

# Gift of Giving

Saturday, November 25th, 2023 Edited by: Edel Morgan

A Special Report

## Charities feel the pressure as households tighten their belts

Donations are falling across the sector at the same time as demand increases

DEANNA O'CONNOR

Every year, Ireland's charity sector distributes billions of euro in aid to the most vulnerable in society. We have a reputation of being one of the most generous countries in the world, per capita.

However, as growing numbers of people are depending on charities to help them make ends meet due to the cost-of-living crisis, and as households across the country are starting to tighten belts, charities are in danger of coming under pressure from both sides with donations falling at the same time as demands increase.

"In Ireland, our 'hybrid model' of providing public services – where the State funds charities to offer certain essential services and supports – is, like those it is supposed to provide for, suffering from a chronic lack of care," says Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel, Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises.

An independent review group, appointed by the Government to examine the role of voluntary organisations in publicly funded health and personal social services, found that these organisations deliver approximately one-quarter of publicly funded acute hospital care and about two-thirds of disability services. Cooper says. These organisations collectively account for more than one-quarter of the total health budget each year.

"Despite their indispensable role, however, community and voluntary service providers are grappling with issues like rising operating costs and a staffing crisis that is blocking access to and affecting the quality of vital services. According to the Charities Regulator, 41 per cent of charities had to use some of their reserves in the last few years, and 3 per cent used all of their reserves," Cooper says.

The housing crisis and the cost-of-living crisis are closely intertwined with the challenge of homelessness. Focus Ireland frontline staff have witnessed a surge in demand for their assistance, driven by individuals and families who have been displaced due to the difficulty of se-



curing affordable housing or who face financial instability as a result of the cost-of-living crisis, says Amy Carr, director of fundraising and marketing at Focus Ireland.

"Last year, approximately 16,000 engaged with our services, an increase of 30 per cent compared to 2021 (12,300 people). After several years during which the total number of people needing our support remained around 12,000, the in-

crease to 16,000 people in 2022 is striking," Carr says.

The latest figures from Focus Ireland, as of September 2023, showed a total of 12,827 people homeless, of which 3,904 are children. "This is an increase of 136 compared to the previous month and an annual increase of 17 per cent compared to September 2022," says Carr.

Despite challenging times, she says, Irish people are "in-

credibly" charitable. "In our experience, regardless of what is happening in the economy, they want to support people when they need it the most," Carr says. "This is especially true at Christmas when people really appreciate the value of having a safe and secure home. Many people still give what they can, even if it is not as much as usual, and to Focus Ireland every donation makes a difference to people who need our support."

However, Carr does not have the same kind words for those in power. "The Government did not deliver on its promise of a 'children's budget' as almost 4,000 children who are homeless were overlooked," she says.

To strengthen the charity's base, so they can continue their critical work, they have looked to diversify their income streams, not becoming too reliant on any one source.

"One of the areas that we have grown over the last 10 years is our corporate partnership and philanthropy area, which now accounts for 40 per cent of our income," she says.

"We recently developed a five-year campaign called A Place Called Home which aims to encourage companies and philanthropists to support our vision to end homelessness by preventing 3,000 people from becoming homeless and moving 5,000 people on from homelessness. With nearly 75 per cent pledged already I think it demonstrates how deeply people care about ending homelessness."

Another major charity, Barnardos, is facing similar pressures to keep up with rising demand.

"Barnardos needs to raise almost €10 million each year to provide services to over 20,000 children and families, with demand for our services increasing each year," says Seán Bergin, the charities' national fundraising manager who has been with Barnardos for 12 years.

Similar to Focus Ireland, they know they cannot rely solely on the kind-hearted individual donors. "Having a diverse portfolio of giving streams across individual, corporate giving, trusts and foundations (philanthropy) and community is the only way to ensure multi-annual funding that can be planned and budgeted for," says Bergin.

