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Community and Voluntary Sector Workforce

Current and Emerging Skills Needs

This report was authored by **Sheryl Lynch** and **Mairead O'Connor**, on behalf of The Wheel and supported by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, through the National Training Fund.

The authors wish to thank the following:

- The **398 organisations** that contributed to the survey and focus group activities.
- **Intermediary organisations** and **networks** that supported dissemination of research activities across the country.
- **Colleagues** who helped us to host the focus groups and gave feedback on aspects of the draft report, including Rob Brown who supported the editing of the final report.
- **The Sector Skills Subcommittee of The Wheel's Board**, that reviewed and provided guidance on the research plan, activities and report findings, as they evolved.

Please scan the QR code to access the online version of this report.

A note on terminology

The authors recognise the complexity of Ireland's nonprofit sector and the large range of important, distinct subsectors operating in this environment. This report refers to the nonprofit sector interchangeably with "the sector" and the Community and Voluntary (CV) sector. Included in this designation are community organisations, voluntary groups, charities, and social enterprises that are independently governed by unpaid volunteers and operating for the public good.

About The Wheel

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups, and social enterprises. As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the sector and 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 sector.

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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

The Wheel is committed to ensuring that Ireland's 1,000,000+ nonprofit workers, both paid and unpaid, and the organisations they work in, have the skills they need to deliver their varied and important missions across Irish society.

This report provides an evidence base to communicate the sector's current and emerging skills needs and contribute to the conversation on community and voluntary sector workforce development.

FOREWORD

The Wheel is delighted to publish our first major study of workforce development in the community and voluntary sector in 5 years. This landmark report follows extensive consultation over recent months with organisations, decision makers and workers, paid and unpaid, across the sector.

With a paid workforce more than 281,000 strong, serving communities all across Ireland day in and day out, and a further volunteer force of more than 1 million people, the community and voluntary sector has particular and urgent skills, training and support needs. This report brings together a comprehensive and wide-ranging set of datapoints that illuminate both the common and various opportunities, pressures and challenges experienced by this significant national human resource.

The report is our contribution to a national conversation of increasing importance and urgency around skills and lifelong learning. Given the speed of changes being wrought at all levels in our communities, workplaces, and society, research such as this is more important than ever in ensuring that those on the frontline supporting communities have the skills and support they need to respond to and resource those around them.



This report should be a touchstone at all levels, from policy makers and funders, through sectoral bodies and education providers. But we also hope that the report provides valuable insight for organisational decision makers and individual staff and volunteers as they navigate this complex space. This is the first step in a phased research programme, with further reports due on areas such as AI and digital skills in the coming weeks and months.

We are keen to work in partnership with infrastructure bodies across the sector, with colleagues in state agencies and with policy makers, government and funders in order to ensure that this key workforce is enabled to make the most effective contribution to our social and economic wellbeing in the years to come.

We wish to acknowledge the support of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in co-funding this work through the National Training Fund.

We would like to thank the 398 organisations that participated in the research activities and shared their valuable insights so that this important evidence could be presented today.



Inez Bailey
Chair of the Board of The Wheel



Pat Watt
CEO of The Wheel



Mary Doyle
Chair of the Sector Skills Subcommittee of The Wheel's Board

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

The Wheel conducted this research, which was co-funded by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) through the National Training Fund (NTF). The purpose of this sector skills and training research was to establish the current and future workforce development needs of community and voluntary sector organisations in Ireland.

The community and voluntary sector in Ireland:

employs more than **281,000** people

involves more than **1 million** volunteers

and contributes daily to the **public benefit** in every single community.

Given the sector's importance, the scarcity of sector-specific data and skills intelligence is a critical issue. This report begins to close that gap. The report builds a picture of the current priorities, gaps, and challenges around workforce development. It also explores options for development. Against a backdrop of fast-moving AI advancements and workplace transformation, the report also begins to explore behaviours and attitudes to digital and AI tools. We will further explore these specific areas in a forthcoming sister report.

This report is the result of our consulting extensively with 398 organisations of different sizes and in different locations (listed in Annex 3 below), and directly engaging staff, volunteers, and decision makers. A mixed methods approach was used to conduct this research during the Spring and Summer of 2026.



The desk research consulted national and international databases relevant to the nonprofit workforce in Ireland, such as the CSO (Central Statistics Office), SLMRU (Skills and Labour Market Research Unit), EUROSTAT (the Statistical Office of the European Union), and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

We conducted **The Wheel's Sector Training and Skills Survey** in May 2026 and received:

400
responses







We added **four qualitative Focus Groups,** carried out in July 2026, to this quantitative data, reaching

86

people working and volunteering in Ireland's nonprofit sector.

Key national and international skills publications such as the:

- *OECD Ireland Skills Strategy Review* (2023)
- National Skills Council's *Skills Matter: Priorities to Shape Our Future Capabilities* (2025) and
- National Skills Council *From Evidence to Action: An Integrated Skills Infrastructure for an Inclusive Ireland* (2026)

inform this report.

This work also builds on two key sectoral research reports namely, Sheila Cahill's Consultation Report on the Support Needs of the Nonprofit Sector (2021) and the Investment Appraisal of Upskilling Employees in the Nonprofit Sector, carried out by Indecon (2020).

Key Findings

The key findings of this research are:

01

A culture of Workforce Learning and Development is growing but blocks to participation persist.

Our research suggests that the sector is maturing in its approach to workforce development. Most organisations across the sector are investing in training annually. A decreasing proportion of organisations are unsupportive of training requests by individual employees, when compared to research from 2020. However, the evidence also points to significant unmet demand for training across the sector:



Over **two thirds** of survey respondents did not participate in training despite wanting to.

- 68% of respondents indicated that they needed "significant upskilling" in one or more of the skills listed in our survey.
- Smaller organisations (those with fewer than 50 staff) are currently significantly less likely to invest and plan for workforce development.

Targeted investment could unlock this proven demand.

02

More sector training would positively impact culture, service delivery, and productivity, but accelerated roll-out is required.

Decision makers across the sector indicate that 89% of organisations would be negatively impacted if current levels of training are maintained over the next 4 years. This rises to 94% of larger organisations. According to respondents, the benefits of investing in the necessary workforce development measures include:

- improved staff morale
- enhanced services; and
- improved productivity

Larger organisations, in particular, saw the benefits for staffing and productivity. There is some evidence that sector organisations currently lack the resources to take full advantage of the innovation and responsiveness that upskilling can bring. Restricted income is limiting and working with vulnerable groups is complex. It is not surprising, then, that our research found a widespread emphasis on mandatory training, especially in larger organisations.

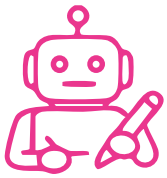
03

There is a significant Digital Skills Gap in the sector that requires upskilling at all levels.

55% of respondents need some or significant upskilling in **digital tools**, and this rises to

75%

for **AI.**



For decision makers the top two upskilling priorities are using AI and using digital tools (except AI). Alongside this, 1 in 5 decision makers also identified a skills gap in foundational skills like literacy and numeracy. Focus group participants emphasised the issue of "leap frogging over the basics" when it comes to digital skills.

Our research shows that many sector workers are using AI (65%), yet nearly one quarter of these AI users are not confident in their skills. This is particularly pronounced for those over the age of 60. Some 37% of these workers said that they are "not so" or "not at all" confident in their use of these new tools.

Further detail on the digital and AI skills of the sector will be found in our sister report, AI Use and Attitudes: Community and Voluntary Sector Skills Digest.

However, **more research** is needed to gauge the overall digital maturity and readiness of the sector.

04

There is a clear need and high demand for sector-specific upskilling.

The **top emerging skills** ranked by respondents are:

Leadership and Management	**37%**
Governance	**35%**
Fundraising	**32%**
Finance, including Compliance and Reporting	**28%**
Impact Measurement	**26%**
Advocacy	**25%**

Smaller organisations rank Fundraising over Leadership. Larger organisations rank AI skills in their top three.

In terms of current upskilling needs, when we set aside digital (85%) and AI (87%), which are the most cited among decision makers, we find the following are the key upskilling requirements:

Impact Measurement	**77%**
Leadership and Management	**71%**
Marketing and Communications	**71%**
Project Management	**69%**

Both the top emerging skills requirements and the current upskilling needs are dominated by sector-specific skillsets that require tailored culturally appropriate solutions.

05

A consolidated, strategic approach to sector skills data and research is needed.

Our research has identified clear gaps in the available data relating to the CV (Community and Voluntary) sector. This is particularly clear when it comes to up-to–date and standardised national CV workforce and skills data. We need to better signpost and coordinate skills information and resources for organisations in the sector. The findings also point to a case for a shared language and approach to skills needs assessments. This is needed at both organisation and sector level, to support current intelligence gathering and benchmarking.

Key Recommendations

The report concludes with a set of **19 Recommendations** which are presented under four headings:



Each recommendation relates to one or more of the Key Findings:

Invest

	Recommendation	Finding
1	Increase provision, across the whole education and training system, of targeted, co-designed and low-cost upskilling measures. Ensure they are culturally appropriate for the community and voluntary sector, meeting proven unmet demand.	4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4
2	Extend provision of a cost-recovery incentivisation scheme to nonprofit employers, like the Upskill SME Training Grant (Skillnet 2026b)	4.1
3	Provide funding for a tiered digital upskilling programme for the sector from foundational to advanced levels. This will support a sustainable, inclusive, and empowered sector into the future.	4.3
4	Provide strategic and ongoing investment for the development of a codesigned national database on the sector. This database must meet the needs of organisations, researchers, policymakers, and funders.	4.5

Act

	Recommendation	Finding
5	Sector specialist training providers continue to build and develop accessible, sector-specific programmes that respond to the demand identified in this study, including: • Leadership and Management; • Governance; • Fundraising; • Finance; • Impact Measurement; and, • Advocacy.	4.1; 4.4
6	Establish a sector-led Learning and Development Network to provide real-time intelligence, peer knowledge sharing, and support an emergent shared sectoral understanding of workforce development needs. These include shaping competency frameworks, sector-skills needs assessment capacity, and career pathway models.	4.1; 4.4; 4.5
7	In partnership with sector skills leaders, explore the opportunity of a "Skills Portal", like the National Enterprise Hub, that would provide up-to-date information and signposting regarding workforce development.	4.1; 4.5
8	Sector partnership to provide guidance on digital skills needs assessment within the CV sector. Work to be undertaken with sector expertise to utilise DigComp 3.0 (Cosgrave and Cachia, 2025) as a basis for shared sector understanding.	4.3
9	Continue to build capacity to involve CV sector expertise in shaping the national skills agenda. Achieve this through contributions at National Skills Council and the National Skills Observatory.	4.4; 4.5

Research

Recommendation		Finding
10	Scope the requirements and means to address the needs and constraints, of smaller organisations. Particularly where investment in, planning for, and commitment to training lags well behind larger organisations.	4.1
11	Conduct research on how best to unlock the innovation and strategic benefits of upskilling for the sector. Explore, for example, knowledge sharing and peer networks, and how to support sector organisations to make the most of these opportunities.	4.2; 4.3; 4.4
12	Conduct further research to fully assess the digital maturity of the sector. Explore the levers required to undertake a digital transformation at sector and sub-sectoral levels.	4.3
13	Assess and cater for basic digital skill competencies within the sector workforce, in tandem with AI learning.	4.3
14	Assess the risks and seize the potential opportunities of ethical AI use. Establish a consultative group to report on acceptable use for AI in the sector.	4.3

Advocate

Recommendation		Finding
15	Advocate that State funders provide an additional allocation for training and workforce development of between 0.5 - 1% of payroll allocation.	4.1;
16	Recommend and support organisations to ringfence funding for training within organisational budgets and strategies.	4.1
17	Advocate for the extension of funding, already available to private firms, to subsidise training related actions. Key models to examine should include, for example,Upskilling SMEs cost recovery programme and Digital Transformation voucher schemes.	4.1 ; 4.3
18	Advocate for a nationwide workplace literacy programme. This programme will provide flexible, accessible literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy programmes, free at the point of access.	4.1; 4.3
19	Advocate for a proactive campaign to encourage the engagement of CV sector employers with Regional Skills Forum structures.	4.1; 4.5



01

Introduction

1. Introduction

Rationale



There is a **lack of research** on current skills and training needs specific to Ireland's CV sector.[1]

To assess the progress and development of sector skills enabled by national and European policy, funding, and strategic programmes, we must collect and analyse empirical data. It is our ambition that the data and insights from this report address that gap. They will do so by contributing to a repository of CV skills and labour market information informing:

- the demand-led approach of national skills policy;
- the upskilling activities of The Wheel and other development organisations in the sector;
- workforce development practice among sector employers; and,
- the work of the National Skills Observatory and the National Skills Council.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this report are to:

1



Map the **current state** of sector skills and training

2



Uncover blocks to engaging in training

3



Articulate sector-specific needs for **upskilling**

4



Illustrate current competency and attitudes around **digital and AI skills**

1 This is due to a number of reasons including the data gap as a result Benefact's departure from the sector, the difficulty in parsing CSO labour market data without a meaningful "economic sector" filter and the absence of an interoperable database that includes all segments of the CV sector.



02

Context Analysis

2. Context Analysis

An Overview of the CV Sector in Ireland

The CV sector comprises over:

281,000
employees, in charities alone

and more than
1 million
volunteers; this includes

76,000+
unpaid charity trustees

The CV sector includes at least

34,331
nonprofit organsiations (CII: 2021)

A substantial number of these nonprofit organisations are "registered charities" as defined under the Charities Act 2009.

