culture in the world. It is also the largest volunteer led and delivered event in Ireland.**

## 2 | What do we mean by Volunteering?

Quote from a Volunteer living in Direct Provision, Dublin

“Volunteering will make you happy. Even if you are happy now, volunteering will make you happier. When you are not from Ireland it can help you make friends and learn things about Ireland you never knew before. It will also make you feel like you’re doing something good.”

Responses to the Call for Input suggested volunteering resonates differently with people including volunteers themselves. Depending on the individual experience, volunteering can be understood as a formal role, such as a trustee of a charity or as an informal and possibly unacknowledged role where people just see themselves as ‘lending a hand’.

Volunteering impacts positively on society, on communities and on the people who live in those communities. Whether formal or informal, organised or spontaneous, volunteering is about civic engagement and active participation in shaping the society we want to be part of.

### 2.1 | Definition

The CFI asked how volunteering should be defined. Our definition emerged from the responses received and aims to reflect as many of the views as possible to ensure an inclusive platform from which this Strategy and its implementation will emerge.

“Volunteering is any time willingly given, either formally or informally, for the common good and without financial gain.”

This definition covers a wide range of ‘volunteering activities’ for example -

- formal volunteering taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies);
- informal volunteering, that which takes place outside an organisational setting; and
- the individual who, in many cases, does not consider what they do as volunteering but sees his or her actions as ‘lending a hand’ or ‘being neighbourly’.

To put it simply, volunteering is doing more than you have to, because you want to, because you care.

What do we mean by ‘common good’?

- Actions taken in order to benefit society as a whole.
- Volunteering undertaken with free will and outside of the immediate family.

What do we mean by ‘financial gain’?

- Volunteers are not financially better-off through volunteering and often volunteer at their own expense.
- Payment or reimbursement for out of pocket expenses is not financial gain.

## Case Study

# ALONE

Nora is an ALONE service user for over four years. She is 82 years old and is visually impaired. Below is her story:

"A few years back I realised I need to have people calling and I contacted ALONE and received very good help from them. They got a visitor for me which is very important. My needs might be different to other people. I need to get out, get exercise, get a walk, get things read for me, forms filled in sometimes; things like that. I'm solely depending on people, like ALONE, to call so if I have an emergency I have someone to get in touch with.

There's more to it than a chat, a friendship has built up. Every week I look forward to my visit. We have nice conversations, we put the world to rights. I feel I can say what I want to say to Josephine. She's great company and I look forward to her visits and all the help she gives me. If I hadn't Josephine I would be without the help I need. It's about being with somebody I feel comfortable with. Trust comes into it all".

Josephine is an ALONE volunteer who has been visiting Nora for over four years. Her story is below:

"I worked right up until retirement and then I was at a total loss about what am I going to do. I didn't want to wake up in the morning and not have anything to do, so volunteering saved my life. I've been visiting for four and a half years and it's just been the perfect match as far as I've been concerned. You build a friendship, you build a relationship and it's wonderful. Volunteering means to me using my time and having a purpose. Volunteering was huge to me, I look forward to coming on my visits. The fact that Nora is blind means I've to be mindful of the different obstacles she faces. There's so much more for me than if I visited a sighted person. It has made me more and more conscious.

I would always suggest volunteering. It's giving back and I think giving back is really important. I think it's healthier for me and for my mind. It's better for people to keep as busy as you can as you get older, as it's good physically and mentally".



**The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention." – Oscar Wilde**

## 2.2 | Who Volunteers

The Strategy is about acknowledging and supporting the work of volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations which is undertaken on a daily basis in our communities. It also reflects diversity in our communities and the different backgrounds and circumstances of all involved in volunteering.

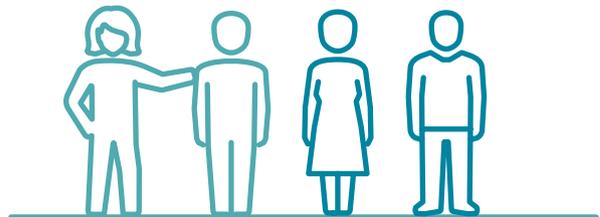
This Strategy also appreciates the need to ensure that all members of our society can positively contribute to the sustainable development of our communities. It will complement the commitments laid out in a number of other Government strategies, such as the Migrant Integration Strategy and Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures amongst others, to provide an engaging, proactive and inclusive framework and guiding principles for volunteering in our country.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life, young and old, urban and rural, all contributing towards common goals aimed at developing and maintaining vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities.

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In 2013 nearly **50%** of volunteers newly registered in Dublin came from migrant backgrounds

Dublin City Volunteer Centre report



### Volunteer who formally resided in Direct Provision, Sligo

Ms. Shupai Matewa, is originally from Malawi. Shupai was in the Direct Provision system for approx. 9 years and received her leave to remain a number of years ago and received Irish Citizenship last year. Shupai now resides in Sligo and works in a local childcare facility after completing her degree in Early Childhood Education from IT Sligo.

“Life in Direct Provision (DP) was lonely, stressful, boring and unproductive. It was affecting my well-being, particularly my mental health. I longed to be out of the centre doing something. I asked the manager of the DP centre where I was accommodated, how I can get involved in volunteering. He directed me to the Sligo Volunteer Centre (SVC). I visited the SVC office where the dedicated staff gave me all relevant information about volunteering and supported me in getting started and to keep on volunteering.

I have volunteered with over 15 groups in Sligo over an 11 year period and to this day continue to volunteer with Sligo Tidy Towns and St Vincent de Paul. Sligo Volunteer Centre was very supportive to me each time I took on a new volunteer role and through volunteering I have made many friends and feel very welcomed and accepted in my community. I was also invited and became a Board Member of the Management Committee of Sligo Volunteer Centre for three years.

By volunteering side by side makes me feel part and parcel with the local community. I do not feel isolated because we do the same/similar tasks together, enjoying the sense of humour that is so rich in my local community. I know I belong to my local community”.

## 2.3 | Community and Voluntary Sector

The community and voluntary sector comprises a diverse range of community, voluntary and charitable organisations with origins in the community. Community and voluntary organisations can vary significantly in size, scale and ethos, from the smallest community and voluntary groups to the largest charities. More than a million people actively volunteer annually in Ireland at an estimated value of more than €2 billion per annum.

Over 71,000 unpaid volunteer trustees and board members sit on boards and management committees of charitable organisations, while more than 300,000 people volunteer with registered charities alone and yield an economic value of €649 million per year (based on the minimum wage).

Ireland's 49 Local Development Companies (LDCs) are a significant example of community activity that is led and governed by volunteer boards and committees. Staffed by workers funded under various government schemes and programmes, these are multi-sectoral partnerships that deliver community and rural development, labour market activation, social inclusion and social enterprise services. The Companies are governed by voluntary boards operating at local level who oversee some 2,200 staff delivering €330 million of state-funded programmes. Each year, they support more than 15,000 communities and community groups and 170,000 individuals.

Similarly, our Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are driven by volunteers. Without the commitment and engagement of the volunteers in the 31 PPNs across the country, our local decision making structures would not be influenced by the voices and input of the PPN member groups, of which there are currently 17,721.

## 2.4 | Corporate Social Responsibility

While the majority of volunteering is undertaken by individuals in their own time, the definition also recognises the role of business and the corporate sector (Corporate Social Responsibility - CSR), which supports and facilitates employees to volunteer, in groups or as individuals.

'Towards Responsible Business' Ireland's National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility 2017-2020 was published in June 2017. The Plan aims, over three years, to position Ireland as a 'Centre of Excellence for responsible and sustainable business practice through the adoption of best practice in CSR'. It focuses on four dimensions - Workplace, Marketplace, Environment and Community.

CSR and responsible business practices benefit everyone by:

- Sharing the skills and expertise, labour and other resources from business with the local community;
- Helping employers to attract and retain talented employees;
- Providing employers and employees with a social purpose aligned to their core business objectives;
- Supporting delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and
- Ensuring a positive relationship between businesses and the local community and creating shared value.