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The housing crisis and the cost-of-living crisis are closely intertwined with the challenge of homelessness. Focus Ireland frontline staff have witnessed a surge in demand for their assistance



Focus Ireland director of fundraising and marketing Amy Carr and Barnardos national fundraising manager Seán Bergin

## What's trending in charities?

### More of us are giving

Ecclesiastical Insurance Ireland has released research into charitable giving and volunteering in Ireland which shows that three-quarters (77 per cent) of Irish adults donated to charity in 2022, up from 69 per cent in 2019.

More than two-fifths (42 per cent) said they had given some form of unpaid help or had worked as a volunteer for not-for-profit organisations or charities in the last year.

### But we're donating less

The report suggests the current socio-economic climate is influencing the amount of money we can give. In 2019, people donated approximately €111.67 yearly to charities, compared with an average of €93.35 in 2022.

That chimes with experience on the ground. "We noticed a reduction in responses in 2022 and 2023 particularly to 'cash appeals'," says Halina McNabb corporate fundraising executive at Barnardos.

"Barnardos needs to raise €9m this year just to keep the lights on and the same current level of services going. With the cost-of-living crisis affecting everyone, there has been a slight downward trend in giving from general regular donors.

### Young people lead the way

The research found Generation Z, those born from the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s, are most actively engaged with volunteering. Some 59 per cent of 18-24-year-olds had volunteered in the previous 12 months. That compared with just under half (48 per cent) of those in the 25-34 age bracket.

### Outlook is correlated with desire to donate

It identified a clear correlation between peoples' outlook and their desire to donate. Those



Focus Ireland HR director Barbara Dempsey. PHOTOGRAPH: MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN

who were more optimistic about the future were most likely to donate or volunteer (at 44 per cent). But 19 per cent of those who said they had felt isolated from other people recently, stated that in the past 12 months they had not given any unpaid help or worked as a volunteer.

### Attitudes to charity impact recruitment

A recent Focus Ireland study found 85 per cent of us are more likely to consider a role in an organisation that supports a cause or charity, and 81 per cent feel it is important that businesses encourage employees to engage in charitable activities. The findings were released for its annual Shine A Light campaign.

One in three people in the public sector actually work in the community and voluntary sector, providing services to people in need. Up to 70 per cent of their funding comes from the public purse in the form of grants.

"But the majority of those grants haven't increased in over a decade," says Ivan Cooper of The Wheel, the charities organisation. The result is that, while the research shows people want to work in an organisation that supports a charity, many who actually work for a charity feel they have no alternative but to leave to increase their pay.

SANDRA O'CONNELL

Every child deserves a happy Christmas.



Donate at [Barnardos.ie](http://Barnardos.ie) today to give vulnerable children a Christmas to remember.

**Barnardos**  
Because childhood lasts a lifetime

RCN: 20010027

"Through the food delivery we also provide that really good social connection ...that chat at the door."

Geraldine, Community Catering Manager, Meals4Health, Cope Galway

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# Make a difference with a charitable gift this Christmas

Buying Christmas gifts from a charity sends help to someone, somewhere, in need

SANDRA O'CONNELL

Back in the Celtic Tiger era we heard a lot about conspicuous consumption. Today, thankfully, there is a much greater emphasis on considered purchasing.

We're more likely to buy less but better. We're keener to know the provenance of our purchases. And we're more conscious of the importance of the circular economy.

Buying Christmas gifts from a charity ticks all those boxes and adds one more; it's a gift to your loved one that also sends help to someone, somewhere, in need.

"This is a very important time of the year for charities, a time when many of them will raise the bulk of their funds," says Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel, the national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises.

There are lots of ways you can help, including buying from a local charity shop. Not only do these perform a vital fundraising role for charities, but they reduce the risk of good quality but unwanted items ending up as waste. "Charity shops are also an important element of most communities," says Cooper.

