



**the
wheel**

Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

THE WHEEL'S SUBMISSION ON THE FIRST NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING COMMUNITY SAFETY

November 2025

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About the Charity, Community and Voluntary and Social Enterprise Sector

The community, voluntary, charity, and social enterprise sector is embedded in every community in the country and should be a key part of the first *National Strategy for Improving Community Safety*. These organisations support young people in underserved areas, provide safe places for those fleeing domestic and gender-based violence, create spaces and opportunities for new communities in Ireland to flourish, protect those seeking safety in Ireland, run community creches, tackle loneliness among older people, and enable disabled people to live with dignity and independence in their own communities.

In addition to its societal contribution, the sector makes a [major contribution to the economy](#). It comprises approximately 35,000 organisations, involves almost 76,500 volunteer trustees, directly employs 281,250 people in charities alone (1 in every 8 employed people), and manages income of €25 billion per year. These organisations raise almost half of this income themselves, majorly subsidising the cost of public services. When direct, indirect, and induced impact is considered, the sector had €32.1 billion in expenditure in 2022, and supported 321,000 jobs.

Summary of recommendations

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the first National Community Safety Strategy and recommend that the Strategy

- Ensure sustainable, multiannual funding for community and voluntary organisations working on domestic and gender-based violence, migrant supports, homelessness, youth services and addiction services.
- Counter misinformation and populist narratives around ‘community safety’
- Improve access to and maintenance of public spaces including green space, leisure/sports facilities, libraries, skate parks etc.
- Address dereliction and empty properties within communities
- Properly fund and consult with community drug and alcohol taskforces
- Support and fund active citizenship and volunteering initiatives
- Improve community policing of marginalised groups and hate crime reporting by Gardaí
- Hold social media companies to account on harmful algorithms and content
- Ensure that the Strategy is cross-governmental, includes co-design with the community and voluntary sector, and proper meaningful review of impact.

Issue 1: Defining Community Safety

Changing the narrative

In recent months, populist definitions of ‘community safety’ have dominated public narratives, using misinformation to scapegoat immigrants and those seeking safety in Ireland. It is vital that Government take an active approach to challenging this narrative on ‘community safety’. To

these ends, we welcome the development of this important Strategy and the opportunity to contribute. Perceptions of the threats around us are increasingly influenced by online content and communities themselves are often formed online. Regulation of social media entities should be an essential part of building cohesive and safe communities for all. To help stop the spread of hate, which results in real harm, platforms must turn the toxic engagement-based recommender systems off by default and act rapidly on harmful content on their services.

We are seeing a global trend towards the shrinking of civic space and threats to advocacy organisations. It is vital that the new *Strategy for Improving Community Safety* acknowledges this and that Government pledges to protect civil society. This Strategy should reference to the recent-launched European Democracy Shield, which includes actions to increase collective capacity to counter information manipulation and disinformation.

Public space

Public space and the built environment plays an important role in community safety. Access to green space, sports facilities, public services and infrastructure remains deeply unequal across Ireland. This is an issue both in rural and urban areas. Local authorities should be compelled to maintain and improve public spaces should and to improve access to essential services and infrastructure for all.

Housing and poverty

It is impossible to discuss community safety without the context of the housing and homelessness crises. Safe and appropriate housing is essential for any person to feel safe. In September 2025, [6,614 people accessed emergency homeless accommodation](#), of which 5238 were children, figures that have risen consistently since 2024. Precarious housing situations and homelessness have a significant impact on community safety, both for those experiencing them and for the wider community.

Dereliction and empty buildings also contribute to antisocial activity within communities and perceptions of public safety. Currently there is little pressure on developers to address this. It is vital that the Department of Housing and Local Government is engaged in this Strategy.

The number of people accessing services for addiction has also increased in recent years, which in turn has an effect on community safety. While we welcome the increase in funding for addiction services in Budget 2026, it is vital that community-led drug and alcohol taskforces see continued support from Government. A health-led approach based in communities is essential.

Almost 830,000 people experienced deprivation in 2024 and consistent poverty rates increased to 5% compared to 3.6% in 2023. Many indicators have worsened, particularly for groups already at the margins. Structural shortcomings in income support, housing, energy policy, and disability inclusion remain unresolved. These factors all have an impact on community safety.

Issue 2: Community-Grounded Knowledge

Community-led

Community and voluntary organisations play a central role in improving both the perception and reality of safety. When people feel connected to the those around them, they feel safer.