## Case Study

# IBM and Cisco



IBM and Cisco joined forces to offer teachers in schools across Ireland free access to video conferencing through use of the Cisco Webex web conferencing tool. The technology offers simple and intuitive features for online collaboration in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak. To support new users in getting started, IBM and Cisco employees volunteered their time to help install the video-conferencing technology and provide ongoing guidance to maximise the tools.

The pandemic and resulting lockdown posed huge challenges for schools as they strived to provide education to pupils across the country. Cisco Webex allowed students to continue attending classes in today's exceptional circumstances by holding lessons in a virtual classroom and embark on distance learning. Students can easily participate in lessons in guest mode, without the need for a user account. Everything is managed by the teacher, who "invites" the students to the classroom. Lessons can also be recorded and sent to students who were unable to attend.

The Cisco and IBM collaboration was initially targeted at supporting schools in Ireland with limited or no learning platform and has now been extended to additional schools nationwide. The initiative began in Italy in response to the government's call for companies to support schools as they closed and has now expanded to over 18 countries in Europe, including Ireland. There are already 3,000 IBMers volunteering to make this a reality across Europe, supporting over 100,000 students in 2,000 schools and continues to increase each week.

Cisco Country Manager, Paul Kavanagh, said: "These weeks have been challenging for all of us, and the need for us all to stay connected has never been more important. We're firm believers that we need to create a digital society for everyone, and that remains true in critical times like these, when the spirit of collaboration really comes to the fore. We're proud to be able to offer a tool that will hopefully help ensure students can continue learning, and charities continue their vital work. And I'm hugely proud of the skilled Irish volunteers who are helping teachers and their students stay connected during these exceptional times."

"The need for us all to stay connected has never been more important. Our goal is to develop innovations that help society progress and improve – this has never been more relevant today as we face an unprecedented global crisis. It is a privilege to contribute the skills and expertise of IBMers in Ireland as we seek to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our society" said Paul Farrell, General Manager, IBM Ireland.



**IBM and Cisco partner to support the Department of Education and Skills with remote teaching across Ireland**

## 2.5 | Skills-Based Volunteering

Skills-based volunteering provides an opportunity for business and individuals to partner with VIOs, with employees volunteering their skills to assist the VIOs deliver their organisational objectives. Research has proven that skills-based volunteering has five times the impact that practical volunteering has. There are many examples of professional skills sharing between businesses and VIO's including professional skills in marketing, IT, HR, finance, sales, consultancy and strategy design and many others.

Pro-bono support is where a company provides their core business service for free to a VIO.

This might, for example, be an accounting firm's employees advising a VIO on finance governance and procedures. As an example, in response to COVID-19, Volunteer Ireland have launched a new Business Advice Programme engaging corporates skills based volunteers who can offer vital supports to VIOs.

This Strategy seeks to increase awareness of and facilitate greater understanding around this model of professional skills volunteering to actively promote the expansion of business in partnership with local Volunteer Organisations.

## 2.6 | Social Enterprise

Social Enterprises are enterprises that trade on an ongoing basis to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact and often such organisations depend on the contributions of a mixture of paid staff and unpaid volunteers. The vibrancy, effectiveness and overall impact of many social enterprises in Ireland therefore depends on volunteers at various levels including in some cases, voluntary board members. Many social enterprises are embedded in our communities and rely on the supports and structures at community level to develop and thrive.

Volunteer involvement adds significant value in terms of community engagement, trust building as well as ensuring transparent and accountable governance of these organisations. Social Enterprises attract volunteers with a diverse mix of skills and experience, people who can inject ideas, passion, and creativity and have the capabilities to help shape their future direction and ensure growth.

## 2.7 | International Volunteering

International volunteering is about volunteers who contribute their time to work for organisations or causes outside their home country. In most such cases, volunteers work in developing countries on international development programmes, with local volunteer organisations typically in the areas of health promotion, education and sustainable development. International volunteering is a broad term which is used to capture multi-year, skilled placements as well as short term roles and includes a range of activities conducted by governments and charities to promote ethical and skills-based international volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries and to enhance Global Citizenship in Ireland. In 2017, almost 2,000 Volunteers from 40 organisations volunteered in 56 different countries around the world.

## 2.8 | Young Volunteers - the Future

For all volunteers, and in particular young people, the benefits of volunteering go far beyond the actions involved and their impact on the beneficiaries. The full range of skills developed through volunteering and community action are important for a wide range of young people. Social innovation and in particular, the Young Social Innovators Schools Programme, harnesses the energy of and provides a greater sense of empowerment among young people.

It is clear that there are a range of opportunities and supports in place across second and third level education, including Youth Research, Young Social Innovators, Gaisce, and Studentvolunteer.ie. It is through the further support and development of such programmes and by examining the potential of including civic engagement and volunteering as part of our formal education system, that some of these challenges can be addressed.

Consultation on this Strategy also included a lively engagement with fifty representatives from the Youth Reference Panel of Foróige, Ireland's leading youth organisation. The participants, aged between 12 and 18, came from all over Ireland and from a diverse range of backgrounds, demonstrating the strength, variety and reach of youth volunteering that currently exists. This Strategy will build upon this consultation to further promote, develop and nurture the role of volunteering across all youth age categories, from 12 to 25 years of age, and wider society.

Six questions were posed to Foróige participants about volunteering, including

- What volunteering means to them;
- The barriers that are presented; and
- How volunteering can be more inclusive.

As Foróige clubs are volunteer-led, there was an overwhelmingly positive and reaffirming response as to the importance of volunteering. That said, there were also observations regarding what stops young people from volunteering. This Strategy provides an opportunity to address these issues and to introduce measures targeted specifically at increasing participation amongst young people including:

- increased availability of information and volunteering opportunities suitable for an under 18 age profile;
- addressing the somewhat negative perception of volunteering among their peer groups;
- access to training and the question of formal accreditation;
- considering the issue of transportation costs; and
- examining ways to streamline the Garda vetting application process and insurance costs.

An expanded list of the consultation questions and collated answers, including requested supports and potential opportunities from which to enhance engagement, can be found in Appendix 3.

“

Volunteers and volunteering is the basis for all young people to have a chance to empower themselves, volunteering also guides young people in the right way forward. Volunteers and volunteering is immensely important to young people and we wouldn't have half the amount of opportunities we have without their input and guidance”.

Jack Nolan Foróige member

“

Volunteering is a great idea for students and young people to practice your skills, discover new ones and build your CV. It allows you to expand your circle of friends and also to create relevant relationships that could bring life-changing experiences for you. A lot of the non-profits and/or charity organisations registered with us are more than happy to welcome Under 18s and support them during their volunteering process.

Dublin City Volunteer Centre



# 3 | Why do we need Volunteers?

The impact of volunteerism is extensive and intrinsic to the social fabric of our daily lives. Volunteering assists people of all ages, social backgrounds and abilities to have a healthier, happier and more inclusive life. It contributes to the development and sustainability of communities, not least in rural areas where access to social and health services can be more difficult.

Volunteering is an integral part of our community and voluntary sector, but it also sits in the private sector, in politics, in enterprise, in education, in sport, in culture and with individuals. It intersects with the work of all government departments, all of which rely on volunteers in some part to achieve their objectives.

Volunteers also provide a vital contribution to our country's vibrant arts scene and rich cultural heritage. The Government's Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2020 calls on all of us to play a part in placing our rich cultural heritage, and its potential, at the centre of our lives and has as one of its high-level principles to 'recognise and support the cultural contribution of the voluntary sector'.

## COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how the national response was supported and driven by volunteers – when large sections of society shut down, volunteers were busier than ever providing vital services and supports for vulnerable people. This included manning COVID-19 contact tracing centres, delivering meals on wheels and providing essential services to people in their community.

The importance of volunteers to the relief effort is exemplified in the wide-ranging projects included in Volunteer Ireland's 'How Irish Communities Stepped Up to the Mark – Stories of Irish Volunteering During COVID-19'. Volunteers from right across the country have been involved in delivering support services across a number of areas, including the areas of health, social isolation and culture, as well as playing a key role as part of the Community Call.