All such bodies are statutorily required to register with the Charities Regulator, which reported 11,466 charities registered on the Charities Register in 2025. Analysis by the Charities Regulator has established that charities in Ireland generate €25bn of income per year (Charities Regulator, 2023:10). The work of the broad CV sector in Ireland is far reaching.

Organisations operate in areas such as:



They are at the forefront of the work to deliver on government priorities in:

health education housing, and other key policy areas.

The sector is a **major contributor to essential public services.**

For example, nearly:

70%
of all **disability services**

are provided by **voluntary organisations** funded under Section 38 or Section 39 of the Health Act 2004.

It is estimated that:

1 in 3
people

delivering public services across Ireland **works for the CV sector**.

Our research gives us an insight into a highly engaged sector that is driven to develop its skills to help those who need it most in society. As the DFHERIS (The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science) Statement of Strategy 2025 – 2028 states, "skills are key to our resilience and competitiveness" (2025:14).



The Department's Strategy also notes that being able to anticipate

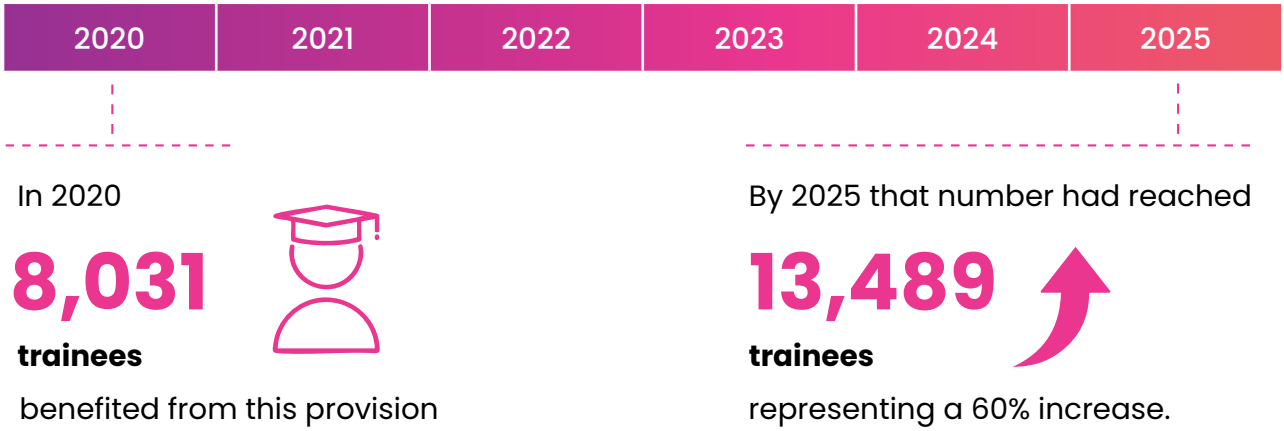
> "future workforce challenges, closing skills gaps, and supporting critical public services and national priorities such as housing, healthcare, climate action, and economic development"
> (DFHERIS 2025:14)

is an important step in securing that resilience. This research is a contribution to that effort.

CV Skills: Development and Progress So Far

The *National Training Fund Act 2000* provided for the imposition of a levy on employers towards a National Training Fund (NTF) for upskilling and reskilling. Since 2005, the CV sector has received a modest, targeted investment from the NTF. CV employers and employees can also benefit from some generic NTF spending (e.g. Skills to Advance, Springboard+ etc). However, the levy takes more from the sector annually than it contributes to targeted measures.

The level of targeted state investment into the sector from the National Training Fund has increased over the past six years. Core NTF funding has increased by 27% since 2020 and the Skills Package in 2025 and 2026 made an additional €800,000 available. This strategic investment in workforce development has supported a range of measures which have expanded reach and access to upskilling. It has also raised the profile of the CV workforce within the national skills agenda.



In that same period, the OECD recognised the CV sector as a key stakeholder in the national skills policy for the first time. It was at this time that the sector was invited to join the National Skills Council. In 2025, The Wheel and TU Dublin, as Apprenticeship Lead and Educational Partner, established a CV employer-led consortium to develop the first nonprofit apprenticeship. This showed a growing commitment across the sector to innovative workforce development practice.

Since 2016 the model of apprenticeship in Ireland has been widened beyond the traditional "craft apprenticeships". The modern apprenticeship bridges the gap between the needs of employers and traditional education pathways and allows learners to "earn and learn". The nonprofit apprenticeship should offer a new, accessible entryway for learners into sustainable sector careers. It will also address a gap in higher education provision with a sector-specific administrative course at Level 6 on the NFQ.

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Over the past seven years The Wheel has led a strategic investment which **facilitated the following developments**:



Reaching an average of almost

9,500

trainees

each year between 2020 and 2025

1.64M

investment

into sector upskilling since 2020 via Training Links, reaching **957** organisations and **12,000** trainees across Ireland

Establishing **The Leadership Academy in 2022**, which has spearheaded sector-specific, innovative Learning and Development programmes such as:

- the CEO Masterclass series
- Future Board Leaders in partnership with Boardmatch, and
- a range of partnerships with executive education providers.





Contributing to the **national skills policy agenda** through the OECD Skills Strategy Ireland review in 2023, resulting in the CV sector being recognised by the OECD as a key stakeholder and, subsequently, the CV taking a seat at the National Skills Council for the first time.

Establishing **new partnerships** with Training and Education providers such as:

- Carmichael;
- Grow Remote/Laois Offaly Education and Training Board;
- the Open University; and,
- a range of executive education providers.

Convening a **formal consortium of 20+ CV employers**, appointing Technological University Dublin as Educational Partner, and making a formal application to the National Apprenticeship Office for a Nonprofit Administration Apprenticeship in 2026.

Hosting significant skills policy conversations at the annual Shaping Skills, Shaping Society conference in 2025 and 2026.

Launching the **Skills Matter Newsletter** in 2022, which disseminates workforce development news and opportunities to more than 13,000 subscribers.

Carrying out the **largest sector-wide research project on skills and training** in CV sector ever undertaken in 2026.



Developing an **impact framework** for upskilling and capacity building activities carried out by The Wheel, shaped by the recommendations of the ESRI's Roadmap for an evaluation of the National Training Fund (2025).

The Wheel's new empirical research provides evidence that attitudes and practice regarding upskilling are changing across the sector. Indications are that support for upskilling is increasing. This progress can be understood in part by comparing Indecon's (2020) needs assessment findings with ours. See section 4.1 for more details on this finding.

The next section outlines the sector-specific context and gives a picture of a sector that has made progress in terms of workforce development but has new and distinct challenges that need to be addressed if it is to keep pace with the public and private sectors.

Distinct needs of the Sector

According to OECD's *Skills Strategy Ireland* (2023) report, the Irish CV sector is internationally acknowledged as a critical contributor to Ireland's social and economic fabric. It also finds that the sector is prevented from accessing certain beneficial upskilling programmes, that have been designed with and for the private sector. For example, charities and nonprofit organisations are generally ineligible for Skillnet Ireland initiatives.

> These organisations [in the CV sector] are acknowledged as making a vital contribution to Ireland's economic and social prosperity. However, many programmes listed [elsewhere in the report] are not available to charities or not-for-profit organisations [...]Addressing these unmet needs should be considered a priority in Ireland (OECD 2023: 184).

Our findings highlight the need to unlock additional, diverse funding and enable existing grant funding draw-down for the purpose of training and upskilling. In this research, organisations have identified issues around grants provided to deliver services. The grants, often provided by state agencies and government departments, do not include provision for workforce development.

In 2024, The Wheel, supported by Community Foundation Ireland, published the latest edition of the *Pay and Benefits in the Community & Voluntary Sector* report. This report uncovered the following top challenges experienced by the CV sector (2024:8):

1. **Staff turnover rate** in the community and voluntary sector increased by:

2% between 2022 and 2024

2. In 2024, almost a quarter **(24%)** of organisations had a turnover rate of

20% or more

3. Accessing funding

92%

4. Managing costs

89%

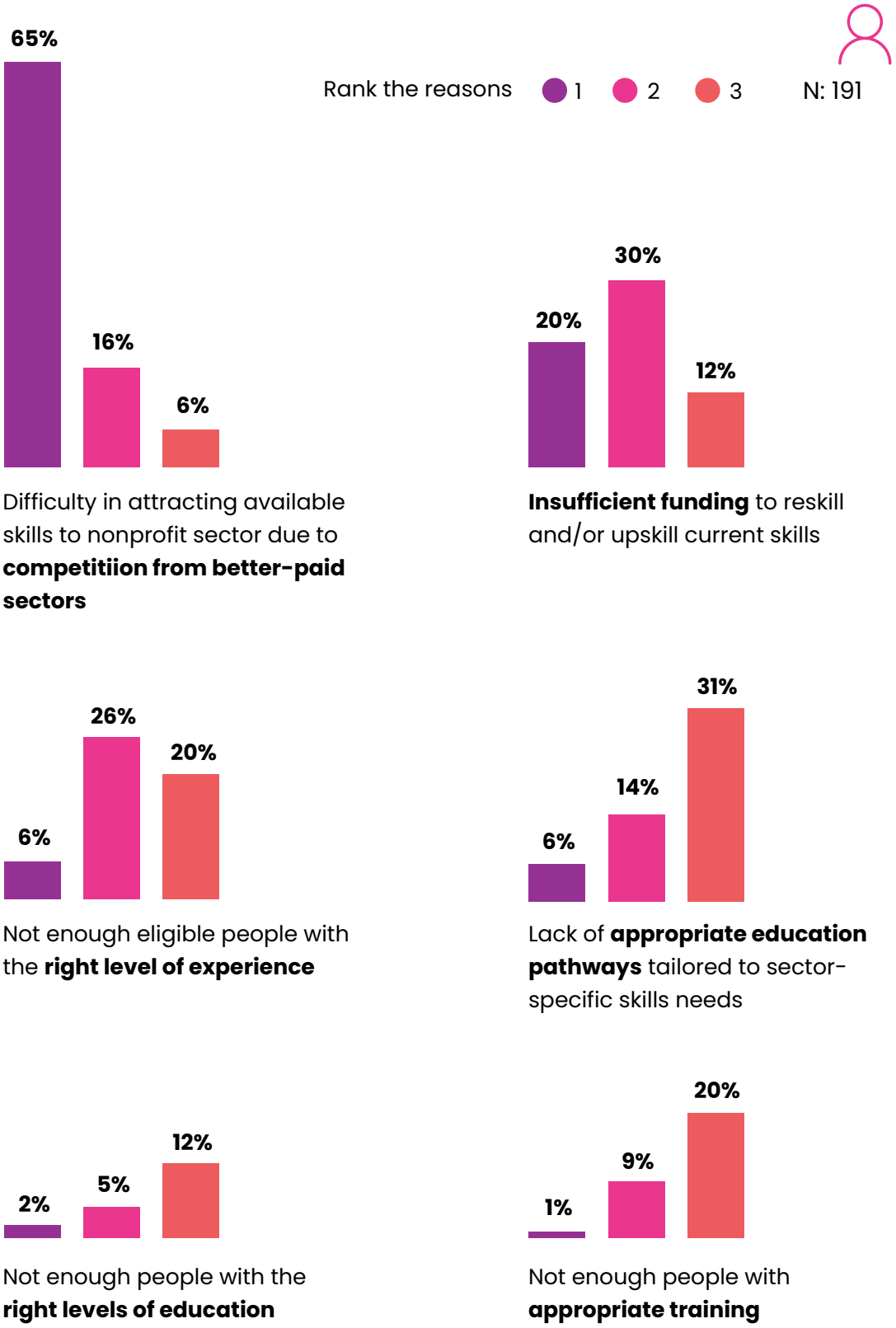
5. Retaining skilled talent

88%

Our latest skills survey data shows that we have distinct challenges when it comes to skills shortages. This is elaborated upon in Finding 4.4 below. The top reason for skills shortages is competing with better-paid sectors for talent.

Figure 2.1 Reasons for skills shortage

According to reports, there are skills shortages in the nonprofit sector. Why do you think this is the case?



Our private sector peers also report a tight labour market. They describe a market where competition for talent remains the single biggest barrier to recruitment of new staff. They also describe applicants who often do not have the right experience or enough experience.

According to **Ibec's** latest data:

talent is listed as the number one cause of skills shortage in the private sector.



This remains true even when accounting for size and subsector (Ibec 2025: 8-9).

These difficult labour market conditions are felt particularly acutely in the nonprofit sector due to resource constraints. As a result, the importance of training and development for existing staff and new hires is increasingly important. Nevertheless 45% of the decision makers in our survey report that their organisation has no dedicated training budget.



Our research revealed the main perceived causes of low workforce training in the sector.

The top reasons given were **lack of financial resources** and **lack of capacity to release staff for training**.

While the sector has made progress in workforce development and closing critical skills gaps, there are still blocks to training and upskilling workers and volunteers. Some of these blocks mirror national challenges, for example, digital skills divide. Others uncover sector-specific challenges, like attracting talent while competing with private and public sector. There are also sector-specific skills gaps, such as fundraising and advocacy.

The next section gives a profile overview of our survey respondents.

A Profile of our Survey Respondents

This section provides insights into the people who responded to our survey in addition to some organisational profile findings. Our survey used decision logic to ensure that the wider base responded to the same initial batch of questions and those that selected "yes" when asked if they were a "decision maker" were taken through an additional batch of questions.

