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# THE WHEEL'S SUBMISSION TO THE CSO ON THE 2027 CENSUS

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# The Wheel's Submission to the CSO on 2027 Census

The Wheel is pleased to make a submission to the Central Statistics Office's Census 2027 consultation, as Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises. We are the representative body for this vibrant and diverse sector and, together with our members, we shape and promote conditions in which people and their communities thrive.

We passionately believe that community and voluntary action improves and enriches communities and society. Our simple but ambitious mission is to make Ireland a fair and just place for all by strengthening the capacity and capability of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises to play their part. We do this by representing these organisations, supporting these organisations to do their work, and promoting the importance of the voluntarism and community values that power these organisations. The Wheel has more than 2,000 members and provides support services and representation on behalf of these members relating to matters that reflect their collective interests.

According to the most recent available CSO data (QNHS 2013), over 1 million people, or about a quarter of the adult population, in Ireland volunteer annually. While we were very pleased to see a question on volunteering on Census 2022, it is now imperative we are able to compare this data in five years to assess trends and future need.

It should be noted that *Inclusion of a question on volunteering as part of the 2022 Census of Population and beyond* is listed as a priority action in the Government's National Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025.

Volunteering is at the heart of every community across Ireland and affects every member of the population either directly or indirectly. It supports a number of a number of key Government priority areas, for example, homelessness, mental health and labour activation. In a recent survey carried out by The Wheel as part of the We Act campaign, 25% of respondents stated that they had given their time to or volunteered with a charity or community group in the last year. 19% had given time to or volunteered as a charity trustee. 55% were proud to say that they work or volunteer in the charity sector. This demonstrates the extent to which volunteering is woven into the fabric of our society and our economy.

However, volunteering is changing – not just in Ireland but globally as part of broader trends. Following COVID-19, many organisations lost their volunteers and they have not returned. At the same time, the age of volunteers is increasing with younger volunteers more difficult to recruit and retain. All of these challenges present a long-term problem for a country that relies so heavily on volunteering. For these reasons, current and comparable data is vital to ensuring that we can respond appropriately, that volunteering is accessible to all, and that volunteering continues to support the delivery of vital services across the country.

The Wheel has carried out significant work on the value of active citizenship, of which volunteering forms a valuable part. The Participating People report, published in collaboration with Carnegie UK Trust, demonstrates the individual and societal benefits of volunteering on wellbeing. We believe that collecting further data on volunteering in the next census would help support the development of active citizenship in Ireland. We believe that it would also add value to the Wellbeing Framework for Ireland.

# Background

## 2006 Census

For the first time ever in an Irish census, a question on voluntary activity appeared in the 2006 Census. Respondents were asked if, in the four weeks previous to census night (Sunday, 23rd April, 2006), they had engaged in any of the following activities without pay:

1. *Helping or voluntary work with a social or charitable organisation*
2. *Helping or voluntary work with a religious group or church*
3. *Helping or voluntary work with a sporting organisation*
4. *Helping or voluntary work with a political or cultural organisation*
5. *Any other voluntary activity.*

Respondents were also asked to note if they had not engaged in voluntary activity.

There have been no such questions in subsequent censuses.

## QNHS 2013

In terms of other available data, a module on volunteering and a pilot module on subjective well-being were included in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) in the three months from July to September 2013 (quarter 3). This included questions around whether people volunteer or not but also how volunteering affects their wellbeing.

## 2022 Census

In 2022, a question on volunteering was included in the census. Although the results have yet to be released, this data will be hugely beneficial to all organisations that engage volunteers. The question asked was:

*Do you regularly engage in helping or voluntary work in any of the following activities without pay?*

1. *A social or charitable organisation*
2. *A religious group or church*
3. *A sporting organisation*
4. *A political organisation*
5. *In your community*
6. *No*

## **The purpose of the user need and analysis required**

According to the most recent CSO data, over 1 million people in Ireland volunteer. As highlighted above, the last data available on volunteering is from the QNHS 2013 Q3 report and prior to that the 2006 census. The 2022 census came two years into the COVID-19 pandemic and just before the war began in Ukraine. Society, and volunteering with it, has changed so much in recent years and will continue to evolve in advance of 2027. Up to date data is vital to ensure that both the volunteering infrastructure and the Government can appropriately address the challenges and opportunities in volunteering in Ireland.