A third option is to buy from an e-commerce that helps connect consumers with purposeful gifts. These include Thriftify.ie, which showcases goods from charities, and BuySocial.ie, which enables you to support social enterprises. Another great option is WeMakeGood.ie, which has a terrific range of homewares and gift items handmade by skilled makers facing social challenges.

Many charities provide the option of buying a gift directly from them, in the form of life-enhancing support. Trócaire was one of the first charities here to launch this option, Gifts of Change, back in 2000. Since then it has sold more than one million gifts.

These range from a Family Survival Kit, which costs €35 and provides families caught up in conflict with emergency dignity kits and food baskets; €20 provides an emergency jerry can of water with purification tablets, while €50 will buy someone a milk-producing goat.

"Instead of commercialism and excess, people are able to buy an ethical and sustainable gift that actually helps someone else," says David O'Hare, communication officer at Trócaire. "People are becoming a lot more cognisant of what they buy, where it comes from and what it is going to be used for."

Trócaire, which next year marks its 50th anniversary, has gifts categorised under such themes as climate, education and water. It has a wide spread of price points, which means there is something to fit all budgets.

#### Crisis situation

A fiver will buy someone in a crisis situation a bar of soap. "We all now know, post-Covid, how soap can help save lives by stopping the spread of infectious diseases," says O'Hare.

At the other end of the price scale is a solar-powered water pump, designed to facilitate a whole community, for €1,400.

All the gifts it offers are sourced locally in the country of use, so they benefit local businesses too.

In developing its gifts range the charity works on a partnership basis with organisations on the ground, whose people are embedded in the communities they serve. "People tell us what they need, not the other way around," he explains.

Right now Gaza is a huge concern for the international community. Trócaire's Gift of Family Essentials, which is already helping people in need in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Ukraine, will aid Palestinians in desperate circumstances too.

Here in Ireland, many will find Christmas a financial challenge. "Families who were



■ Hana (42) with her children Samer (13), Salma (10) and eight-year-old Roula: The family, who have been living in a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon, benefitted from Trócaire's €50 mental-health lifeline gift. Below: Barnardo's Christmas cards can be bought at Aldi stores or online at Hallmark.com.

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: TRÓCAIRE



already struggling before inflated prices face even more severe consequences in last few years as a compacted impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living rise," says Halina McNabb, corporate fundraising executive at Barnardos.

"As prices rise, few of us can escape the increased pressure on our budgets and finances, but some families are facing some very dire decisions indeed, such as what can they give their children to eat that will feed them and use the least amount of energy for example."

Many were already struggling to cover the cost of food, heat and light and must now choose between essentials. "Families are having to decide, should we eat and suffer the cold? Or pay for some electricity and miss a couple of meals?" she says.

The level of need in Ireland



**"This is a very important time of the year for charities, a time when many of them will raise the bulk of their funds"**  
Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel

cannot be underestimated, with 90,000 children living in consistent poverty in Ireland in 2022, according to the Central Statistics Office.

#### Supports

Barnardos provided 20,838 people with a wide range of supports last year, from practical to emotional. "We know the public in Ireland are so generous and they look to buy gifts with impact. Now, in the run-up to Christmas, every euro counts in helping us give every child a happy Christmas," says McNabb.

Here too there are many ways you can help, including a financial gift, which helps Barnardos to provide targeted, crisis intervention support, including food, clothes and gifts for vulnerable children.

You can buy one of its Gifts for Good online, practical

presents ranging from warm pyjamas to a healthy, nutritious meal. The range is priced from €18 to €65, with a special care bundle option comprising five gifts for good for €100.

Belleek Pottery is donating €1 from the sale of some of its ornaments to Barnardos, and you can help by tuning in to Christmas FM and supporting its appeal, she adds.

Choose your Christmas cards wisely too. You can buy Barnardo's Christmas cards at Aldi stores, or online at Hallmark. Businesses have the option of sending a company e-card with Barnardos, in lieu of corporate cards or gifts.