## Case Study

### Robert Canavan – Volunteer Driver- COPE Galway Community Centre

Robert Canavan, who returned to Galway in the wake of the pandemic after two years in Canada, began volunteering as a COVID-19 response driver soon after coming home.

"Initially I was volunteering whenever needed, but now I have more of a general route for delivering meals," he said. A volunteer shift as a meal delivery driver begins by collecting meals from the COPE Galway Community Catering kitchen and receiving a list of addresses. Generally, Robert makes five to eight deliveries per shift.

Robert has volunteered with COPE Galway in various capacities since 2014.

In the months since he began as a response driver, he says he has gotten to know the clients he delivers meals to and enjoys chatting to them as he makes his rounds.

"I'm on a more regular schedule now and I am on a first name basis with everyone," Robert said. "You really care how everyone's doing. There are some great people you might meet who make your day as much as you might help theirs."

Robert said he feels his volunteer work helps him as much as it might help any of COPE Galway's clients, a sentiment shared by many volunteers. "As I was left unemployed when I moved home [from Canada], volunteering gave me a bit of structure during that crazy time," he said.

"It's been great to get out and get involved in helping the community," Robert continued. "And it's just as a much benefit to my own mental health, it's made me a much happier person to get involved and help out as much as I possibly can."



### 3.1 | The value of Volunteering

Volunteering enriches our society, it brings people together for the better of their communities and beyond national borders.

Looking through a broad lens, the impact of volunteering can be viewed as a support to democracy, inclusivity and welfare. Many community based grassroots initiatives are both led by and dependent upon volunteers. And as we look to the future, the participation of grassroots communities is essential to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Volunteering is not only about civic participation, it can also have an important contribution on the health and well-being of our communities, as well as addressing loneliness amongst older people and helping young people develop confidence, community awareness and involvement.

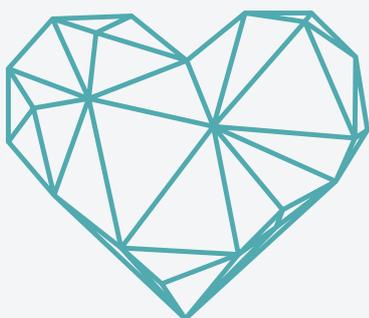
Volunteering is a very personal and positive experience, creating an increased sense of well-being, whether it be from leading and driving initiatives, giving back to the community by sharing knowledge and experiences or simply lending a hand for the greater good.

### 3.2 | For Volunteer Involving Organisations, volunteering -

- brings the perspectives and insights of the local community, including beneficiaries, to the heart of the organisation;
- provides leadership and inspiration at local, regional and national level;
- can increase the diversity of the organisation;
- provides advocacy, support and awareness about their organisation and allows organisations to reach a wider audience;
- empowers organisations by engaging a wider audience from the local community;
- secures added support and resources to complement and enhance the work of the organisations;
- provides volunteers who act as trustees that are essential to the existence of charitable organisations; and
- can provide an effective means of recruiting new staff from among volunteers.

### 3.3 | For Society, volunteering-

- is an expression of active citizenship, inclusion and social capital and as such, is part of a healthy democracy;
- helps us deliver our international commitments, e.g. supporting the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals; and
- enables people to support the valuable activity of non-profit groups and organisations.



“

Volunteering is at the heart of vibrant, inclusive, sustainable communities”



## Case Study

# Nadya Doyle, An Taisce Climate Ambassador Programme, Wexford

At just 16 years old, Nadya was the first person in her community to become part of An Taisce's Climate Ambassador Programme. Having always had a keen interest in the environment, she has been encouraged by her parents to recycle from a young age.

Nadya – who is also the chair of the Green Schools Committee in her secondary school – chose to become a climate ambassador to raise awareness of the effects of climate change and to highlight things that people can do every day to help the environment such as correct recycling practices.

Nadya has organised many initiatives as part of her role such as a beach clean-up at Bannow strand as part of Clean Coasts Week. She was asked by the OPW to give a talk on the cause and effect of climate change in Ireland at Tintern Abbey during Heritage week.

Nadya organised a competition among the staff of Carlow County Council on the amount of batteries that could be collected for recycling to raise funds for Laura Lynn children's hospice (WEE Schools Pledge) and has volunteered with New Ross Tidy towns on a clean-up and is in the process of helping them making a mural out of bottle tops for the town.



### 3.4 | For local communities, volunteering -

- brings an irreplaceable passion and commitment, whether drawn from geographical or common interest;
- adds local and personal knowledge and perspective into the work of non-profit organisations;
- ensures the on-going delivery of a range of important services, including assisting Government in the provision of such services e.g. some emergency response services including the Civil Defence, and more recently, participating in the Government's 'Community Call';
- helps build social networks, connectivity and community resilience;
- consolidates and fosters a wider sense of belonging among participants, for example through participation in local sports clubs or residents / tidy town associations;
- facilitates community members to identify and take action on a broad range of issues such as climate action and social inclusion; and
- has the potential to bring a wider perspective into local communities, for example volunteers returning from abroad.

### 3.5 | For volunteers, volunteering–

- connects people to their communities, reducing isolation and enabling people to get involved in causes they care about;
- affords an opportunity for people to build on their skills and employability;
- improves mental and physical health; and
- increases levels of happiness and contentment.

### 3.6 | For Beneficiaries, volunteering-

- helps build links with the wider community;
- provides access to vital services;
- can instil a sense of well-being and security; and
- creates a unique sense of value, by being supported by someone who is not being paid.

As part of focus group responses for Volunteer Ireland's 2017 report on the The Impact Of Volunteering On The Health And Well-Being Of The Volunteer, respondents highlighted some of the links to positive health and well-being that volunteering has provided them with:

- Feeling useful, purposeful and valued
- Feeling friendship, social interaction and meeting new people
- Feeling a sense of personal growth and development
- Feeling connected to community and a sense of belonging
- Feeling better mentally, feeling good about themselves
- Feeling fortunate, a sense of meaning, gratitude and appreciation

## Case Study

# Carolyn Akintola

Carolyn is a disability awareness advocate who has been volunteering since she was 12 years old. Having spent 15 years as a carer for her mother, she once again has the time for volunteering and taken on a number of volunteer roles.

She is a member of the South Dublin County Council Disability Advisory Consultancy Panel and previously volunteered with St. Vincent De Paul for 25 years.

As a lifelong volunteer, we asked Carolyn what makes her do it and her answer was simple. "If we want to live in a good society, we have to take part and make a contribution. I've gained a lot from society as have many others so I feel it's important to give that back."

What piece of advice would she give to someone who has never volunteered?

"Don't be a stranger. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Just try it and if you don't like it you can try something else. Don't give up at the first hurdle, there are so many different things you can do – you'll find something that suits you."



## 4 | Who are the drivers?

Modern society faces complex problems requiring innovative thinking and flexible responses at national and local level. Government can put structures and funding in place but this only brings us some of the way. To make a real difference, we also rely on the vision and dedication of organisations and individuals who volunteer in the community. Put simply, many local services, sports clubs and community care initiatives are dependent on the volunteer – otherwise the service cannot be delivered to the same extent in many cases.

### 4.1 | Government Policy and Funding

Following on from commitments in previous programmes for Government, the Programme for Government – Our Shared Future (2020) affirms the contribution of the community and voluntary sector in building a more just and prosperous society and underlines the strong focus on urban and rural regeneration within the sector. The Department of Rural and Community Development is a key enabler of these commitments.

The Department is central to developing policy and supporting the development and growth of volunteering in Ireland. This is reflected in its mission to “promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland” and its strategic objective to support the community, voluntary and charity sector and to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society. This role is recognised in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, 2020-2025: Ambition, Goals, Commitments, the whole of government strategy to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion in Ireland. The Roadmap acknowledges the important role of volunteering in Irish society and includes a target for increasing the rate of volunteering.