While Volunteer Ireland, the national volunteer development organisation, has undertaken small scale research in recent times, they do not have the resources to conduct research on such a large scale. We are hopeful that data from the 2022 census will allow us to understand the areas where more research is needed to support organisations like us to continue to engage volunteers. This type of information can also inform the work of government, particularly in areas such as homelessness and mental health – services currently heavily supported but the community and voluntary sector. However, volunteering is evolving all the time. Combine this with immigration/emigration, a potential recession and demographic changes, the need for this data will be just as important in five years' time.

There are more than 8,000 charities in Ireland, the majority of which involve volunteers and many, like us, would not survive without volunteers. Their work is vital to Irish society and having current data on volunteering in Ireland will support organisations like us to recruit volunteers effectively and continue to deliver their mission.

International comparisons, especially in England, Scotland and Wales, show that levels of volunteering are decreasing. Anecdotal evidence from the network of 29 Volunteer Centres across the country, indicate that we may be seeing a similar trend in Ireland. In the World Giving Index 2022 (published by the Charities Aid Foundation in the UK), Ireland fell to 21<sup>st</sup> place in terms of levels of volunteering, globally, having been inside the top ten in 2016. A question on volunteering in the 2027 census would show us if levels of volunteering in Ireland are increasing, decreasing or staying the same when compared with 2022. This will allow Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres to develop appropriate interventions and help ensure that volunteering continues to thrive.

We propose to keep the wording of the question the same in 2027 to ensure we can compare the data.

## **Need for the data at a small area level/small population groups**

Local areas and regions have different challenges when it comes to volunteering e.g.: rural isolation, older populations and lack of transport options. Breaking volunteering data down to small areas and population groups will allow us to address these in a targeted and more impactful way.

Small area and population data will allow Government to invest in the local infrastructure based on the real needs of the area.

## **Requirement for cross tabular analysis**

In Scotland, 6% of the volunteers undertake 66% of the volunteering. This represents a huge challenge particularly given a large amount of the 6% are older volunteers. However, this problem can be addressed as they have concrete data to guide their approach. In Ireland, while anecdotal research suggests our position is similar, no such hard data is available.

Cross tabular analysis across age, gender and location will allow for a targeted approach to volunteering strategies and ensure maximum impact.

# About the Charity, Community and Voluntary and Social Enterprise Sector

Independent, community-based, voluntary organisations have long played a key role in supporting and advocating with and for people and communities in Ireland. Indeed, it is often through the initiative and advocacy of self-organising communities that many community, health and social care services have been initiated.

Community and voluntary organisations are involved in every community in the country, providing health and social supports, services and advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities, older people, young people, children, people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and people at every stage of their lives.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the extent to which we rely on the community and voluntary sector, especially in difficult times. These organisations played a key part in sustaining communities during the crisis, demonstrating their core role as part of Ireland's public service infrastructure. They restructured services to deliver remotely, responded to the need for socially-distanced and safe provision, cut costs, redirected resources to priority areas and designed new service responses targeted at meeting emergent need.

The community and voluntary sector constitutes a significant social economy within the broader economy. It comprises almost 35,000 community, voluntary and charitable organisations; involves over 86,481 volunteer directors and trustees; directly employs 165,000 people; and manages income of €14.2bn per year. These organisations raise over half of this income (more than €8.3bn) themselves, majorly subsidising the cost of public services in Ireland. Indecon Economic Consultants (in a report published by the Charities Regulator in 2018) estimate that the total direct, indirect, and induced value of the work of Ireland's charities exceed €24bn per annum and supports 289,000 employees.

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