"This lets your customers know how you are combining your sustainability efforts with your social and community support, by helping children and families across Ireland," she says.

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Quantity: Amount:

€

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Quantity: Amount:

€

You can transform a life with this moo-racle! Producing over 5,000 litres of milk a year, the gift of a cow means a family in poverty can benefit from a calcium-rich diet.

I would also like to make a donation of € Total Inc. Additional Donation €

#### Your Details

Title: First Name: Surname:

Address:

Email: Phone:

#### How To Pay

I would like to pay by cheque (payable to Concern Worldwide)  OR I would like to pay by credit / debit card

Card No

Expiry date / CVV No\*

Signature: Date:

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■ Online fundraising became a lifeline for many charities during the pandemic. PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

## As consumers go digital, so do charities

There are multiple tech-driven options making it easier for people to give

DEANNA O'CONNOR

A decade ago, there was no such thing as a Revolut app. Now there is, with setting that allows users to round up and donate the spare change every time they use their card. It is a way of giving to charity that simply did not exist before, but now, people are giving multiple times a day, from that morning cappuccino to a pint after work, without even thinking about it. Little and often adds up.

That is just one of myriad convenient, technology-driven ways that have opened up for individuals to donate money charities. From crowdfunding campaigns, virtual events, or simply having a donation button on the organisation's website or social media pages, there are multiple digital options making it easier for people to give, with the convenience of just a few clicks.

Online fundraising became a lifeline for many charities during the pandemic, when valuable income from fundraising events and street collections dwindled to nothing. But in today's technology-driven world, the impetus to pivot on-

line also opened their eyes to all these new possibilities.

Moreover, online fundraising can complement traditional channels by helping to reach a broader audience and providing data insights on donor behaviour, preferences and trends which can help charities optimise their future fundraising strategies.

Seán Bergin, national fundraising manager for Barnardos, says using digital platforms to show the impact of the organisation's work to reach a wider audience is a very important tool. "Utilising effective means of storytelling has become vitally important, as is investing in people," Bergin says.

However, competing for technology talent can be challenging in the current employment market for charities with limited budgets.

"Ensuring the sector has the right skill sets across teams is more important than ever, especially in an employee market. This can be difficult – especially in the areas of IT and data analysis where much higher-paying roles are available in the large multinationals," Bergin explains.

The investment is important to them though, as digital platforms allow charities to engage people with impactful storytelling, as they found out during the pandemic when in-person events shutdown.

"With those changes, new opportunities arose for engagement and messaging across digital platforms, crucially allowing us to showcase the tangibility of our work which ordinarily, people may not have been aware of," Bergin says.

With the shift now firmly back to real-world events, he says online events have declined, but their eyes have been opened to the possibilities of leveraging digital platforms. "We have gained a wider reach digitally from that initial growth, as our message and storytelling caught the attention of more busy eyes," Bergin says.

At Focus Ireland the team also had to adapt to delivering fundraising initiatives in the digital realm with virtual events and social media campaigns during the pandemic.

"While the unpredictability of the pandemic made it challenging to plan our fundraising

strategies effectively, it did challenge us to embrace digital fundraising more quickly, and we invested our efforts in online giving platforms and digital marketing," recalls Amy Carr, director of fundraising and marketing at Focus Ireland.

"The importance of online giving platforms and digital marketing became critical during the pandemic and this trend is likely to continue as we blend old and new."

#### Increased appetite

However, with an increased appetite for in-person gatherings post-pandemic, there has been a renewed interest in in-person fundraising events, such as musicians and choirs performing in Irish Rail stations as part of the Big Busk for Focus Ireland, and the Shine A Light sleep out events where workplaces, clubs, schools, and whole communities come together to sleep out against homelessness.

"While the return of in-person events is a positive sign of better times ahead, we have transformed the way we engage our fundraising efforts to be more inclusive and far reaching," says Carr.