Out of the **400 respondents**:



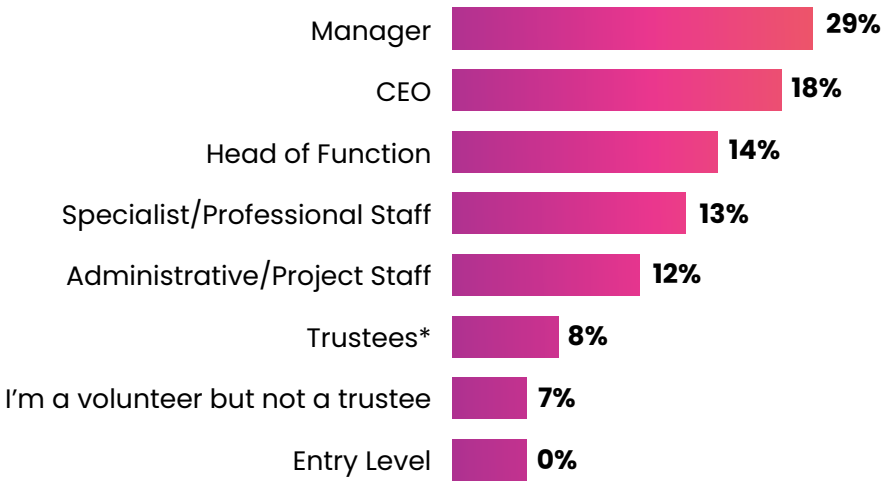
Demographic insights

Most of the respondents to our survey are women managers with third level qualifications, ranging from age 35-59.

The chart below shows the high proportion of managers in the sample (29%). In fact, most of the respondents are in a managerial role or higher (82%).

Figure 2.2 Organisation Structure

Which of the following best describes your role in your organisation?"



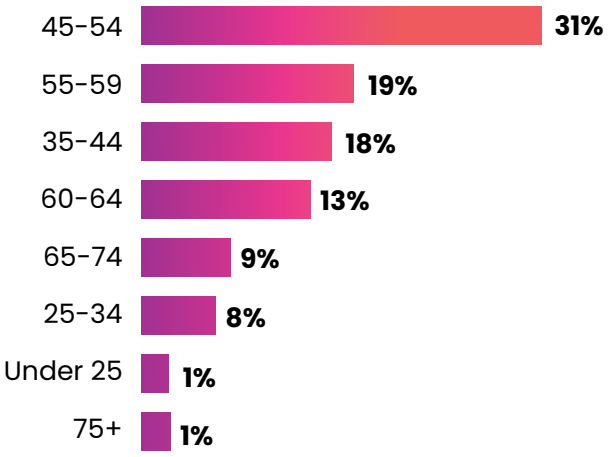
(includes Directors, Board Members, Chair, Treasurer)

The age profile is broken down in detail in the figure below:

Figure 2.3 Age Profile

Please tick the appropriate age bracket for you

N: 400



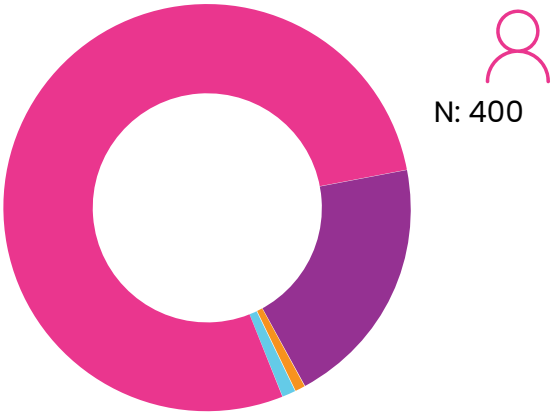
Almost 50% of respondents are aged between 45 and 59 and 30% of the sample are aged 45-54. Consequently, both ends of the spectrum are underrepresented in our survey.

In other words, people aged over 60 represent 23% (65+ being 10% of that cohort) and people aged under 25 and over 75 represent 1.2% each.

The gender breakdown of all respondents (N=400) is shown below.

Figure 2.4 Gender breakdown of respondents

What best describes your gender?



N: 400

78% Women

1% Non-binary

20% Men

1% Prefer not to say

A sample of 78% women is 29% higher than the national average for all economic sectors. The CSO (2025a) report "Male: 50.6% and Female 49.6%" respectively. The CV sector cannot be extracted using the CSO's "economic sector" filter. This is because it does not have its own category in the database the way construction or public administration do.

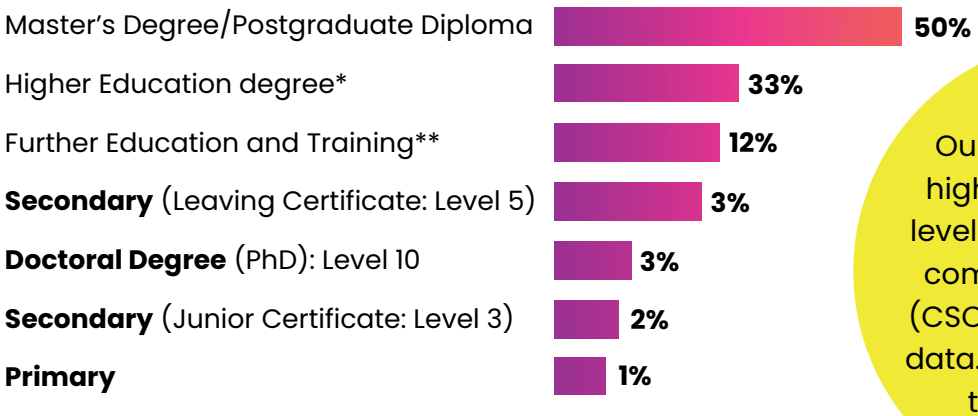
However, 78% women is comparable to the national average gender representation in sectors such as Education (74.9 %) and Human health and social work (75.9 %) (CSO 2025b).

The educational attainment level for survey respondents is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 2.5 Level of Education

What Level of Education have do you have?

N: 400



* Level 7 or Honours Degree: Level 8 ** (FET)/Higher Certificate: Level 4-6

Our sample shows a higher-than-average level of education when compared to national (CSO) and EU (Eurostat) data. This is illustrated in the table below:

Table 2.1 Educational Attainment across EU27; Ireland; and The Wheel data

N: 400

Eurostat broad aggregation group	EU-27 (2025)	Ireland (2025)	The Wheel's Survey sample (2026)
High* Tertiary education	34.3%	55%	85.75%
Medium (vocational)* Upper secondary, post secondary and non-tertiary-vocational	34.9%	13%	12% Further Education and Training (FET) / Higher Certificate: Level 4-6
Medium (general orientation)* Upper secondary, post secondary and non-tertiary	9.5%	17.6%	3.25% *Secondary (Leaving Certificate: Level 5)
Low* *less than primary, primary or lower secondary school	21.2%	12.8%	2.75%

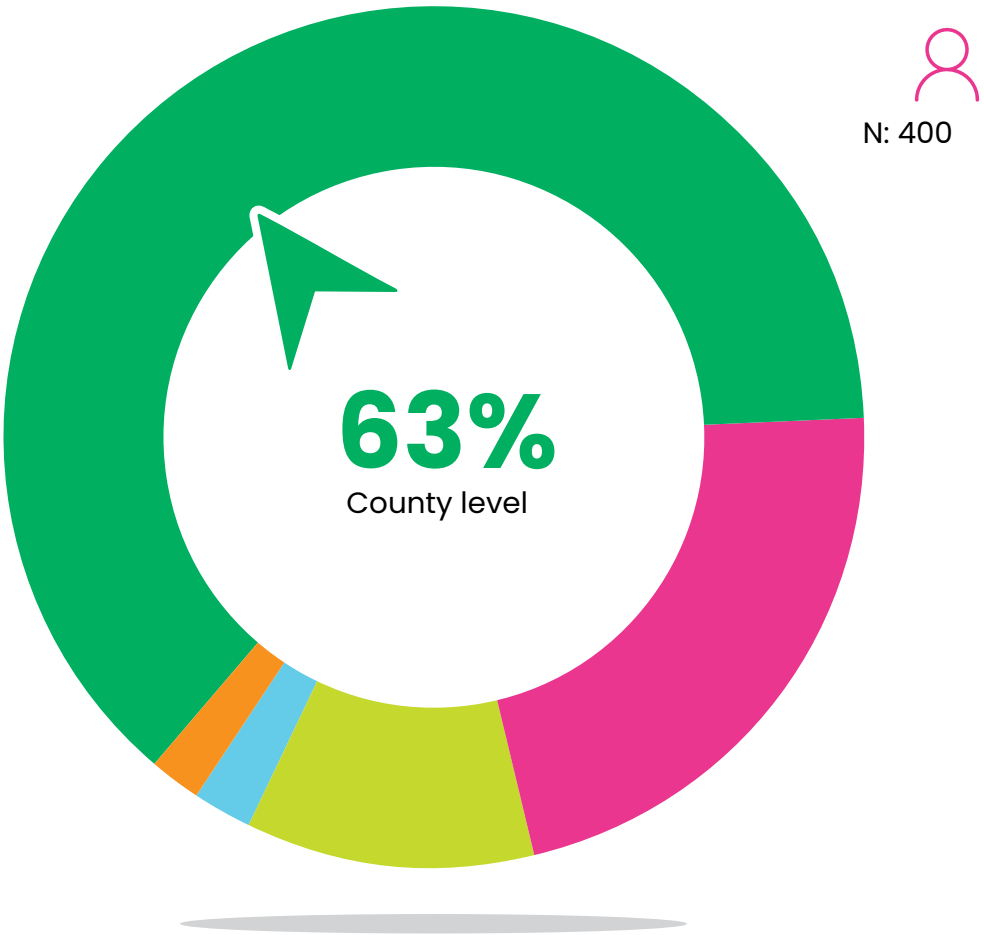
It is beyond the scope of this report to ascertain why this noticeably higher education achievement is evident in the survey sample. However, one driver could be that the cohort sampled were training and skills professionals in the sector. It is possible that this group may have more of a tendency towards upskilling and accredited learning and development than the general population and other segments of the CV sector.

Geographic segmentation

The following chart shows the location spread for when respondents were asked where their organisation's work primarily takes place:

Figure 2.6 Location spread for organisations

In which location does your organisation's work primarily take place?



For the 63% operating on the county level, Figure 2.7 shows the percentage spread per province.

Figure 2.7 Organisation's work primary location

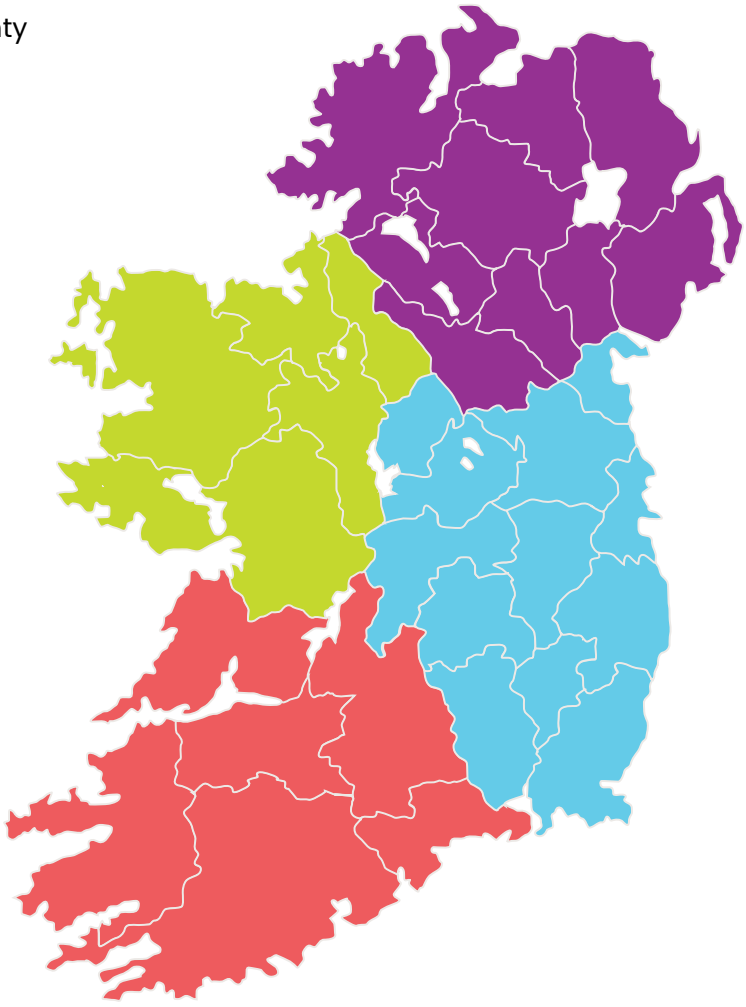
In which location does your organisation's work primarily take place?

N: 253

63%
County level

1%
Ulster

9%
Connaught



35%
Leinster

17%
Munster

Organisations that operate on a national level account for the highest cohort (22%) with

19%
Dublin

11%
All-Island

10%
Cork

5%
Galway

were the two counties outside of Dublin with the highest proportion of organisations.

Charitable purpose

We asked respondents their organisation's area of focus, using The Charities Regulator "charitable purpose" categories. Organisations can have more than one charitable purpose.

Figure 2.8 Charitable Purpose: The Wheel sample

What areas does your organisation focus on?

N: 391

246
Integration of those who are disadvantaged, and the promotion of their full participation, in society

212
Advancement of community welfare including the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, or disability

202
Advancement of education

189
Promotion of health, including the prevention or relief of sickness, disease or human suffering

154
Relief of poverty or economic hardship

143
Promotion of civic responsibility or voluntary work

132
Advancement of environmental sustainability

115
Advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or sciences

101
Protection of the natural environment

93
Advancement of the efficient and effective use of the property of charitable organisations

89
Advancement of conflict resolution or reconciliation

86
Promotion of religious or racial harmony and harmonious community relations

73
Advancement of religion

67
Prevention or relief of suffering of animals

The table below compares our respondents top five primary focuses with the Charities Regulator's data (2026:20). Respondents could select more than one option in our survey (one primary focus and one secondary focus).