Implementing the Strategy will support delivery of the Department’s strategic objectives and meet Programme for Government commitments vis-à-vis enabling volunteering and recognising, expanding and supporting the role of volunteers in society.

The Department also provides a framework of support for the voluntary sector to develop volunteering infrastructure. To this end, funding is provided to a number of organisations to help

strengthen and foster volunteering in Ireland and to build a support structure that will develop volunteering locally from the bottom up. This includes funding and supports for Volunteer Ireland, Volunteer Centres and Public Participation Networks (PPNs), which give volunteer-led groups a direct voice in local government. PPNs also enable groups to connect with others in their locality and provide capacity-building opportunities such as training and workshops.

Volunteering is also supported by other Government Departments under their various programmes, policies and strategies for which they have responsibility. Likewise, many Government initiatives and policies rely heavily on Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), communities and volunteers to deliver their initiatives. This Strategy will help ensure we move towards a more joined-up approach that supports and recognises the important role that volunteers and VIOs have to play in the delivery of these strategies and that they are supported accordingly.

## 4.2 | Volunteer-supporting Environment



**Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth.”**

Muhammad Ali

The volunteer supporting environment consists of 29,300 community and voluntary sector organisations in Ireland, who are VIOs actively involved in promoting volunteering, and as such play a critical role. In addition, volunteering is developed and nurtured by 22 Volunteer Centres, seven Volunteering Information Services (VISs) and Volunteer Ireland, all of which are supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development. This volunteering infrastructure provides nationwide cover giving communities access to support and resources, through their local Volunteer Centre or Volunteering Information Service in every county. This encourages a rich breadth of volunteering in response to local needs.

Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres manage the national volunteering database, I-VOL, which as of 2020 had over 100,000 volunteers and 9,000 organisations registered. They have recently developed a new i-VOL app which allows users to access volunteering opportunities in their local area. Users can search for roles near them by interest, cause and time they have available. They can also apply for roles directly through the app, keep track of their applications and volunteer hours undertaken through their profile.

In addition, in 2016 Campus Engage, a network of higher education institutions, coordinated a student volunteer working group to build an online tech-solution to support and award thousands of students on campuses wishing to volunteer as part of their learning experience. This working group launched an online national student volunteering system [www.studentvolunteer.ie](http://www.studentvolunteer.ie). StudentVolunteer.ie is dedicated to encouraging and engaging all higher education students in volunteering as well as managing, tracking, responding and reporting on rewarding engagement. The system also enables community organisations both at home and abroad to promote, recruit, manage and report on student volunteering. This online management system is provided as a free resource to both volunteers and community groups alike.

VIOs are of differing size and capacity; some organisations have very strong volunteering strategies in place overseen by professional volunteer managers; other smaller groups are completely volunteer-led and recruitment is completed on an ad hoc basis with little or no support structures in place. As referenced previously, sporting organisations are largely volunteer led and represent some of the largest volunteer bases in the country.

Large non-profit organisations also provide expertise, capacity and general and specific services to charities, not-for-profits and VIOs. These include, among others, The Wheel, Carmichael, Dóchas, Comhlámh and Boardmatch. The supports they provide are invaluable to VIOs and cover a range of issues from good governance, board appointments and training, to ethical fundraising and international development.

The Charities Regulator (or the Charities Regulatory Authority) was established in 2014 and is the independent statutory body responsible for the registration and regulation of charities within the State. 33% of VIOs are also registered as charities. Given that such a considerable proportion of our voluntary groups operate as charities, the importance of the Regulator’s work in maintaining trust and confidence in the charity sector is, and will continue to be, critical to the Strategy’s core values of fostering integrity and promoting quality and excellence.

### 4.3 | Personal Motivation

People volunteer for different reasons. Although many volunteer for altruistic reasons, motivations are varied and can be about increasing social networks and gaining skills. Based on responses from 13,095 volunteers registered on the national volunteering database I-VOL in 2018, the top motivations for choosing to volunteer are:



### CLG Baile Buadáin Naomh Éanna



What makes the Club is the people who volunteer and help out every week. The club for me is a place to be with friends and meet new people. I am giving my resources back to the community...when the community as a whole gives me so much more than that"

Doireann Mullany on how volunteering with her club helps her feel part of the wider community

## Case Study

# The Bluestack Special Needs Foundation – Shaun Meehan

The Bluestack Special Needs Foundation was set up approximately eighteen years ago by a man called Patrick Mc Brearty to help his daughter who has Downs Syndrome, as there were no services in Donegal Town. Shaun Meehan outlines what it means to be a volunteer.

“I have been going to The Bluestack as a volunteer for three years. When I started not many people knew about this voluntary organisation and in them three years it has grown. When I started there were only two clubs - the Teen club and The Saturday club, and now we also have a choir. The things that we do at the clubs differ each week as we listen to what the kids want to do.

The Saturday club is for children aged between four and twelve years of age who have a disability. Each volunteer is assigned a child who they play with for the duration of the club. The best thing about The Saturday club, in my opinion, is listening to the children as there is no filter in what they say. The Choir is really only getting recognised now.

We practice every Wednesday and we have performed in The Abbey Hotel and Croke Park.

I have been volunteering for three years and what I understand is all the volunteers are like one big family. Even though we are working with children, we are still able to talk to one another about problems that we are facing ourselves and are given advice on how to overcome the problem. The more volunteers that The Bluestack gets – the more children they can facilitate in each club and the more it can grow. You also make great friends with children and the volunteers. Although this might not be for everybody, I would advise you to try volunteering once and if you don't like it that's okay. The main thing is - you tried.

The thing that I like the most about The Bluestack is that the door is always open and there is always someone there to chat to and have the craic, so I urge you to volunteer once and I can guarantee you will get hooked, just like I did”.

“

I have been volunteering for three years and what I understand is all the volunteers are like one big family.



# 5 | What are our Challenges?

## 5.1 | Challenges identified

The challenges and barriers to volunteering vary from one county to the next, and from rural areas to urban areas. However, a comparison of national volunteering strategies across jurisdictions suggests many challenges are universal.

The CFI and Stakeholder consultations suggested the primary challenge to volunteering in Ireland isn't a lack of people willing and able to volunteer, rather it is the limited resources of volunteer involving organisations and their lack of capacity to engage and adapt to the changing needs of volunteers. This pressure on resources and the associated issues of funding and training deficits as well as the need for streamlined governance requirements emerged as recurring concerns across cross-sectoral volunteer organisations.

There is also a very clear message that we need to improve awareness of and increase participation in volunteering activities, particularly among those sections of our society who are currently underrepresented (e.g. younger people, marginalised groups). Research also indicates that one of the main reasons people do not volunteer is because they are not asked! This Strategy aims to ensure that anyone who wants to volunteer can do so and that we create the supporting environment for this to happen.

Common themes emerging for VIOs included funding levels, governance and regulatory requirements, administrative burden and capacity building. Smaller VIOs emphasised the impact of governance and regulatory requirements as one of the biggest challenges to volunteer led organisations.

From the volunteer viewpoint, barriers included a lack of flexibility in the way, time and manner in which people could volunteer while many volunteers also highlighted that their contribution is not fully recognised or valued and that practical issues such as transport costs were not addressed.

Many of these challenges were also magnified during the COVID-19 emergency, when our volunteers and volunteering infrastructure were called upon to assist in times of unprecedented crisis.

## 5.2 | Challenges to Volunteer Involving Organisations

- There is a lack of short-term, flexible volunteering opportunities to suit the diverse needs, interests and circumstances of potential volunteers.
- Some VIOs may not have a volunteering programme in place overseen by experienced volunteer manager, who play a key role in monitoring projects, adapting to change and future proofing initiatives.
- Many VIOs are volunteer-led and in order to effectively manage their volunteer programmes, additional supports are required.
- Lack of clarity around roles, responsibilities or volunteer management structures of VIOs when engaging volunteers.
- Cost of compliance associated with regulation e.g. GDPR, Garda Vetting, regulation and duplication of reporting, means less resources and capacity for organisations to put into their volunteer programmes.
- Difficulty recruiting new volunteer board members and limited resources for adequate training.
- Lack of awareness, understanding and capacity to implement good governance practice, in particular for smaller organisations.
- VIOs struggle to create volunteering roles for young people under the age of 18.