"With online platforms, supporters from across the country can participate in fundraisers and we are no longer confined to geographic restrictions. We also embraced the concept of empowering individuals to host their own fundraising events and we incorporate a 'host your own' element to each of our campaigns, where suitable. By embracing technology and social media, as well as empowering individuals, we aim to increase the opportunities to engage with Focus Ireland and support in our mission to end homelessness."

**"We have transformed the way we engage our fundraising efforts to be more inclusive and far reaching"**

# Charity begins in the office

Companies play a key role in fundraising by providing expertise and manpower

PETER MCGUIRE

Charities have also been strongly dependent on corporate entities to assist with their fundraising goals over the years – a goal that's become ever more important year-on-year. In addition, corporates can also provide charities with a wealth of expertise and manpower to support projects and initiatives. How does the charity sector enlist this help and how can corporates become more involved?

## Working together

The charity sector works in conjunction with the corporate sector on many different levels, says Gráinne Kennedy, head of partnerships and philanthropy, Focus Ireland. "Focus Ireland engages with companies and their employees to align on our mission to end homelessness in Ireland. To do this, we need both financial support and skill-sharing expertise from the corporate sector."

Mary Gamble, director of fundraising, marketing and communications at Barnardo's, says the charity has several strategic partnerships which provide not only much-needed financial support for their work but a significant amount of support in the form of skills and expertise.

## Charitable benefits

It goes without saying that charities benefit in multiple ways, whether from direct fundrais-

ing or initiatives. "Our retail partner Aldi Ireland works with us raising funds and also supports us by raising awareness of our brand," says Gamble. "We work with their marketing, communications and sustainability team to deliver our Big Active campaign each year as well as a number of in-store fundraising activities and staff events."

"Our long-term partnership with Dell Technologies has given us access to a global network of experts in fields such as communications, cybersecurity and IT [information technology]. Their teams in Ireland are instrumental to us delivering practical help to children we work with a special fo-

**Focus Ireland engages with companies and their employees to align on our mission**

cus on getting parents and children ready to go back to school each September."

Kennedy agrees that the value of the partnership often goes beyond monetary. "An excellent example of a corporate partner sharing their expertise with Focus Ireland is from our biggest partner, Bord Gáis Energy. Recently, Bord Gáis Energy continued its vital support of Focus Ireland by providing a home energy upgrade programme for vulnerable families."

"Bord Gáis Energy installed new state-of-the-art boilers and smart heating controls in 13 homes in one of Focus Ireland's Dublin-based supported



Focus Ireland sponsor a star: Bord Gáis Energy continued its vital support of Focus Ireland by providing a home energy upgrade programme for vulnerable families

family accommodation services. These home energy upgrades will save Focus Ireland €3,000 a year in costs."

## Benefits to the corporate

"A survey published in The Irish Times earlier this year found that one in five workers in Ireland believe their employer does not place a high priority on supporting charitable causes despite an overwhelming majority of employees indicating they would be more likely to consider a role with a company that does," says Gamble. She says 81 per cent of workers said they feel it is important for businesses to support charity with close to two-thirds (64 per cent) indicating that taking part in charitable activities in work improves job satisfaction.

Gamble says there are a variety of charity initiatives and partnerships in businesses across Ireland strongly supported by an underlying sense of generosity and empathy. "Barnardo's has been approached by many organisations with offers of support, volunteering and help over this period and we are grateful to every single one of them. Because our work is based in Ireland, employees get to see first-hand the impact of their support."

"Businesses from every sector have pulled together to create magical childhood memories for children – from creating fabulous Santa's Grottos in our centres to painting walls and planting beautiful flowers in our gardens."

Kennedy says every corporate partnership is different. "Some of the partnerships are very much led from the top down and others are driven by a charity committee or an individual within the organisation that is championing the cause. When a charity partnership is led from the top and fully integrated within the organisation, those partnerships tend to be the most successful in terms of fundraising and impact."