Top 5 What areas does your organisation focus on? compared with Charities Regulator (2025)

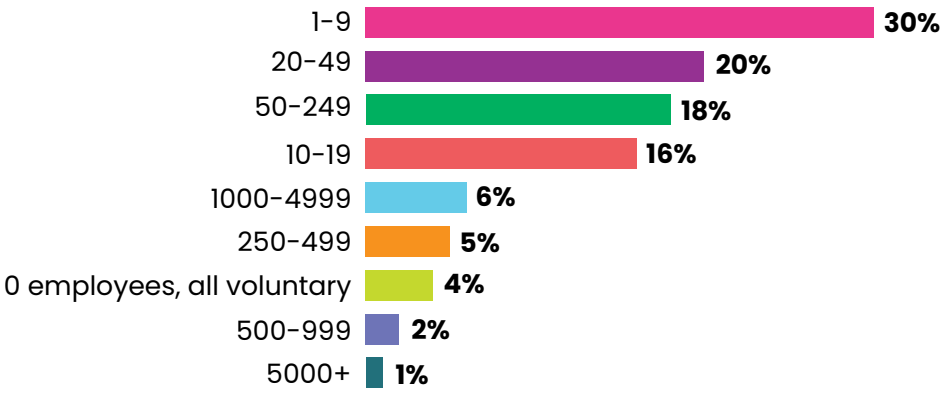
Table 2.2 Focus Top 5 compared with Charities Regulator (2026)

Rank	The Wheel	Charities Regulator
1	Integration of those who are disadvantaged, and the promotion of their full participation, in society **N=246; 63%**	Advancement of education (excluding schools) **N=2,255; 20%**
2	Advancement of community welfare including the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, or disability **N=212; 45%**	Advancement of community welfare including the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, or disability **N=2,127; 19%**
3	Advancement of education **N=202; 52%**	Integration of those who are disadvantaged, and the promotion of their full participation, in society **N=1,595; 14%**
4	Promotion of health, including the prevention or relief of sickness, disease or human suffering **N=189; 48%**	Relief of poverty or economic hardship **N=1,335 12%**
5	Advancement of community development, including rural or urban regeneration **N=174; 45%**	Advancement of community development, including rural or urban regeneration **N=1,317 11%**

Organisational size

Figure 2.9 Number of Employees and Volunteers

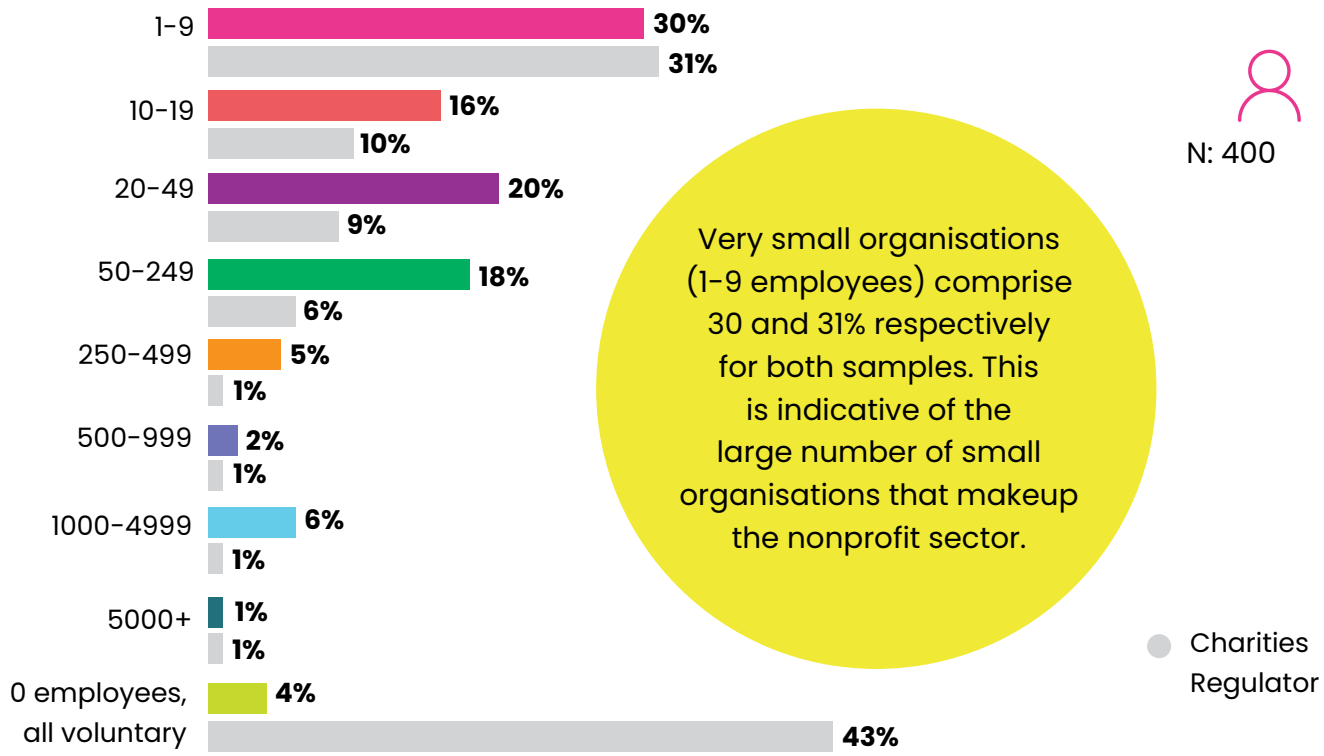
How many people work in your organisation?



N: 400

The majority (70%) of organisations are small (under 50 employees) and only 4% of these are all voluntary in comparison to the Charities Regulator sample. In that sample this cohort was largest group (43%). Our sample may therefore underrepresent the needs of entirely volunteer led organisations. The grouping with zero employees in particular points to the need for further detailed research into this cohort. However, our data is broadly representative of organisations with 10-249 employees, which make up 54% of the total. A comparison of our sample and the Charities Regulator's latest figures (2026:22) is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 2.10 Employee number compared with Charity Regulator.



Financial Income

Figure 2.11 Total Annual Income for last calender year

What is your organisation's (approximate) total annual income for the last calendar year or set of accounts?"

N: 245

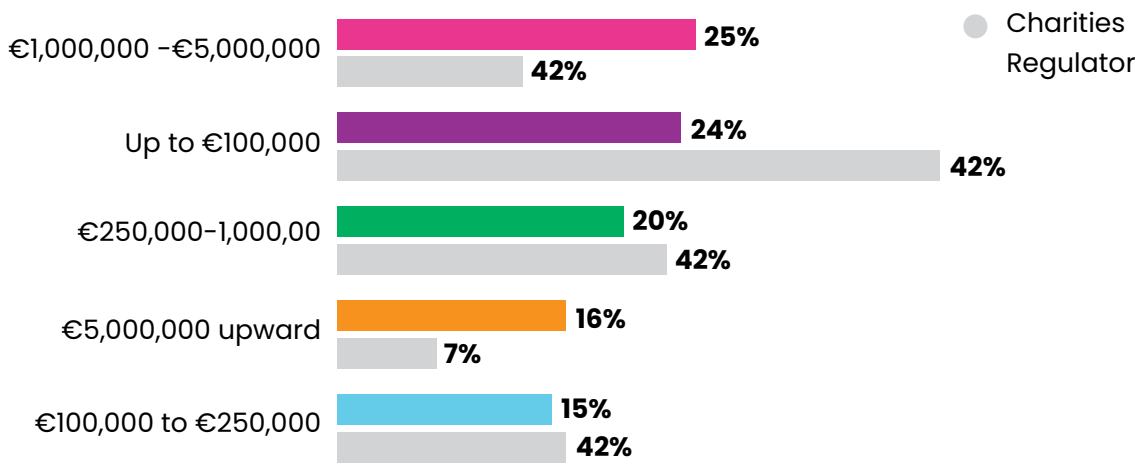


The largest cohort is €1,000,000-€5,000,000 25% with a very close second: smaller organisations: up to €100,000 24.5%. When compared with the Charities Regulator (2026:21), our sample has almost half as many organisations from the lowest income bracket. Our sample also has double the amount from the highest income bracket. There is a much closer correlation for the mid ranges (€100,000 to €250,000 and €250,000–€1,000,000).

Figure 2.12 Total Annual Income compared with Charities Regulator

How many people work in your organisation?" compared with Charity Regulator sample

N: 245



Conclusion

Ireland currently operates in a tight labour market and is experiencing a cost-of-living crisis. We also face specific skills gaps that challenge progress made in terms of workforce development and lifelong learning. People working and volunteering in the CV sector are facing many of the same national challenges as our peers in other sectors.

In addition, lower sector pay, restricted income and expenditure, and unique skillsets required for nonprofit work create unique challenges for upskilling and training. These challenges require an informed, culturally appropriate approach to both the “what” and the “how” of sector upskilling.



03

Methodology

3. Methodology

Overview of Approach

A mixed-methods approach was used. This began with a quantitative survey followed by qualitative focus groups to explore the numerical results. This two-pronged workplan enabled comparative analysis and an affinity mapping exercise that produced a thematic analysis. The table below outlines participation numbers for research activities undertaken for this programme.

Table 3.1 The Wheel's Research Programme Participation Numbers

Research Activity	Number of Participants
Training and Skills Survey	400
Short AI Use Survey	86
Focus Groups	86
Total number of organisations reached	398



For context, it is useful to compare our sample with those from the two major reports on skills in the sector.

Indecon conducted two surveys with a total response number of 698 (2020:8) and

Cahill (2021:3) undertook:

- a total of 26 interviews;
- including 19 focus groups;
- with 116 attendees; and,
- representing 81 organisations (total participants N=142).

The research activities conducted by The Wheel for this report were underpinned by desk research. This research drew on national and international publications and datasets relevant to workforce development, as well as skills and training boosters and blockers and digital transformation. The four key components of The Wheel's research programme thus far are outlined below.

Stakeholder types

The Stakeholder types* that participated in the survey and focus groups were:

- Senior Leaders including CEOs
- Managers including training managers
- Volunteers including trustees
- Specialists including social care workers and project managers
- Administrative and support staff

* *See Annex 1 for full list of participating organisations*

Desk research

We carried out our desk research with two aims:

1. assess the progress in training and skills levels over the past six years; and,
2. collate an evidence base for the current context to enable comparative analysis with national and European skills and workforce data.

This report responds to and builds upon two key pieces of research, namely the sector-specific findings in the Cahill (2021) and Indecon (2020) reports. The full list of international and national research reviewed is available in the "References" section of this report. As part of our desk research, we extracted pertinent data from the following datasets:

Table 3.2 Lists of Datasets reviewed

The Charities Regulator Live Register
The Wheel Membership Database
The Central Statistics Office (CSO)
Solas Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU)
Eurostat
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Our stakeholder-informed research activities were informed by the insights gained from reviewing existing research. For example, we used the question format of many of the survey questions to enable data comparability at the analysis stage.

Sector Survey

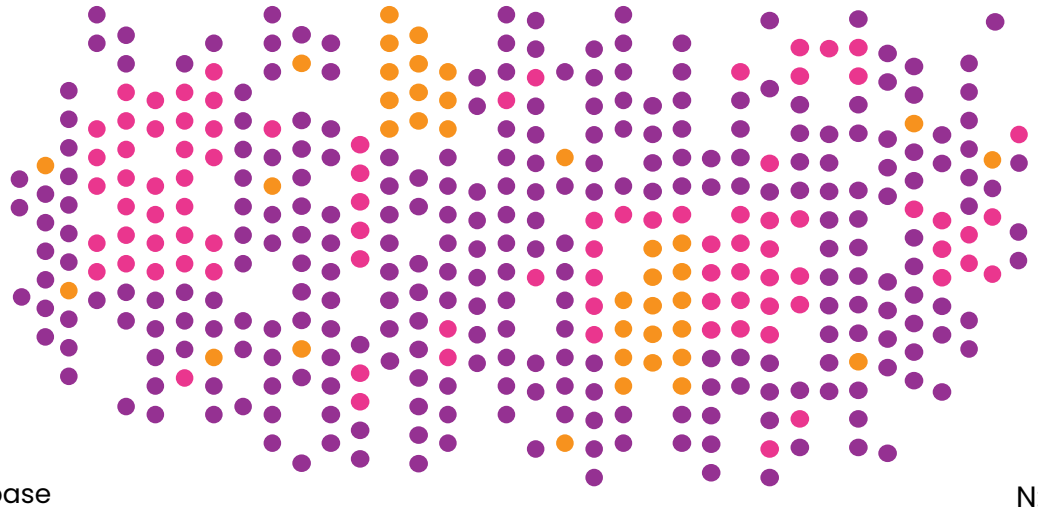
The Wheel designed and launched a sector-wide Training and Skills Survey in April 2026. As part of our communication and dissemination strategy, we used current stakeholder lists to reach as much of the sector as possible. We achieved this by working with various network bodies including PPNs (Public Participation Networks), Volunteer Centres, and representative organisations.

We also carried out targeted recruitment for specific segments and hard-to-reach stakeholders.

The campaign reached **58,000 recipients** across a series of email campaigns (dedicated or standalone mailings and newsletters). These took place over three weeks, with a 31% open rate.

We received 400 valid survey responses across a range of roles, locations, and levels. It is, however, important to note the limitations of the sample. Our sample is based on a voluntary survey, enabled by self-selection. As such it cannot be considered statistically representative of the entire nonprofit sector workforce and volunteer base in Ireland.