### 5.3 | Challenges to Volunteers

- Obstacles specific to rural locations e.g. transport, isolation and access to broadband.
- Lack of clarity around roles, responsibilities and rights for volunteers.
- Need for more understanding and research on the positive impact of volunteering on specific groups such as the disability sector, older people, gender, youth and education and migrants.
- Little or no opportunities to volunteer in Transition Year as volunteer roles, guidance or supports for students are not in place.
- Volunteers feeling that they are not supported in their roles for a number of reasons including training.
- Feeling their contribution is undervalued.
- Fear of over-commitment in terms of time.
- Lack of flexibility in terms of how and when they can volunteer.
- No access to public transport.

### 5.4 | Challenges to Communities

- Large levels of volunteering are undertaken by a small cohort or “civic core,” which means we overly rely on a small group of people. We need to engage more and new people in volunteering. This issue was highlighted during COVID-19, when many existing volunteers were unavailable due to public health measures.
- Lower levels of participation in volunteering among young people and more marginalised groups in society.
- Vital community services cannot be delivered without volunteers.



## 5.5 | Challenges to Volunteering Infrastructure

- Lack of recognition of the levels, value and impact of volunteering across the public sector and also across Government Departments.
- Lack of investment in technology developed to reach younger audiences is problematic, with 72% citing internet as their primary source to access information and 89% as their preferred means to access digital content.
- Lack of research and insight on volunteering, e.g. current levels of volunteering, demographic breakdown of volunteering and impact of volunteering.
- A lack of resources to deliver communications campaigns on volunteering at the scale required, to raise the profile of volunteering, celebrate volunteering and encourage cross-sectorial dialogue.
- Informal volunteering structures may not always recognize the necessity to ensure essential safeguards are in place before engaging in activities, particularly in the areas of Garda Vetting and good practice.
- Cost of insurance.
- Funding levels are insufficient to address the capacity issues within VIOs and across our volunteering support infrastructure.

Such challenges are not insurmountable. However, they will require a considered, proportionate and collaborative response from government and the wider volunteering community.



We need to have the structures and supports in place so that organisations are in a position to ask all our citizens - 'will you volunteer?'

While we can be somewhat reassured by our responsiveness and mobilisation of volunteers during COVID-19 which was in no small part as a result of our investment in volunteering over the years, the experience has also highlighted many of the challenges outlined above. It has demonstrated the need for continued investment in managing, supporting, and channelling the dynamism of Ireland's volunteering spirit.

Now, more than ever, we need to invest in volunteering and to work towards addressing the significant challenges around recruitment, training and supporting those that want to volunteer to ensure that our communities continue to derive the significant benefits from volunteering activities. Through the implementation of this strategy, we have an opportunity to build on this and invest in encouraging further diversity, innovation and creativity in how and where we volunteer.

## As a Volunteer I need to -

### Decide to Volunteer

- Be inspired to volunteer
- Know what volunteering roles are out there
- See a diversity of roles to find one that suits my interests
- See a diversity of roles to suit my life - location, time requirements, etc.
- Be asked to volunteer

### Stay Volunteering

- Be trained
- Be supported and managed
- Be thanked and valued
- Not be out of pocket
- Have my expectations met
- Understand the impact I'm making
- Feel included

### Stop Volunteering

- Be able to leave or end the relationship
- Not feel negative about volunteering
- Feel proud and happy with what I have achieved
- Want to volunteer again
- Feedback on experience
- Recommend volunteering to others

### Start Volunteering

- Find, apply for and get a role
- Be made to feel welcome
- Be listened to and matched to a volunteer role that's a good fit for my motivation
- Know what I can expect from the organisation I volunteer with
- Know what the organisation expects from me
- Be inducted

### Feel Supported

- Have a volunteer agreement
- Have a code of conduct
- Understand my rights
- Have someone to go to for advice
- Be able to make a complaint
- Have a volunteer policy to refer to

## 5.6 | Research

Capturing and promoting the quality of the volunteer experience is an important outcome for measuring success. Volunteer organisations, in their Strategy submissions, consistently referred to the "meaningfulness" and "impactfulness" of activities as an important motivation in securing the continued participation and retention of volunteers. Surveys, impact metrics and media engagement are a way to progress and measure such outcomes.

Ongoing research into the volunteering community is key to developing informed, evidence-based policy beyond the lifetime of this Strategy.

Such studies will be enhanced through the continued collaboration between government, volunteering infrastructure and academic organisations.

The CFI identified several themes for further investigation in this regard, including an examination on the Social Return on Investment from volunteering activities, the role of volunteering and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and maximising VIOs engagement with VCs.

# 6 | Where we are and where are we going?

Top Tips for recruiting and retaining volunteers
Ask them – people are waiting to be asked
Use wisely – link opportunities with available skills
Communicate – use all resources available to inform and recruit
Involve them – there are no age limits to volunteering
Praise and reward – give acknowledgement

## 6.1 | Strategic Objectives

Having considered our vision for the future of Irish volunteering, the challenges that vision poses and the guiding values by which we will proceed, the next step is to examine how we will realise that vision.

This Strategy seeks to develop and enhance the role of the volunteer and encourage volunteering as a means of developing vibrant communities. To achieve this, it is necessary to view volunteering as an evolving concept influenced by the challenges the sector faces and changing socio-economic conditions. It needs to be robust and supported in order to respond quickly and positively to emergencies such as COVID-19 when volunteering is such a key part of our community response.

Volunteering comes at a cost, and planning and investment is essential to further develop a dynamic and thriving volunteering culture. This Strategy will provide the framework and the building blocks to realise this vision, through the implementation of the following strategic objectives.

# Strategic Objective 1

The Strategy seeks to improve awareness of and increase participation in volunteering activities, particularly among those sections of our society that are currently under-represented. It also seeks to reflect diversity in volunteering and to integrate existing initiatives as well as adopting new and innovative ones.

## To increase participation and diversity in volunteering including embracing new trends and innovation

### Stakeholders:

- DRCD
- Volunteer Involving Organisations
- Volunteer Centres
- Volunteer Ireland
- Public Participation Networks
- Local Authorities
- Educational Bodies
- Sporting Bodies
- Other support organisations
- Government Departments

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
1	Greater diversity in who volunteers and how people volunteer	Introduce flexible volunteering options through the delivery of a time and needs match programme, including event volunteering, that will facilitate volunteering in local communities without long-term commitments.	Medium-term	VIOs
2	The diversity in our communities and of people of different backgrounds and circumstances reflected more proportionately within the volunteering community	Provide public information and more awareness programmes to enable people to volunteer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• from marginalised communities</li> <li>• from ethnic minorities</li> <li>• with disabilities</li> </ul>	Medium-term	VI/VCs VIOs DRCD D/Justice
3		Deliver engagement programme aimed specifically at potential volunteers reaching retirement and those over 55.	Medium-Term	VI/VCs

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
4		Deliver an educational programme in partnership with youth organisations and Educational Bodies. While many young people volunteer through youth work and sports groups there is need to change the perception and encourage participation of volunteering among younger people, including those in higher education.	Medium - Term	VI/VCS YSI Education Bodies
5		Consult on a Youth Engagement strategy	Long-Term	D/Education D/Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science D/Children
6		More cohesion in the various online volunteering services – volunteering promotional portals to be interlinked.	Medium-Term	VI The Wheel Boardmatch Studentvolunteer.ie
7		Work in partnership with Sport Ireland to introduce newer forms of volunteer engagement that are ideally situated to modern times in conjunction with the National Sports Strategy 2018-2027.	Medium-Term	DRCD Sport Ireland D/Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
8	An increase in the evidence base of the quantity and demographic breakdown of volunteers, contribution of volunteers and the value and benefits of volunteering individuals, groups and communities	National Survey on Volunteering to provide baseline data on volunteers.	Medium-Term	All Stakeholders