Corporations benefit greatly from charity partnerships as they boost staff morale, provide opportunities for skill sharing, create team building and working together environments and, most importantly,

they empower staff to make a real and lasting difference to the lives of people who need it most, says Kennedy.

## Charity campaign

Christmas charity campaigns and appeals come with extra challenges, says Catriona Campbell (pictured below), managing partner, The Public House, who have launched a new fundraising campaign for Barnardos. "There is more competition, clutter and crisis appeals than at any other time of the year. Additionally, charity campaigns don't exist in a void. They exist alongside the whopping levels of Christmas activity and investment by advertisers across all other sectors," says Campbell.



"When your client is Barnardos, and their core work helps the most vulnerable children living in disadvantaged communities across Ireland, there's a lot riding on it. The work must demand attention. At The Public House we have donated upwards of €200,000 of pro bono agency time to Barnardos over the past 3 years. This isn't a small investment – but it pales in comparison to the amount Barnardos need to raise each year – €10 million just to keep their services in operation."

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## How to get involved

Focus Ireland is running their Sponsor A Star campaign, where they are calling on the support of the business community, from multinationals to family-run businesses to indigenous companies, in the fight to end homelessness.

"Companies who sponsor a star will display their logo proudly on the panels around our tree display in the middle of Grafton Street in Dublin as well as on our virtual Christmas tree at [sponsorstar.focusireland.ie](http://sponsorstar.focusireland.ie)."

To find out how your business can become a partner with Barnardos Ireland and create happy childhood memories for vulnerable children go to [barnardos.ie](http://barnardos.ie) or contact [corporate@barnardos.ie](mailto:corporate@barnardos.ie)

## FOCUS Ireland Sponsor A Star

Celebrating our 20th Anniversary

Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.



The greatest gift you can give this Christmas

Visit [focusireland.ie](http://focusireland.ie)  
Call 01 881 5900

# Gift a LIFESAVING PRESENT

Countless children in Gaza, and around the world, are in urgent need of life-saving supplies of water, food and medicine.

Purchase a UNICEF Christmas Gift, on behalf of a loved one, and help give children a fighting chance.

### Suggested gifts...

#### CRISIS SURVIVAL KIT

Give two children a chance at life by providing emergency food, clean water and life-saving medical supplies.

€30



Please visit our shop to see more options for CHRISTMAS GIFTS

[unicef.ie/shop](http://unicef.ie/shop)

#### CONFLICT & NATURAL DISASTER SURVIVAL PACK

Provide a family with the life-saving supplies they need to keep their children safe, healthy and warm this winter.

€90



unicef  
for every child

# Transparency around the charity sector is vital

In order to become a charity in Ireland an organisation has to prove that it operates in the jurisdiction, has one or more charitable purposes and provides public benefit

PETER MCGUIRE

Irish people are among the most charitable in the world. Nine out of 10 adults donated to charity in 2022, according to figures from the Charities Regulator. Meanwhile, the crowdfunding platform GoFundMe has ranked Ireland as the most generous country in the world for the past four years.

Over the past decade, however, a number of controversies have hit the charity sector, with Bóthar, Console, the Central Remedial Clinic, Goal, Gorta and the Peter McVerry Trust among those to face difficult questions.

Alongside the issue of senior staff these controversies damaged public confidence in charities, while a more recent survey from the Charities Regulator found that members of the public also have concerns around transparency in Ireland's approximately 10,000 charities and 20,000 not-for-profit organisations.

The survey by Amárach Research also found that almost 40 per cent of adults were concerned that charity regulation is not having any effect, holding a view that there is no evidence of consequences for non-compliant charities. Are they right, or can they be confident that their donations are well spent?

Sandra Velthuis owns and manages Whitebarn Consulting, which provides a range of information and support services

to charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, NGOs, social enterprises, co-operatives and to the public and private sector bodies that work with them. She says that compliance has beefed up, and that charities have to adhere to a variety of rules and regulations.