The Wheel conducted targeted outreach efforts. Yet employees in smaller community organisations, those in frontline roles, and volunteers or entry-level personnel are still likely to be underrepresented. Consequently, our sample has a higher representation of high educational achievement. Our survey was designed with decision logic, so that not all respondents answered the same amount or type of questions.



Full base

N: 400

- Decision makers general — N: 245
- Decision makers with an organisational view — N: 191
- Decision makers in organisations with 50+ employees — N: 49

The table below outlines the segments of our survey sample:

Table 3.3 Sample segmentation for The Wheel's Training and Skills Survey 2026

Segment	Research Activity	Sample Number
Full base	• General demographic and organisational profile questions • current levels of training needs • Digital tool use and confidence levels	N=400
Decision makers general	• Annual income and training budget	N=245
Decision makers with an organisational view	• Organisational view of current levels of skill • Financial information e.g. annual income and % spend on training • Impact of training level on organisation • Future skills needs	N=191
Decision makers in organisations with 50+ employees	• Strategic questions on training and development, AI and sustainability	N=49

The table above shows that the full base was asked the same question about current training needs and demographic information. This made up 50% of the total survey questions, thus shortening the survey length for staff and volunteers. We then asked decision makers to progress with a separate batch of questions. The full base gave us a foundation to profile the sample and enabled the collection of current needs data.

We then focused on decision makers with enough organisational oversight to meaningfully engage with the remaining survey questions. For example, only decision makers were asked questions about investment in training and strategic planning data.

The research is enriched by having expert-informed data because of this decision logic and segmentation design choice. But it is important to be aware of the sample variation, especially when making assertions about trends. For clarity, sample size is indicated under every figure in the report.

Where small or absent groups of respondents emerged, this gave us insights into hard-to-reach sections of the sector. This will help guide further research as our programme progresses. The range of organisational size, charitable purpose, and number of respondents do, however, provide a basis for uncovering insights and trends.

These will be of help in exploring into how nonprofit staff and volunteers engage with skills development and training. These trends were further corroborated through dataset comparison and qualitative research.

We gathered data from employees and volunteers on their thoughts on upskilling needs and their experiences of accessing training. We also asked where they think the sector is going in terms of future skills needs. The survey was designed to contain a mix of closed (e.g. multiple choice and rating scales) and open-ended questions.

This allowed us to gather different data types that we could both rank and utilise for qualitative data analysis. Free text options provided an opportunity to add to topics respondents were particularly informed, concerned, and excited about. These also provided a space for those who simply wanted to contribute more context to their answers.

Readers can download data for the figures listed in this report. Details are provided in the List of Tables and Figures section.

Focus Groups

The survey results informed the design and content of our **four qualitative Focus Groups**.

Throughout July 2026, we conducted:

2 
online sessions

The format for the **online groups** enabled more participation from stakeholders not easily able to travel to Dublin and involved workshopping four key questions about enablers and obstacles to upskilling.

2 
in-person sessions

The **in-person session** asked the same four questions in addition to a solutions tree activity. In this activity, participants were asked to speak to someone new in the room. They were then asked to place a key solution to the sector's skills problems on a physical tree. This activity moved the conversation into a solution-focused space. It also unlocked some great ideas for creating a resilient skilled sector going forward.

reaching **86** people working and volunteering in Ireland's nonprofit sector.

The focus groups enabled us to meet our stakeholders, have generative conversations in the room together and collect key qualitative data. This qualitative data enriched the quantitative data collected by our survey.



Data Analysis

Comparative analyses were used to track progress from previous skills assessment studies. We also used these analyses to compare our dataset to other sources to ascertain general population and EU-27 trends. When analysing quantitative data, percentages equal to and greater than 0.5 were rounded up to the nearest whole number. All other fractional percentages were rounded down to keep our data consistent. Training hours and days are presented without rounding.

We used a mix of:

- descriptive statistical techniques;
  - those that summarise and describe using numbers or charts; and
- inferential statistical techniques;
  - those that use a small sample to predict, test, or draw conclusions about a larger population.

Correlation analyses were applied to assess meaningful differences between data segments and profiles. For example:

- demographic data such as gender, age, and education level;
- organisational data like size (below 50 and over 50 workforce), charitable purpose, and location of operation;
- skills acquisition and confidence, such as confidence in using specific tools and self-assessed upskilling needs.

For the **focus groups**, comparative analysis was applied across all four groups under the themes that arose from each question. We used a "living lab" methodology developed by the ENoLL (European Network of Living Labs), which is an iterative process. This process allows for:

- learning from people;
- taking those insights and adapting how we do things or how we think; and,
- going back to the people it effects on a continuous basis or a set number of times based on the scope of your project or activity.

The two activities we conducted were:

- **The Question Lab** (like a world-café-style focus group without the moving around to a new table for each question); and,
- **The Solutions Tree** which enabled an affinity mapping exercise to bring key themes to the surface.

Data Management and Ethics

We conducted this research in compliance with the Wheel's Privacy statement.

- We processed data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2016). Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent.
- We collected data anonymously through GDPR-compliant survey software.
- We reported data in aggregate form only and both soft and hard copies were securely stored.
- We included no personally identifiable information in the findings.
- Individual research participants hold the right to ask for correction, or deletion (or both) of data submitted as part of this research. These rights are granted in GDPR Article 15-22.



Conclusion

In conclusion, The Wheel engaged in two significant research activities during the Spring and Summer of 2026. These activities facilitated the perspectives of over 400 organisations to be heard and analysed. The section below delineates the research findings that we uncovered, thanks to the participation of sector workers, both employees and volunteers.



04

Research Findings

4. Research Findings

Overview

This section outlines the key findings of The Wheel's Skills and Training research programme.

The **insights** are based on two research activities carried out in Spring and Summer 2026:

- our sector wide Training and Skills survey; and,
- the Focus Group series hosted by The Wheel in July 2026.

The **survey** captured skills data from two distinct groups:

- staff and volunteers of all kinds across the workforce; and,
- decision makers (those who shape the skills agenda and learning experiences within their organisations) in roles such as CEO, HR Manager, and similar.

The **four focus groups** (two online and two in-person) were made up of 86 total participants including:

- engaged learners;
- trainers;
- volunteers;
- supporting staff; and
- senior leaders, including CEOs.

Five themes emerged from our analysis of the survey and focus group responses. These which are presented below, alongside supporting evidence from desk research.

Summary of Findings

The Wheel's research has uncovered the following findings:

4.1 A culture of workforce learning and development is growing but **blocks to participation** persist

4.2 More sector training would **positively impact culture, service delivery**, and **productivity**, but accelerated roll-out required.

4.3 There is a significant **digital skills gap** in the sector that requires an all-level upskilling approach

4.4 There is a clear need and high demand for **sector-specific upskilling**

4.5 A consolidated, **strategic approach** to sector skills data and research is needed

Each finding is discussed in detail below.

4.1 A culture of Workforce Learning and Development is growing but **blocks to participation persist**



Many nonprofit organisations operate in sectors of the economy where there are relatively high education levels among workers. These include sectors like health, education and social care. 85% of our survey respondents have a high level of educational attainment. This level is higher than the national average and higher than the sector rate recorded in 2020 by Indecon (2020:16).

Alongside these highly educated and qualified individuals, the sector workforce also includes groups that have faced barriers to educational attainment. The sector provides significant employment through supported employment schemes. The Community Employment programme, for example, had 19,557 participants in 2025 (Oireachtas: 2025). Also, 60% of staffed social enterprises engage with labour market activation programmes. These include, for example:

- CE (Community Employment);
- Tús;
- Rural Social Scheme; and others (DRCDG: 2023).

Many projects provide work for those who face structural barriers to employment and education, including early school leavers, people who are long-term unemployed, people exiting the justice system, people with intellectual disabilities and Travellers etc. The CV sector is made up of a diverse labour force. It is crucial, therefore, that learning and development pathways and continued professional development are strategically enabled and accessible at all levels. There have traditionally been low levels of investment in workforce development and training in the sector. As a result, there has been a lag in the growth of a learning and development culture in organisations. This is particularly noticeable when compared to other sectors (Indecon: 2020).

In the general population, we are seeing a need for education and training to continue across the lifespan and career path (OECD: 2025a). But recent evidence from the Survey of Adult Skills (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) shows that training participation is declining in many countries (OECD: 2025b). Lifelong learning rates in Ireland consistently lag significantly behind Nordic colleagues (Eurostat:2023). This is a challenging backdrop to the development of a lifelong learning culture in the CV sector.

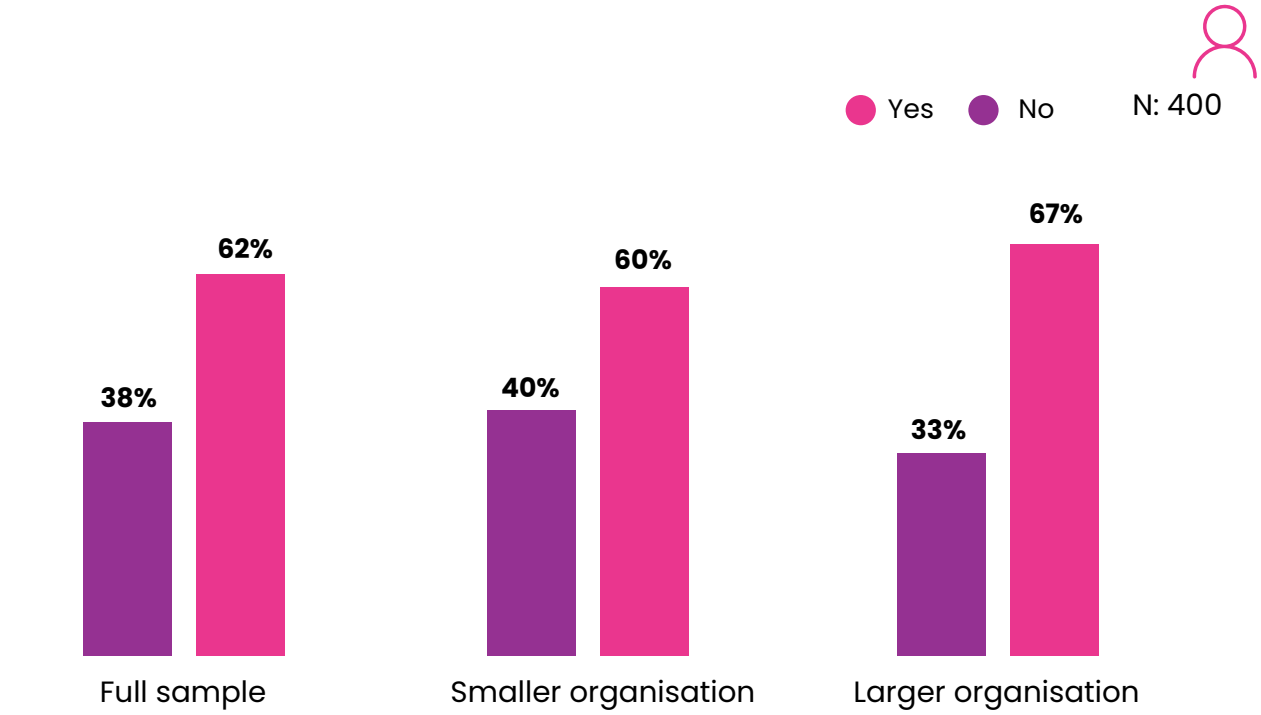
Current levels of training activity

Evidence from our survey suggests that workers in the CV sector are generally engaged learners. There is also a clear an established regular appetite for lifelong learning opportunities. When asked, 62% responded yes to the question:

"In the past 4 weeks, have you engaged in any learning opportunities (through either formal or informal education or training)? This can be related to your role in the sector or completely unrelated." There are different approaches to asking about lifelong learning. As such, there are differences in how this is measured nationally and by the OECD (see Appendix 1 for a measurement comparison table)[2] The figure below shows our data for rates of life learning, disaggregated for organisation.

Figure 4.1 Lifelong learning compared across organisation size

In the past 4 weeks, have you engaged in any learning opportunities (through either formal or informal education or training)? This can be related to your role in the sector or completely unrelated.