Communities can be built on geographic proximity, interest, language, identity, life stage or shared challenges. As the Department's consultation notes, "successful community safety initiatives are often driven from the ground up, not imposed from the top down". The community and voluntary sector in Ireland is highly adaptive and has emerged as a manifestation of need at community level.

The [We Act](#) campaign, funded in part by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, showcases a number of valuable, best-practice community initiatives and organisations around the country. Many of these relate to community safety and include youth clubs with restorative practice models, housing for vulnerable adults, domestic violence refuges and 'for all' groups that support new communities.

Active citizenship

A survey by the European Commission found that Ireland was the [loneliest country in Europe](#). It also found that community activities, particularly volunteering, mitigates the impact of loneliness and provides much-needed social infrastructure for future generations. Strong social infrastructure leads to greater trust in the instruments of the State, which in turn leads to greater social cohesion and feelings of safety.

Sustainable funding for sustainable services

Despite increased expectations on community and voluntary organisations to address major societal issues, long-term investment seldom matches this reliance on the 'hidden infrastructure' of the sector. This should be underpinned by sustainable, multiannual funding models that provide for the full cost of the services being delivered, as well as pay equality. While strategies are important, it should be noted that partnership working and inclusion of community organisations at policy level needs to occur across government in the spirit of the cross-departmental approach repeatedly highlighted in the *Programme for Government*.

In order to build the 'thriving communities' cited in the *Programme*, and for people to feel safe in their communities, organisations on the ground need to be able to plan for long term impact and sustainable services through the life cycle.

Issue 3: Collaboration

Sidelined voices

Recent alarming events across Ireland, [such as arson attacks on IPAS centres](#), as well as a [continued rise in hate crimes](#), have demonstrated that many people are not safe within their communities. This includes in particular people seeking international protection in Ireland, people of African descent, but also LGBTQI+ individuals, disabled people, those escaping domestic and gender-based violence, and members of the Traveller and Roma communities. 'Community safety' must be for everyone.

There is significant need to improve community trust in An Garda Síochána, local authorities and the judiciary among these vulnerable groups. [Recent research](#) by the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR), for example, looks at experiences of policing among Brazilians and people of African descent in Ireland. The report shows a significant lack of trust amongst these groups and makes recommendations to address racial profiling by Gardaí, to improve training and reporting of hate crime by Gardaí and to improve data collection in this area.

Community organisations are often the ones to bridge communication gaps, and to inform people about their rights and the services available to them. They are also the main actors on the ground creating shared spaces to ensure a better inclusion of certain groups within the wider community. It is essential that these organisations are consulted and funded in developing any Strategy. 'Social cohesion' should not become an empty term but must be underpinned by long-term planning and support for the organisations already embedded in communities that are facilitating dialogue and addressing local tensions.

Issue 4: Measurement

Hate crime reporting

As detailed above, there is an urgent need to improve and extend hate crime reporting by Gardaí and by the wider public. A change in culture as well as increased training is needed. This is in accordance with the *National Action Plan on Racism* recommendation on policing.

Co-design and impact measurement

Community groups should be included in meaningful codesign both of policy and of impact measurement indicators. Safety and the perception of safety are complex concepts that should be measured through multiple indicators and integrated with wellbeing reporting by the CSO. Engagement in community activities, volunteering and dialogue, as well as a sense of pride and value in the physical environment of any community are essential to improved feelings of safety.

The Strategy should include tangible outcome indicators and regular review to ensure its objectives are achieved and real change occurs. Several recent strategies, such as the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion*, have fallen well short of targets, with little subsequent analysis or review.

Issue 5 – Policy and Governance

Cross-government working

The *Programme for Government* made strong commitments around improving cross-governmental working and we are encouraged by further reference to this by the Department of Justice in relation to this Strategy. There should be a renewed focus on a whole-of-government approach to supporting the community and voluntary sector in a wide range of policy areas that impact community safety, such as housing, health, social cohesion, youth and young people, and environmental action.

This Strategy has a clear interaction with others such as the new *National Strategy for Women and Girls*, the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion*, the *National Volunteering Strategy*, the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy*, the *National Action Plan Against Racism* and coherence between these will be essential. However, community safety reaches beyond the Department of Justice and policy coherence must extend to essential government strategies on housing, climate, children and equality.

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises. Our membership includes thousands of nonprofit organisations of all types and sizes, including most of Ireland's leading charities.

As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the charity and community sector and we advocate on behalf of our growing community of members.

As a supportive resource, we offer advice, training and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the charity and community sector.

www.wheel.ie



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