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
9	A stronger culture of volunteering, leading to a potential increase in our volunteering population	Run a "Tell a Friend about volunteering" campaign in conjunction with National Volunteering Week	Medium Term	VI / VIOs / VCs / Volunteers
10		Promote/Fund a volunteer recruitment awareness campaign using existing structures and networks – National and Local campaigns	Medium Term	DRCD VI Local Authorities
11		Support the introduction of a 'pilot-project' examining the potential for a 'time-bank concept' that allows individuals with specific skills and qualifications to volunteer hours that are then matched with the needs of VIOs e.g. accountants, tilers, etc.	Medium-Term	DRCD VI/VCs
12		Undertake a pilot project for professional mentoring as a support to volunteers and smaller volunteer involving organisations	Medium Term	DRCD VI/VCs Corporate Sector DETE: CSR Stakeholder Forum
13		Support VIOs to introduce task based volunteering as an alternative to role based volunteering where people can volunteer for a task as opposed to committing to a role	Medium-Term	VI/VCs VIOs
		  		

## Strategic Objective 2

This objective aims to have the best possible supports and infrastructure in place so that volunteering, volunteering infrastructure, volunteering involving organisations, volunteering supports and the volunteers are empowered in the work they do in our communities.

To facilitate, develop and support the Volunteering Environment so that it contributes to vibrant and sustainable communities

Stakeholders:

- DRCD
- Volunteer Involving Organisations
- Volunteer Centres
- Volunteer Ireland
- Public Participation Networks
- Local Authorities
- Educational Bodies
- Other support organisations
- Government Departments
- Corporate Sector

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
14	Delivery of the National Volunteering Strategy	In partnership with stakeholders, deliver, implement and ongoing review of the Strategy	Long-term	DRCD led All Stakeholders
15	More volunteers – who know how and when they can get involved	Support the ongoing development of the national volunteering database, I-VOL (website and app) where individuals can easily find volunteering opportunities.	Long-term	DRCD Volunteer Ireland Volunteer Centres

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
16		<p>Develop the potential for further volunteering partnerships between the corporate sector and community organisations through</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The delivery of an awareness programme aimed at companies highlighting the benefits of volunteering ;</li> <li>2. Establish a forum for sharing best practice on employee volunteering, engaging community organisations so that the needs of the company, employee volunteers and the community organisation are all met;</li> <li>3. Ensure that the importance of volunteering is represented in the next iteration of the National Plan on CSR in line with EU and international best practice on CSR policy</li> <li>4. Working with the corporate sector to develop volunteering among employees, which could include an extension of Volunteer Ireland's Business Assistance Programme.</li> </ol>	<p>Medium - term</p> <p>Short-term</p> <p>Medium-term</p> <p>Long-term</p>	<p>Chambers Ireland</p> <p>DRCD</p> <p>Volunteer Ireland</p> <p>Business in the Community Ireland</p> <p>DETE: CSR Stakeholder Forum</p> <p>Corporate Sector</p>
17		Explore the potential for a volunteering policy across the public sector	Short-term	<p>DPER</p> <p>DRCD</p>
18		Develop a research-based toolkit for VCs/VIOs on how to develop volunteer programmes for young people in collaboration with NYCI, Campus Engage, Foróige and other stakeholders		<p>DRCD</p> <p>VI/VC's</p> <p>VIOs</p> <p>Youth Representative Organisations</p>
19		Develop programmes aimed at increasing the numbers of volunteers from under-represented groups	Long-term	<p>DRCD</p> <p>VI's/VC's</p>
20		Invest in capacity building in VIOs through the delivery of a suite of training to Volunteer Managers	Short-term	<p>DRCD</p> <p>VI's/VC's</p>
21		Provide a shared "volunteer manager" service to volunteer involving organisations	Medium Term	<p>VI/VCS</p> <p>VIOs</p>

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
22	A more streamlined Garda vetting system	Undertake an examination of the current Garda vetting process	Long-term	Garda Vetting Office
23	A highlighting of the cost and availability of insurance for volunteering activities	Represent the views of the sector in relation to the impact of the cost and availability of public liability insurance on volunteering through engagement with Insurance Reform Sub-group of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Investment, which was established to implement the Government's insurance reform agenda.	Long Term	All Stakeholders
24	An increase in the quality of the volunteering experience for all stakeholders	Introduce a standard tiered code of conduct(s) for volunteer involving organisations, to offer protection and clarity on expectations of the volunteer and the VIO	Medium-term	VI/VCS
25		Introduce a standard code of conduct for volunteers, to offer protection and clarity on expectations while volunteering	Medium-term	VI/VCS
26		Provide a bursary fund to support volunteer involving organisations to build capacity in their organisations	Medium-term	DRCD VI
27		Undertake a review to examine the requirement to introduce protections for volunteers e.g. in cases of bullying, discrimination or protected disclosures	Long-term	VI
28	An increase in the capacity of the national volunteering infrastructure	Provide funding to Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland in order for them to provide support and capacity building to volunteer involving organisations and volunteers	Medium-term	DRCD
29		Upgrade the seven VISs to full VCs in order to provide a network of volunteering centres nationwide.	Short-term	DRCD Volunteer Ireland

**9** INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  


**11** SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES  


**16** PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS  


**17** PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS  


## Strategic Objective 3

The Strategy wants all who volunteer to know their contribution is appreciated and valued and that volunteering is celebrated for its vital contribution to Irish society, developing communities as vibrant, inclusive and sustainable places where people want to live.

To recognise, celebrate and communicate the value and impact of volunteers and volunteering in all its forms.

Stakeholders:

- DRCD
- Volunteer Involving Organisations
- Volunteer Centres
- Volunteer Ireland
- Public Participation Networks
- Local Authorities
- Educational Bodies
- Other support organisations
- Government Departments

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
30	An increased recognition of the value of volunteering	Explore the potential for the introduction of a formal qualification in recognition of the skills, knowledge and competencies acquired from volunteering	Long-term	D/Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Higher Education Authority
31		Further develop the IVOL database to include a 'volunteering passport' section that records the accredited skills and competencies of volunteers gained through volunteering roles	Medium-term	VI/VCs
32	Volunteering is recognised and valued for the contribution it makes to Irish Society	Support Local and National Awards ceremonies that recognise the contribution and impact our volunteers, VIOs, community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises are making to society	Short-term	All Stakeholders

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
33		Explore the potential of the CSO regularly including a question on volunteering in their quarterly national household survey annually	Long-term	DRCD VI CSO
34		Inclusion of a question on volunteering as part of the 2022 Census of Population and beyond.	Short-term	DRCD VI CSO
35		Based on the data from the 2022 Census, develop a programme specifically targeted at underrepresented cohorts of volunteers	Long-term	VI / VC lead with support from all stakeholders
36		Conduct benchmarking exercises and peer reviews with other jurisdictions	Long-term	VI
37	An increased awareness among individuals, families and groups of how their skills, interests, talents and education can contribute to their community.	Develop a national communications strategy to include information campaigns at national, regional and local levels communicating the value, benefits and impact of volunteering to include targeted media campaigns focusing on specific areas of volunteering e.g. benefits for the unemployed, health benefits, community benefits, young people, older people	Medium-term	DRCD / VI lead with support from all stakeholders
38		Deliver a co-ordinated national volunteering week campaign that engages all sectors of society	Short-term	VI lead with support from all stakeholders
39	Volunteering is recognised as a viable pathway to work	Promote volunteering to job seekers through the INTREO centres and social welfare offices	Short-term	DSP VI

**10** REDUCED INEQUALITIES  


**11** SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES  


**17** PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS  


## Strategic Objective 4

Ethical and skills-based international volunteering can play an important role in delivering results for beneficiaries and in fostering Global Citizenship. A global citizen is someone who is aware of and understands our rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world - and their place in it. They take an active role in their community, and work with others to make the world more equal, fair and sustainable in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### To promote ethical and skills-based international volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries and to enhance Global Citizenship in Ireland

#### Stakeholders:

- Department of Foreign Affairs
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Department of Social Protection
- Irish International Volunteer Sending Organisations
- Comhlámh
- Volunteer Ireland
- Local Authorities
- Educational Bodies
- Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)
- Dóchas

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
40	Ireland viewed as an example of international best practice in international volunteering.	Review the Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative (2013).	Short-term	DFA
41	Sustained and expanded support for increased public awareness of our rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world	Engage with the EU in relation to the European Solidarity Corps	Long-term	D /Children and DFA
42		Support ethical and responsible international volunteering, including through the promotion of the Comhlámh Code of Good of Practice for international volunteer-sending agencies.		