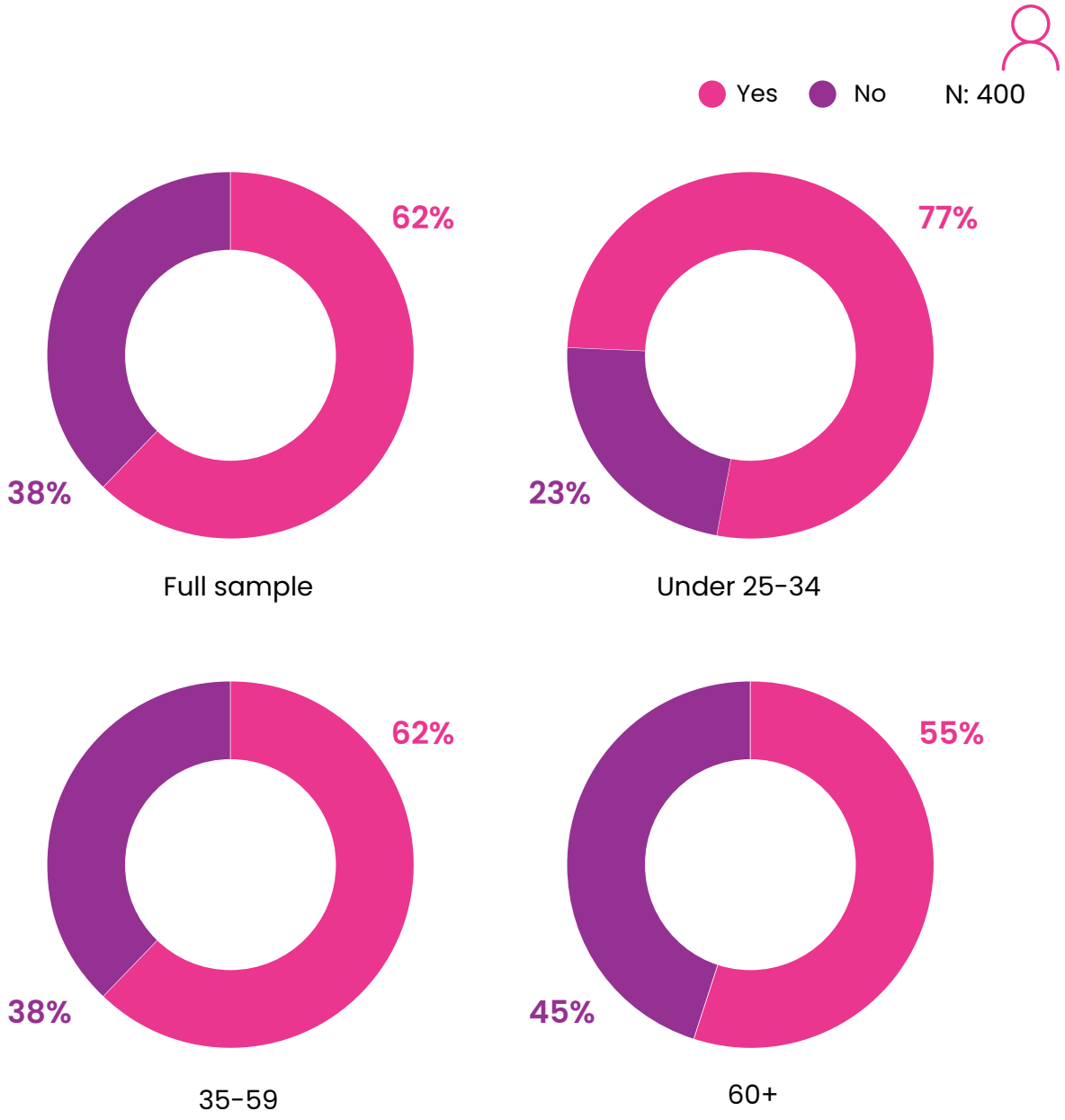
As illustrated above, there is a 7% increase in lifelong learning rates among those working for larger organisations (50+ employees).

2 See Approaches to Lifelong Learning table in Annex 2 which lists a selection of relevant organisations that collect this information, the specific question asked of respondents, and the % reported. The table helps situate The Wheel's approach in a wider context of lifelong learning metrics. Please note that the samples are not comparable due to differences in mode and collection frequency.

When compared for age cohorts across our sample, the following pattern emerged:

Figure 4.2 Lifelong learning across age cohorts

In the past 4 weeks, have you engaged in any learning opportunities (through either formal or informal education or training)? This can be related to your role in the sector or completely unrelated.



Our sample shows a decrease in learning engagement as people age. This is reflective of wider population trends when it comes to lifelong learning attitudes and behaviours. This can be seen in, for example (SLMRU 2026:3) and Skillnet (2025). The highest rates of lifelong learning are reported by the CSO for those aged 18-24 (60.6%) and 20-34 (22.9%) (CSO: 2026 Q2).

A slightly different picture emerges when we asked respondents about their overall level of training activity related to work. We asked survey respondents, "In the past 12 months, how much time have you spent on training related to your work?" The rationale for asking the question in this way, was to incorporate both formal and nonformal learning.

The average reported amount was 30.5 hours per year, equivalent to 4.3 workdays where the working day unit is 7 hours. This means there is little change in the amount of time spent on training since Indecon measured it six years ago.

Figure 4.3 Lifelong learning compared across organisation size



In the past 12 months, how much time have you spent on training related to your work?



N: 400



Indecon reported an average of 4.5 days in 2020. Unlike the OECD PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), where a distinct decline in engagement with job-related training is evident. This shows a picture of relative stability six years on.

The variation in average reported training hours between employees in different sizes of organisation is outlined in the table below:



In the past 12 months, how much time have you spent on training related to your work?



N: 400

Table 4.1 Time spent on training over 12 months (N: 400)

Hours reported in survey	Converted to days where working day divided by 7
30.5 Full base average	4.3
27.5 small organisations average	4
37 large organisations average	5.2

We asked about the average amount of hours spent on training in the past 12 months.



People working in larger organisations **spent 10% more time on training** than those in organisations with up to 50 staff.

For those who are spending the least amount of time on training (those spending 0–10 hours per year), the following insights apply:

Age

31%
are 60 years or over



Org size

33%
1-9 employees

73%
are small orgs up 50

Role

11%
CEOs

11%
Managers

18%
Admins



59%
wished to participate in learning activities in the past 12 months but could not.

This represents 26.5% of the overall sample.

Age and organisational size play a significant factor in the amount of work-related training participated in. However, almost 60% of those who are not accessing significant amounts of training demonstrate an appetite for more.

Of our entire survey sample:

Unmet demand



71%
of participants in the past 12 months wanted to engage in training but did not

According to the OECD (2025:69)[4]



one in four adults say that they would have liked to participate in (more) learning.

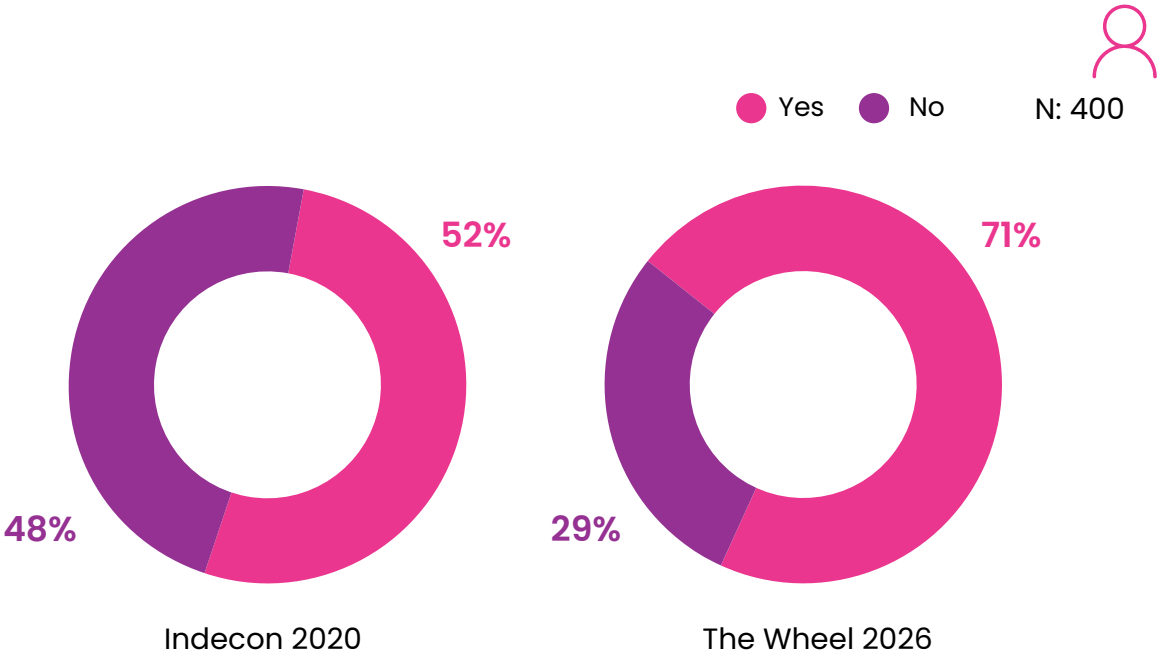
These same adults have been prevented from participating by some barrier or another. Our research shows a strikingly different pattern, with almost 3 in 4 expressing a desire to engage in more learning opportunities. This represents a level of pent-up demand for more upskilling.

4 OECD (2025), Trends in Adult Learning: New Data from the 2023 Survey of Adult Skills, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ec0624a6-en.

The last in-depth analysis into sector training blockers was conducted by Indecon in 2020. See the comparative analysis below of Indecon (2020:21) and The Wheel's data:

Figure 4.4 Comparison of learners who wanted to participate but could not

In the past 12 months, were there learning activities related to your work in the sector that you wanted to participate in but did not?



The 71% figure above indicates unmet demand. This is a 19% increase from Indecon's 2020 figure. This may be interpreted as a more engaged workforce who want to train at increasing levels. It may alternatively be seen as evidence that fewer learners are getting to access the courses they want.



When compared across organisation size, smaller organisations reported:

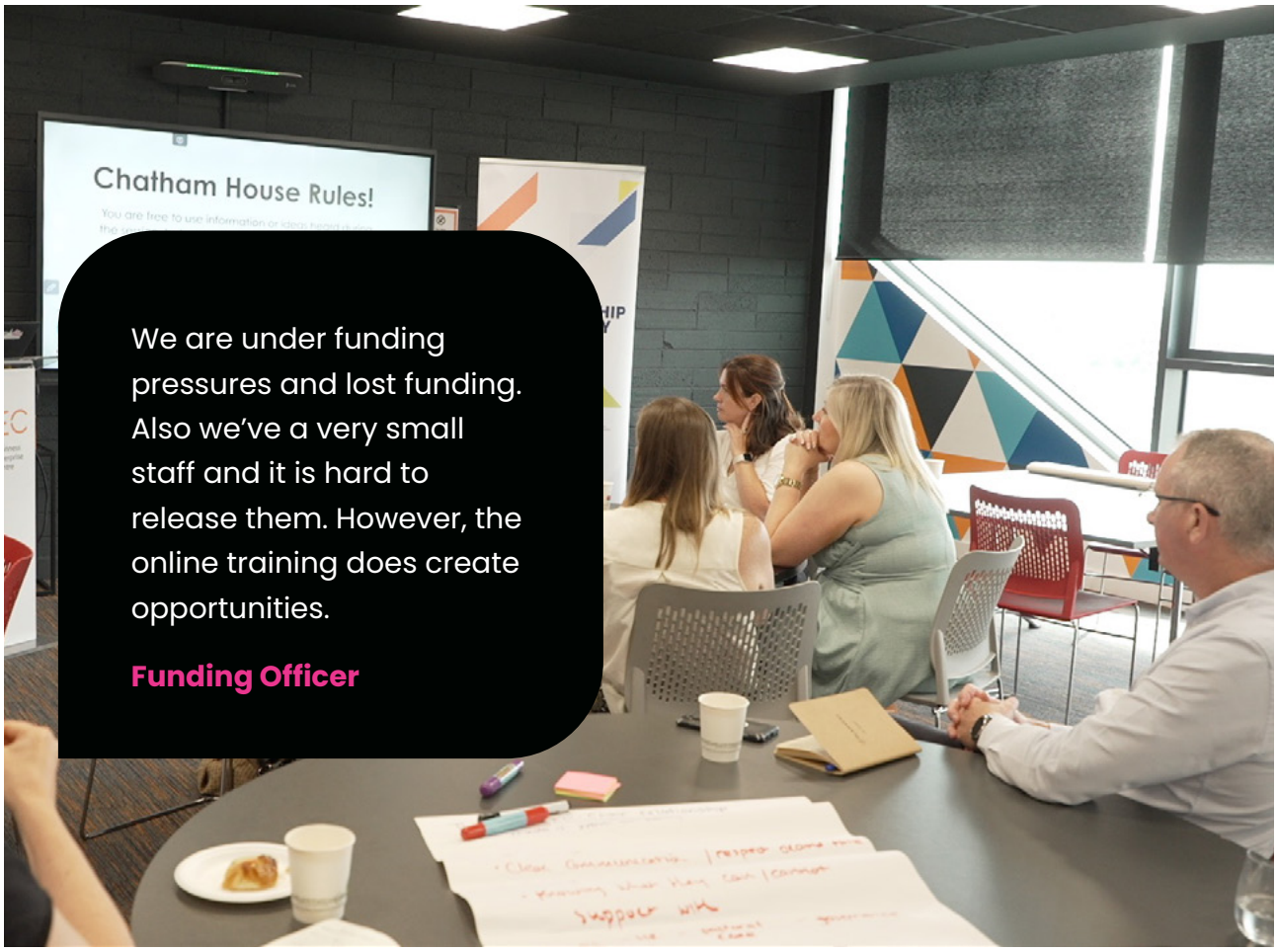
a larger number not participating in training who wanted to

72.5%

a lower amount of missed training was also evident for organisations with 50+ employees.