## Public benefit

"In order to become a charity in Ireland an organisation has to prove that they operate in the jurisdiction, have one or more charitable purposes and provide public benefit," Velthuis says. "Only if the Charities Regulator is satisfied that they meet all the relevant criteria will they be entered on to the public Register of Charities. They must then adhere to all charity law and other rules set out by the regulator."

"If they are in the health sector they may have to comply with Hiqa and HSE standards. Depending on their legal structure and activities, they may be accountable to An Garda Síochána, the Data Protection Commission, the Health and Safety Authority, the Health Information and Quality Authority, Revenue, the Standards in Public Office Commission and many more."

"In some cases they have to report on a regular basis to such agencies, and much of this information is then made publicly available. For instance, anyone can browse the Register of Lobbying to see



■ In Ireland there is still not a full public understanding of the roles and activities that exist within the charity sector, and charities need to do more to explain what they do and why paid, qualified staff are needed. PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY

what those charities that engage in advocacy as part of their work have been up to, and all returns that charities which are companies limited by guarantee have to make to the Companies Registration Office can be purchased for a small fee.

"Sometimes charities undergo regulatory inspections and the reports from these are then published for all to see. Examples include the Mental Health Commission for approved mental health centres, some of which are charities, and the Department of Education and

Skills for schools, most of which have charitable status.

"Additionally, charities are accountable to their funders. These can be government departments, statutory agencies, corporates, trusts and foundations, both in Ireland and further afield," Velthuis says.

Amy Carr is director of fundraising and marketing at Focus Ireland, a charity working with homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. She says that annual statutory audits, periodic audits by State funders, publication of audited financial statements, and being signed up to and compliant with a range of best practice codes are among the ways in which Focus Ireland provides reassurance to funders, supporters and other stakeholders.

"The rules, particularly around financial matters, are

stringent and enforced," Carr says. "For example, charities are legally required to file annual reports with the Charities Regulator within 10 months of the financial year-end, those who don't are investigated. Focus Ireland also submits its annual report to competitions where they are scrutinised by a range of professionals who provide robust feedback on any lack of clarity. Focus Ireland is regularly shortlisted in these awards."

## Minimum requirements

Velthuis says that in her experience many charities actively go beyond the minimum requirements. "For example, internally they might find innovative ways to involve service users in their work or they might establish and communicate very clearly defined roles, responsibilities and decision-making

# “

**Charities need to do more to explain what they do and why paid, qualified staff are needed**

flows for all who are part of their organisation. Externally they might show how well run they are through voluntary compliance with quality frameworks."

Online commentary occasionally suggests that charities should be entirely staffed by volunteers, but this assumes that the well-educated and skilled people needed to run a

complex operation would be willing – or able – to work for free.

"There is still not a full public understanding of the range of roles and activities that exist within the charity sector, and charities need to do more to explain what they do and why paid, qualified staff are needed," says Carr. "Recently we have found that the conversation has shifted, and the public's focus is moving towards supporting based on the impact that the charitable organisation can demonstrate. Most people want to support charities which make the most impact and advance their mission. To tackle one of the most challenging issues in the country and end homelessness for thousands of people every year we need to have a skilled and dedicated workforce."

Velthuis, meanwhile, says

that while some regulation could be streamlined, and there is some duplication, charities are dealing with complex questions and protecting vulnerable people, so it is right that there must be some administrative burden.

"In any sector there are always going to be some bad apples. If a rogue politician is spotlighted do we give up on democracy? If one judge makes a dodgy ruling, do we distrust our entire legal system? If one retailer acts unethically do we stop buying things? No. In the private sector fraud happens regularly, but the entire sector is not held responsible. Indeed, it's likely that in the future a charity scandal will happen again but because of how the sector is now regulated people should be better held to account than they perhaps were before."