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
43		Ensure international volunteers are supported, including through the provision of credited pay-related social insurance contributions and exemptions, where appropriate	Long-term	DFA and DSP
44		Ensure that Ireland's support to the UN Volunteer Programme reflects the geographic and policy priorities of A Better World, Ireland's Policy for International Development	Long – term	DFA
45		Explore the potential to expand the National Volunteer Database to include international volunteering opportunities.	Short-term	Volunteer Ireland and Comhlámh
46		Revise travel advice to highlight issues and provide information for citizens to consider before engaging in international volunteering	Short-term	DFA
  				

## Strategic Objective 5

This Strategy affirms the contribution of volunteering at local and national level and commits to developing a cooperative approach between public bodies and volunteering representatives in the advancement of coherent policy. This Strategy also acknowledges the importance of ongoing research into the volunteering community in developing informed, evidence-based policy beyond the lifetime of this document.

### To improve policy coherence on volunteering across Government both nationally and locally

#### Stakeholders:

- DRCD
- Volunteer Involving Organisations
- Volunteer Centres
- Volunteer Ireland
- Local Authorities
- Educational Bodies
- Other support organisations
- Government Departments

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
47	Greater understanding among public representatives, policy makers and decision makers of the impact of volunteering	Examine the scope to carry out an impact assessment on volunteering prior to introducing local and national strategies, legislation, programmes and schemes that include VIOs or volunteers as part of the implementation.	Medium-Term	All Stakeholders
48		Commission an evidence based report on the economic and social value and impact of volunteering on our economy	Short Term	DRCD
49	An increase in the capacity of volunteer involving organisations	Through Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-2024: Support and develop a sustainable model to support the community and voluntary sector, through: A multi-annual funding approach An appropriate cost-recovery model for programmes delivered by the C&V sector Core funding for autonomous community and local development	Medium-Term	All Stakeholders

	In five years' time, we will see	Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies
50		Examine the scope to reduce the cost of compliance and administrative burden of regulation, insofar as possible, in order to free up resources for volunteering	Medium-Term	All Stakeholders
51		Provide on-going guidance and support to VIOs on a range of issues such as volunteer management/leadership	Medium-Term	VI/VCs
52		Provide training on good governance to volunteer board members, as well as matching service to recruit new board members	Medium Term	DRCD VI/VCs Boardmatch
53		Support volunteer involving organisations to create more diverse roles e.g. short-term, virtual, micro, one-off and episodic volunteering	Medium-Term	VI/VCs VIOs
54		Provide networking and peer-to-peer learning opportunities for volunteer managers	Medium Term	VI/VCs
55	Supports for all VIOs to implement and raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals	Develop toolkits to develop and proof plans against SDGs. Support capacity in VIOs in relation to deliver of the SDGs.	Medium Term	All Stakeholders
56	Supports for Reserve Volunteering Corps	Establish a national "Reserve Volunteering Corps" in order to support national, regional and local emergency responses.	Short Term	VI/VCs/VIOs

**4** QUALITY EDUCATION  


**11** SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES  


**16** PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS  


**17** PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS  


## 6.2 | The National Volunteer Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals



This Strategy through the delivery of the actions set out in the Strategic Objectives, supports the Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020 and its successor, as well as the Anti-Poverty, Social Inclusion and Community Development Action Plan identified in the Programme for Government.

SDGs have been mapped to each individual Strategic Objective to demonstrate this link.

The implementation of the National Volunteering Strategy will expand and reinforce the role of volunteers in our society, contributing to the Department of Rural and Community Development's mission to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities and at the same time, assisting Ireland's wider commitments to sustainable development.

## 6.3 | What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 interconnected objectives that are at the centre of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs represent a global call to action to end all forms of poverty, to tackle climate change and to fight inequality and injustice, recognising that a collaborative response is required from all countries, irrespective of their income levels or geographic location.

The SDGs acknowledge that putting an end to poverty must go hand in hand with strategies that stimulate economic growth, advance educational attainment, improve health care provision and reduce inequalities, while simultaneously safeguarding the environment and tackling climate change.



## 6.4 | Our Strategy and the SDGs:

Our Strategy and the SDGs share common themes of sustainability, co-operation and inclusivity. It is these same themes that provide the critical framework for this Strategy, most clearly identified in the Strategy's vision:



The Strategy's vision is of "a society where volunteering is promoted, valued, facilitated and supported so that people can contribute to developing and maintaining vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities."

The successful delivery of the Strategic Objectives will support the community, voluntary and charity sector and to strengthen its capacity to contribute to civil society.

To realise this vision, the five Strategic Objectives set out in this Strategy, each contain individual actions identified to improve and build upon existing volunteering infrastructure.



The successful delivery of the Strategic Objectives will help strengthen and foster volunteering in Ireland and to build a support structure that will develop volunteering locally from the bottom up.

This Strategy, just like the SDGs, belongs to everyone in our community. The Strategy recognises, as identified in the Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020, that just as Government will need to work in partnership with society to achieve the SDGs, collaboration is critical to the delivery of the Strategic Objectives.



Partnership and collaboration form the cornerstone of this Strategy.

The successful delivery of the Strategic Objectives will ensure we move towards a more joined-up approach that supports and recognises the important role of volunteers and VIOs in policy development and delivery.

# 7 | How will we get there?

Following on from the agreed Strategic Objectives, an Implementation Plan will be developed to progress each of the actions under these Strategic Objectives. Among the issues to be included are Key Performance Indicators, Timescales and Responsible Bodies in order to determine the way forward from which critical success factors and measurable progress indicators will emerge. Interim and annual reviews will also be a component of the Implementation Plan.

## 7.1 | Implementation and Monitoring

The implementation of this Strategy will require the same partnership approach to that used in the development of the Strategy. All the partners and stakeholders have a role to play in realising the shared vision we have for volunteering. The Strategy will be implemented in partnership with all the stakeholders over the next five years. While Government will play a lead role in the delivery of many of the actions, this will be done collaboratively with stakeholders across the sector.

An Implementation Group, chaired by the Department of Rural and Community Development, and including representatives from stakeholders, will be established to oversee, monitor and measure progress in implementing the Strategy. A key role for this Group will be to advise on the implementation of the Strategy and the measurement tools to be deployed for this purpose. It is envisaged that a combination of surveys, research and the establishment of baseline data will be used.

To deliver on the implementation of this Strategy, we will:

1. Develop an implementation plan that provides for ongoing appraisal of implementation progress and overall impact of delivery;
2. Establish a Volunteering Strategy Implementation Group, chaired by the Department of Rural and Community Development, with representation from other relevant Government Departments, Public Bodies and Stakeholders; and
3. Publish annual updates on the implementation of this policy.

The Strategy will be implemented in close co-ordination with the Strategy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities 2019-2022 and the first National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 to ensure coherent and aligned policy and supports to further the key Strategic Objective of the Department of Rural and Community Development to “support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland”.



## 7.2 | Evaluation

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will allow us to determine the impact and also to review and refocus the Strategy over the five year period, where necessary. Appropriate mechanisms will be needed to monitor and evaluate progress and these will be developed as part of the implementation plan. At a high level, we consider the following outcomes as important indicators in measuring the success and impact of the Strategy.