67%

During our focus groups, a combination of time and funding was reported as the reason participants did not take advantage of training:



> We are under funding pressures and lost funding. Also we've a very small staff and it is hard to release them. However, the online training does create opportunities.
>
> **Funding Officer**

The most common barriers to further training, according to the OECD (2025:69), are:

48% lack of **time** either due to family or work responsibilities

14% the lack of **suitable training** opportunities

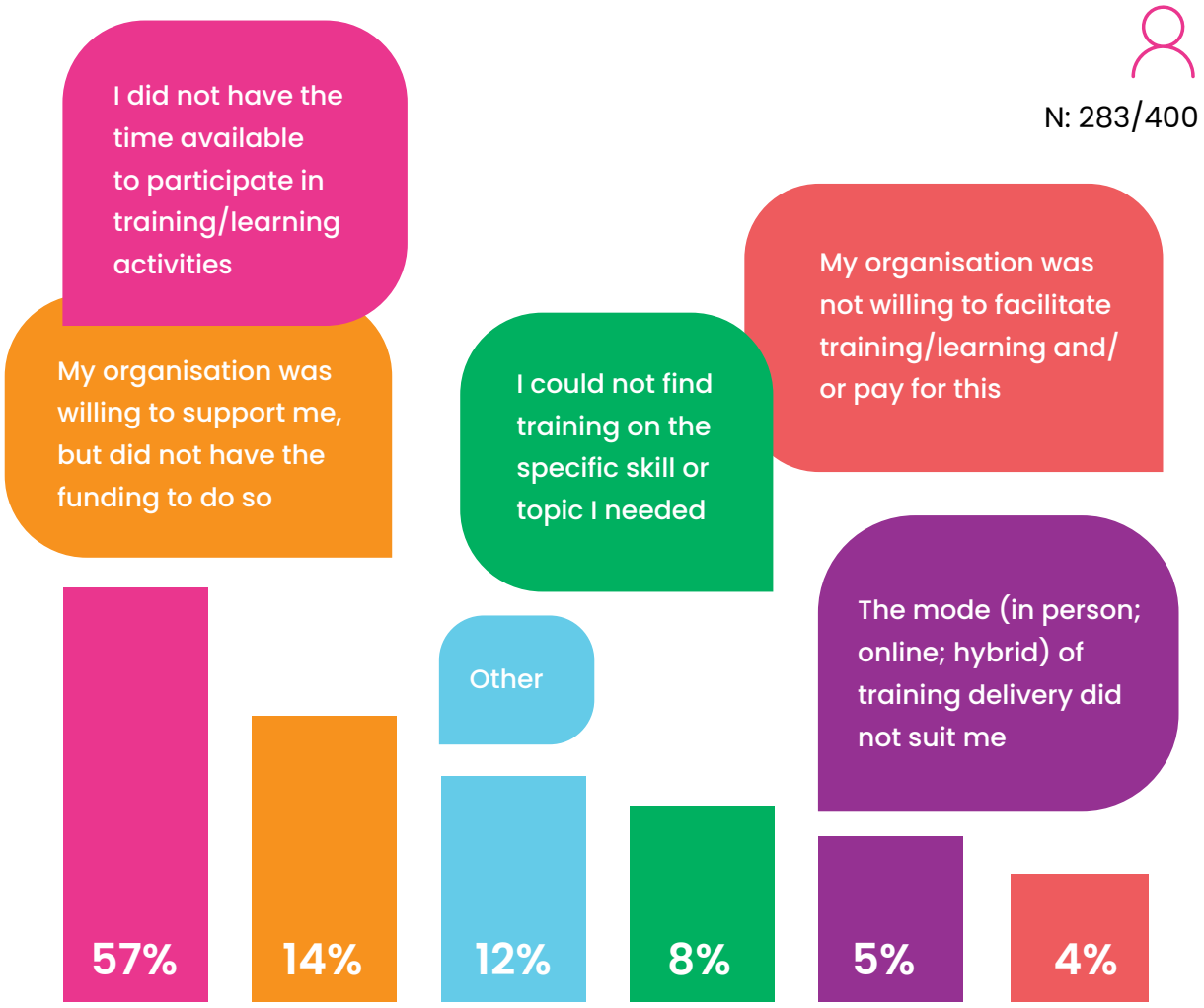
13% and, **costs**

Indecon surfaced the key blocks to upskilling in the sector six years ago. The Wheel carried out comparative analysis to see whether the same blocks persist for those who could not access training. Findings suggest that lack of organisational support has become less of a blocker for aspiring learners in the past six years. Lack of organisational support accounted for just 4% of responses.

Figure 4.5 Reason for not participating in training

Select the most relevant reason for you not participating in training in the last 12 months?

N: 283/400



The above figure shows what the full base think are the blockers. We asked decision makers (N=191) why they think there are low levels of workforce training in the nonprofit sector. The following leading blockers were cited:

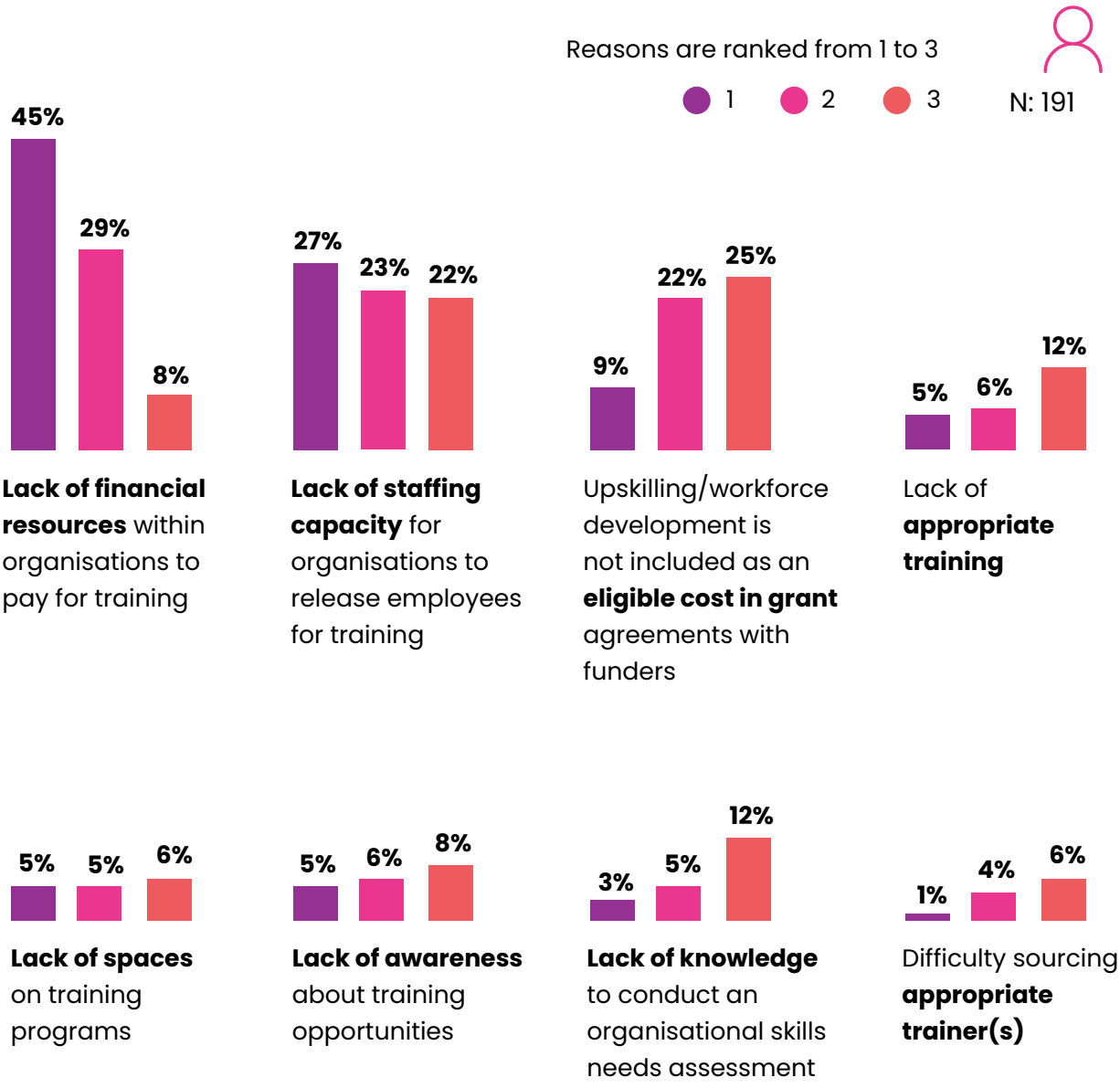
45% said it was **due to** "**Lack of financial resources** within organisations to pay for training"

27% said it was **caused by** "**Lack of staffing capacity** for organisations to release employees for training"

These two reasons map on to those given by learners above. They also show that financial and resource shortages remain the key blockers to upskilling the sector. The top three reasons cited by decision makers are related to human and financial resourcing constraints. These three are far ahead of the bottom five, which are related to supply issues. This indicates that organisations are aware of relevant, accessible training but constrained in their own ability to support staff to attend.

Figure 4.6 Reasons for low workforce training ranked

Previous research has identified low levels of workforce training in the sector. Why do you think this is the case?



In addition to financial and human resource constraints, a significant blocker emerged in terms of grant agreements: Decision makers highlighted the difficulties arisings when grant agreements do not include upskilling or workforce development as an eligible cost. This gives rise to situation where a project may be funded but training or upskilling new or existing team members is not feasible. Our focus group participants told us that there was often not enough funding for training, especially non-mandatory training.



There is a vital need for ring-fenced funding within project funding or training and upskilling

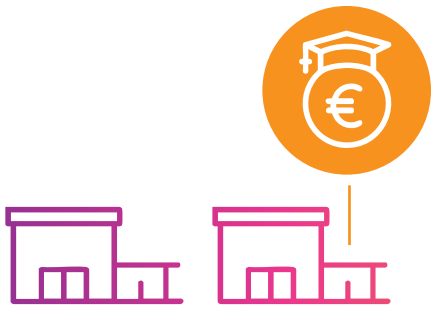
Project manager from a frontline service provider

A variety of stakeholders highlighted **the need to ringfence funding for training** so that upskilling-by-design is baked into financial capital provisions.

Investment in training

We asked the decision-makers cohort questions related to organisational investment decisions around training. The sample for the following questions is N=191.

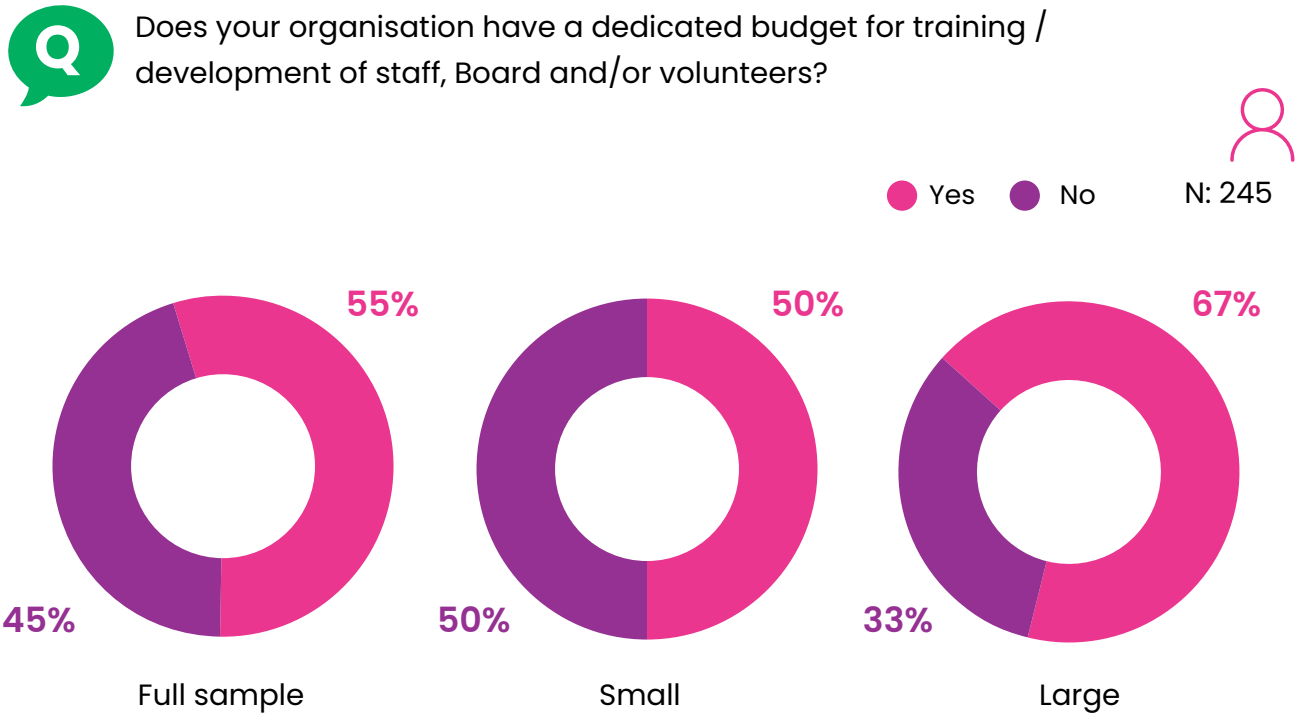
When asked "does your organisation have a dedicated budget for training/ development of staff, Board and/or volunteers?", 55% said "yes" they have a dedicated budget. However, a large proportion of respondents (45%) reported "no".



Only one in every two small organisations (those with a staff of less than 50) have a dedicated training budget.

Recent research by Ibec (2025:37) suggests the same pattern in SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), finding that 50% of private firms with a staff of less than 50 do not have a training budget.

Figure 4.7 Dedicated training budget by organisation size.



Presence of a training budget varies considerably when the total income for the organisation is considered. The table below shows the variation in dedicated training budgets, separated by income.

Does your organisation have a dedicated budget for training / development of staff, Board and/or volunteers?

N: 245

Table 4.2 Staff training budget disaggregated by annual income bracket

Annual income	% that has a dedicated training budget	N=
Up €100,000	18	60
100 - 250	44	36
250,000 - 1,000,000	60	48
1,000,000 - 5,000,000	76	62
5,000,000 upwards	79	39

The above table shows that only 18% of organisations with an annual income below €100,000 have a dedicated training budget. This increases considerably the more income an organisation has.