**Trócaire**  
TOGETHER FOR A JUST WORLD

**IT'S NOT JUST THE GIFT OF BLANKETS AND FOOD  
IT'S FEELING CARED FOR THIS CHRISTMAS**

Photo: Trócaire

This Christmas a Trócaire Gift can bring vital comfort to children and families caught in conflict.

**BUY A GIFT, CHANGE A LIFE**  
[www.trocaire.org/gifts](http://www.trocaire.org/gifts) or call **1800 408 408**

Charity No: 20204842

■ The Charities Regulator estimates that volunteering hours in Irish charities increased significantly between 2018 and 2022. PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

## Volunteering can be as valuable as donating

Volunteering hours in Irish charities increased by 38% between 2018 and 2022

**SANDRA O'CONNELL**

It's not all about the price tag. Volunteering can be just as valuable to charities as monetary donations.

And not only are there are lots of volunteering opportunities available but all the evidence suggests you'll get back way more than you could ever put in.

That may be why so many people do it. According to the Charities Regulator volunteers contributed an estimated €1 billion worth of their time to Irish charities in 2022.

It estimates that the total number of volunteering hours in Irish charities increased by 38 per cent between 2018 and 2022 and now stands at 94 million hours per year.

The economic value of this volunteering is significant. If Irish charities paid their volunteers for the time worked, the cost in 2022 would have been €0.96 billion based on the minimum wage, or almost €2.5 billion if volunteers were paid the average hourly wage.

It found that just under 648,000 people did some voluntary work for charities, equivalent to almost one in five

of the total adult population.

"Irish people are hugely generous with their time when it comes to supporting charities, and this report highlights a substantial increase in volunteering over the past few years," says Helen Martin, chief executive of the Charities Regulator.

According to Volunteer Ireland, Ireland is ranked number one in Europe and 10 in the world for volunteering time on the World Giving Index.

"The number of people volunteering has doubled since 2018, so it's really important part of the Ireland we live in today," says Ivan Cooper, chief executive of The Wheel, the national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises.

Our willingness to "give back" is, he says, both a selfless act and a way of finding more purpose in our lives.

To find out about volunteer options open to you, check out WeAct.ie, a campaign to celebrate the impact of Ireland's charities and community groups. It's full of positive stories acknowledging the remarkable, everyday efforts of thousands of people around

the country. With your appetite whetted, log on to Volunteer.ie, which has advice about selecting the right volunteer work for you, and points you in the direction of your local volunteer centre.

These help people to find suitable roles, provide support, deliver training and process Garda vetting.

There is something for every kind of volunteer, from helping at events to volunteering online.

**Reading programme**

Among the options is Barnardo's Wizards of Words. It's an evidence-based reading programme for children in first and second class in primary school who are 12 months behind their age group in their reading. It aims to improve the children's reading ability, as well as their enjoyment and love of reading.

Wizards of Words volunteers are over 55 years of age, from

the local community and deliver the paired reading programme in identified schools, during the school day.

The volunteers are trained by Barnardos and have full Garda clearance. They come from a variety of backgrounds, professions and homemakers, and are chosen for their love of reading as well as their interest in working with children.

The volunteers meet with the children on a one-to-one basis, three times a week, for 30 minutes during school hours. They read specific stories with them while giving them individual reading instruction and support. Wizards of Words is always happy to hear from people interested in becoming volunteer tutors in the Dublin area.

International aid agency Trócaire has around 140 active volunteers around the country and it too is always happy to talk to people keen to join them.

There is a range of ways in which they can help the organisation, from helping out at events to speaking in schools.

All who join the team are provided with training and support, according to Karen Casey, its head of community engagement and outreach.

This includes regular webinars and Zoom meetings to help you develop your knowledge of the challenges facing the communities Trócaire supports in the global south, including the impact of climate change.

Right now the charity is planning to ramp up its activities by attending events such as the Ploughing Championships, Bloom and the Electric Picnic.

As such, it needs volunteers more than ever, she adds.

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Helen Martin, chief executive of the Charities Regulator