- Greater awareness – people know how their skills, time and talents can contribute to healthy and resilient communities.
- More volunteers – people know how and when they can get involved
- The value of volunteering to individuals – people are aware that through volunteering they can achieve personal development goals as well as improving their health and wellbeing e.g. practicing a language, learning new skills, working as part of a team, feeling part of a community
- Helping to shape communities – communities are shaped and influenced through volunteer involvement
- Organisational capacity – volunteer involving organisations grow their capacity through targeting skills and talents of volunteers for specific roles and are trained in volunteer management
- Multi-sectoral Leadership – a forum is established for engagement, planning and delivery of CSR projects
- A thriving volunteer support infrastructure that meets the needs of both VIOs and volunteers
- Public Policy – government policy is developed following consideration of the impact on volunteering



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# Appendix 1: Membership of the National Advisory Group

Chair	
Seán Canney	Minister of State for Community Development, Natural Resources and Digital Development [May 2019 - June 2020]
Joe O'Brien	Minister of State for Community Development and Charities [September 2020-]
Members	
Ciara Bates	Department of Rural and Community Development
Deirdre Kearney	Department of Rural and Community Development
Deborah Dignam	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Roisin Barr	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Peter Hogan	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media
Conor O'Malley	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media
Kieran Lea	Department of Social Protection
Orla McBreen	Department of Foreign Affairs
Carina Connellan	Department of Foreign Affairs
Sarah Cooney	Department of Health
Eibhlin Byrne	Department of Justice
Brian O'Malley	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Cian Galvin	Alone
Inspector James Calvin	An Garda Síochána
Shane Mulchrone	Business in the Community Ireland
Lucia Canavan	Cope Galway
Denis O'Brien	Foróige
Margot Kenny	Harold's Cross Hospice
Kate Morris	Irish Association of Universities

Members	
Frank Murtagh	Irish Local Development Network
Seamus Boland	Irish Rural Link
Paula Butler	Local Government Management Agency
Brigid Geoghegan	Public Participation Networks
Una May	Sport Ireland
Deirdre Garvey	The Wheel
Tricia Nolan	Volunteer Centre Managers
Nina Arwitz	Volunteer Ireland
Mary Fitzgerald	Volunteer of the Year

# Appendix 2: Impact of volunteering

A 2018 survey of volunteers that saw 1,735 responses, asked about the impact of volunteering on the individual. As a result of volunteering, respondents reported as follows:

	Significantly Increased	Increased	Stayed the Same	Decreased	Significantly Decreased
Confidence in my own abilities	22% (370)	49% (825)	27% (456)	1% (22)	1% (14)
Sense of self-esteem	21% (348)	48% (804)	29% (493)	1% (18)	1% (12)
Feeling of making a useful contribution to the community	33% (561)	49% (818)	15% (256)	1% (23)	1% (17)
My interpersonal skills e.g. communication, working with others etc.	24% (408)	45% (750)	29% (485)	1% (14)	1% (16)
My employability and skills	20% (334)	39% (657)	39% (654)	1% (16)	1% (12)
My ability to advance in my current employment	15% (256)	29% (488)	54% (893)	1% (21)	1% (11)
Sense of motivation	23% (377)	50% (818)	24% (397)	2% (33)	1% (16)
My physical health and wellbeing	16% (289)	35% (592)	47% (794)	1% (17)	0% (8)
My mental health and well-being	19% (316)	43% (722)	36% (605)	1% (24)	0% (6)
My range of friendships	17% (291)	44% (736)	37% (626)	1% (11)	0% (6)
My participation in social gatherings	14% (238)	39% (647)	45% (758)	1% (23)	0% (6)
My willingness to get involved in local activities	17% (292)	49% (815)	32% (531)	1% (22)	1% (11)
My interest in doing more volunteering	22% (364)	52% (864)	23% (382)	3% (44)	1% (15)
My sense of belonging to the community	19% (309)	48% (794)	31% (521)	2% (30)	1% (16)
A feeling of being included and not alone	19% (316)	51% (832)	27% (447)	2% (25)	1% (16)

# Appendix 3: Foróige Consultation

## What does volunteering mean to you?

- Helping some of the most vulnerable people in society.
- Developing as a person, learning and upskilling.
- Giving up your own time for a good cause.
- Being part of a community/sense of belonging.
- Allowing clubs and your local environment to thrive.
- Sharing a common interest with others.
- Changing the world for the better.
- New opportunities.
- Becoming a role model.
- Self-fulfilment.

## How do young people currently volunteer?

- Through youth organisations.
- Sponsored walks/runs.
- With local sports clubs by fundraising.
- Mentoring.
- Work experience.
- Community Development Groups.
- Visiting nursing homes.
- Transition year.
- Animal sanctuaries.
- Peaceful protest.
- Helping local community e.g. Meals on wheels, tidy towns.
- Charity events e.g. Movember/Shave or dye

## What do communities get from volunteering?

- Greater community spirit.
- Closer relationships.
- Improved quality of life.
- Less antisocial behaviour.
- Breaks down barriers.
- Tidy towns.

## What do 'The Beneficiaries' get from volunteering?

- Benefit by funds raised for charities and their activities.
- Nicer surroundings e.g. Tidy Towns
- Social Inclusion
- Organised sporting activities
- Elderly people feel less lonely and are more connected to young people.

## What do volunteers get from volunteering?

- Awareness of social problems.
- Life skills.
- Self-confidence.
- Opportunities
- Friendships.
- Activities.

## What are the challenges or barriers to volunteering for young people?

- Costs of volunteering.
- Public Transport, especially in rural areas.
- Lack of information about volunteering opportunities.
- Not enough use of social media.
- Assumption that volunteering is mainly for older people.
- Lack of understanding from parents.
- Not enough spare time.
- Not realising the benefits of volunteering.
- Lack of confidence.
- Age restrictions.
- Garda Vetting.
- Lack of resources.
- No Incentive.
- Young people feel like they're being taken advantage of.
- Not being able to volunteer with people your own age group.
- Stigma about volunteering
- Volunteers feel taken for granted

What supports do young people need to get involved in volunteering?

- More recognition for the work that they do.
- More publicity on social media, particularly Instagram.
- Reimbursement of travel costs.
- More opportunities to volunteer in rural areas.
- Better public transport.
- Carpool system for volunteering.
- Spread awareness of the Volunteer Ireland app.
- Young people need other young people to promote volunteering.
- More encouragement.
- Credits in schools for volunteering.
- Grants for volunteering.
- Grants for charities that focus on young people.
- More school volunteering programs.
- Tailor certain volunteering activities for young people.
- Youth ambassadors for volunteering.
- First aid training
- Better information for parents of volunteers.
- More transition year volunteering programmes.

What volunteering opportunities would you like to see available to young people over the next 5 years?

- More varied and flexible volunteering roles.
- Opportunities to volunteer through school.
- More training available for young people.
- Charities need to be more open to youth involvement.
- More opportunities to volunteer abroad.
- Opportunities to work with homeless people.
- More online resources.
- Advertisement campaigns on YouTube, Netflix and Instagram.
- Promote the benefits of volunteering.
- More Irish language volunteering.
- More reference panels or similar forums.
- A clear information pathway.

# Appendix 4: Abbreviations & Acronyms

CFI – Call for Input

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CII – Charities Institute Ireland

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CSO – Central Statistics Office

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CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

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CV – Curriculum Vitae

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CVS – Community and Voluntary Sector

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D/Children – Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

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D/Education – Department of Education

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D/Justice – Department of Justice

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DETE – Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

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DSP – Department of Social Protection

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DFA – Department of Foreign Affairs

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DPER – Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

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DRCD – Department of Rural and Community Development

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EU – European Union

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GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

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HEI – Higher Education Institution

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ISM – Irish Sports Monitor

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I-VOL – National Volunteering Database

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LDC – Local Development Company

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NYCI – National Youth Council of Ireland

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QNHS – Quarterly National Household Survey

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SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

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UN – United Nations

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VC – Volunteer Centre

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VI – Volunteer Ireland

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VIO – Volunteer Involving Organisation

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VIS – Volunteering Information Services

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# Appendix 5: Public Participation Network Contacts

Organisation	Resource Worker	Email
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