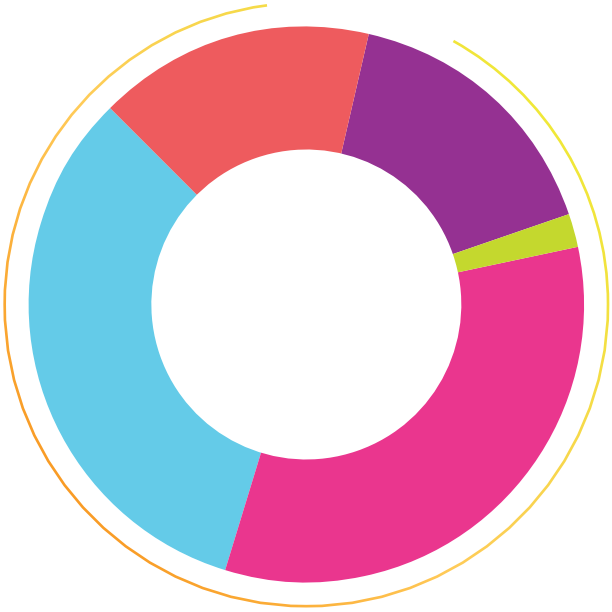
To tackle a similarly persistent issue in the SME sector a new measure was launched in September 2026 called the Upskill SME Training Grant (Skillnet:2026b). The scheme aims to incentivise SMEs to upskill and reskill employees in AI skills. It does this by allowing eligible companies to claim reimbursement for time spent by employees on training. A similar scheme open to nonprofit employers (currently ineligible for this grant) would provide a significant and relevant support.

We asked a smaller cohort of decision makers from larger organisations, with 50+ staff, some more detailed questions about their strategic approach. We also asked what their organisation has in place for staff training and development. There is an even split of 33% each for “a basic annual structured approach” and “a formal learning and development strategy”. As reflected above in the question on budget, almost 66% of larger organisations are taking a planned strategic approach to workforce development.

Figure 4.8 Strategic plan in place for staff training and development

Which of the following best describes what your organisation has in place for staff training and development?

N: 49



16%
No formal approach (ad hoc only)

16%
Some formal planning

2%
Other (please specify)

33%
A formal Learning and Development Strategy with associated budget

33%
A basic annual structured approach with an associated budget

Decision makers of organisation with 50+ employees

Key takeaway

Our data suggests a sector that is gradually maturing in its approach to workforce development. It implies that most organisations are investing strategically in training. It also highlights a decreasing number of organisations who are unsupportive of the training choices of individual employees.

However, our data shows that there is increasing unmet demand for training in the sector. Over two thirds of survey respondents indicated that they did not participate in training in the past year despite wanting to. This, coupled with the relatively low average amount of training undertaken by staff and volunteers, leaves scope for growth. This growth may be enabled through provision of targeted, flexible and low-cost upskilling measures.

Attention is needed to understand and address the needs and constraints of smaller organisations (those with a staff of less than 50). For many of these organisations, investment in, planning for, and commitment to training lags behind larger counterparts.

4.2 More sector training would **positively impact culture**, service delivery, and productivity, but accelerated roll-out required.

This section outlines the impact of maintaining the current level of training. It also describes what respondents said about the benefits of being enabled to roll out necessary training in their organisations.

Negative Impact of maintaining current levels of training

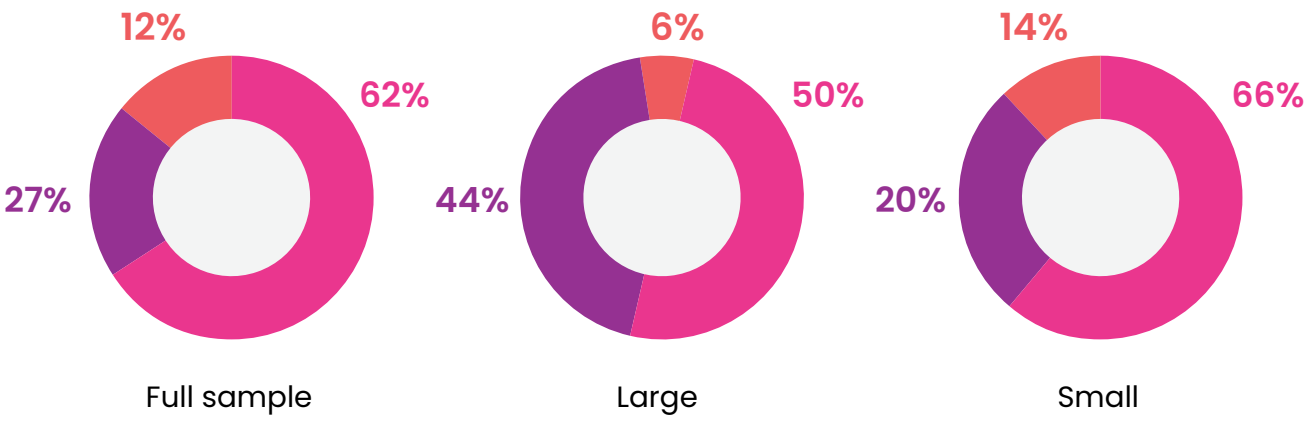
We asked decision makers about the impact of maintaining their current levels of training over the coming 4 years. The chart below shows that 89% of respondent organisations (N=191) would be negatively impacted if the current level of training stayed the same as it was in 2026. This increases to 94% for large organisations.

Figure 4.9 Level of Training Impact on Organisation

If by 2030, the current level of training in your organisation has stayed the same as it was in 2026, what would be the impact on your organisation?

- My organisation's work and impact **would be somewhat negatively** impacted
- My organisation's work and impact **would be very negatively** affected
- My organisation's work and impact **would be unaffected**

N: 191



Negative impacts of low levels of training are well-documented and include declining resources and morale. As cited in the Indecon report: "skills gaps can impact on the ability of non-profit organisations to meet quality standards, introduce new work practices and to develop new services. Skills gaps can also increase the workload burden on other staff in the organisation, and it is possible that this impacts on staff retention and recruitment" (Indecon 2020:33). Below are quotes from our focus groups that outline the impact of low levels of training:



Staff recruitment and retention is already a well-documented challenge within the sector. This underlines the importance of upskilling and reskilling as a means of developing and protecting people working in CV organisations.[3] Only 12% of respondents said their organisation would be unaffected by no change to current levels of training. This illustrates that current training levels need to increase to avoid a sector-wide negative impact.

Constraints on resources in the CV sector narrow the options of employers to ringfence discretionary spending such as workforce development. This is often due to a reliance on grant funding and other restricted income sources. As such, this concern over stagnation in training investment is particularly acute.

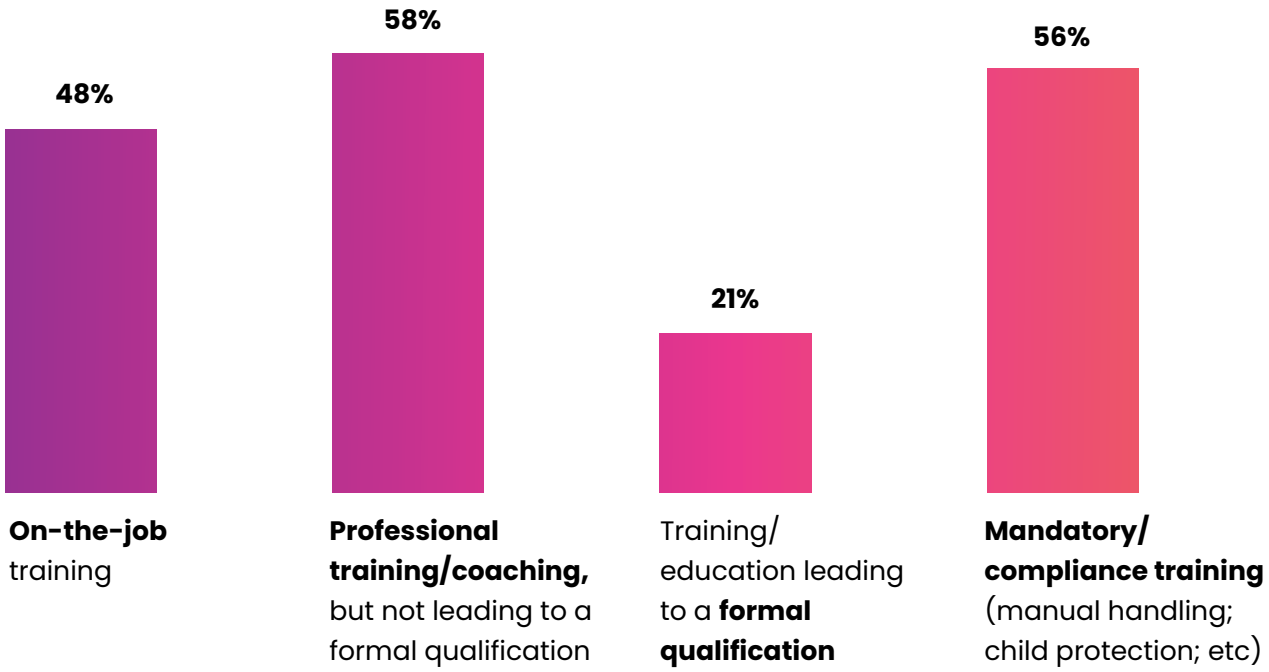
3 Talent Trends Q1 2026, 2into3; Pay and Benefits 2024, The Wheel ; The Future of Public Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector (2023), The Wheel & TASC

To illustrate the profile of training currently evident in the sector we asked staff, volunteers, and decision makers "What types of training related to your work have you done in the last 12 months?" The types of training that were accessed is illustrated below. More than one type could be selected.

Figure 4.10 Types of training accessed

What types of training related to your work have you done in the last 12 months? Tick all that apply

N: 400



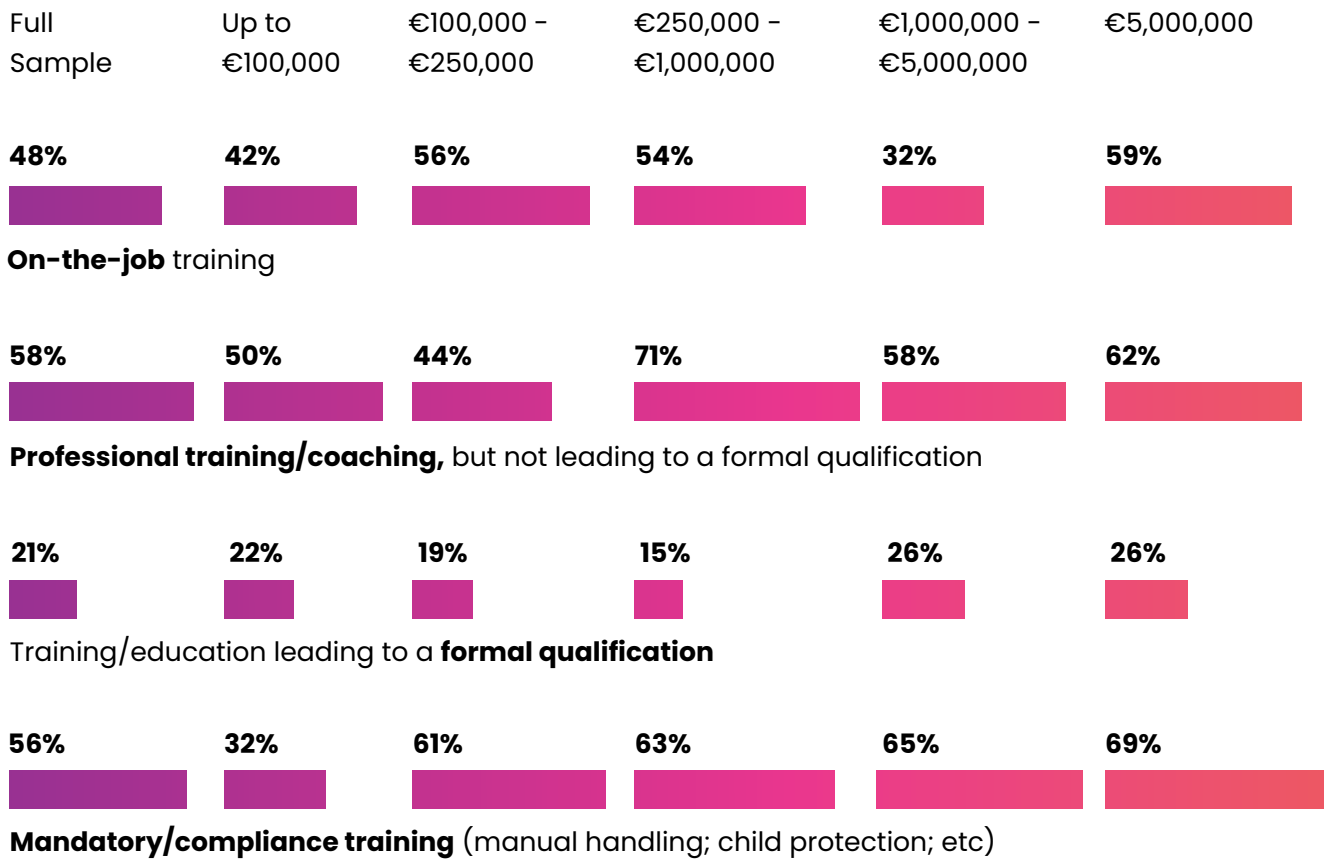
It is clear that professional and mandatory training are the leading types of training accessed, and that formal qualification engagement is low (21%).

The figure below highlights variations in the types of training people are doing according to their organisation's annual income.

Figure 4.11 Types of training by organisational annual income

What types of training related to your work have you done in the last 12 months? Tick all that apply

N: 400



Interestingly, as organisation grow in both size and income, they are more likely to spend time on "mandatory/compliance training". This is understandable given the growing complexity and risk involved in running larger organisations. In particular where organisations provide services in the health, social care, and disability sectors.

When resource constraints are considered, it is predictable that mandatory training will be prioritised. However, ongoing social and workplace transformations are happening around these organisations. These transformations make this prioritisation, at the expense of other learning and development, a false dichotomy. Decision makers' concerns about stagnant levels of training may reflect recognition of the need for more transformative training.

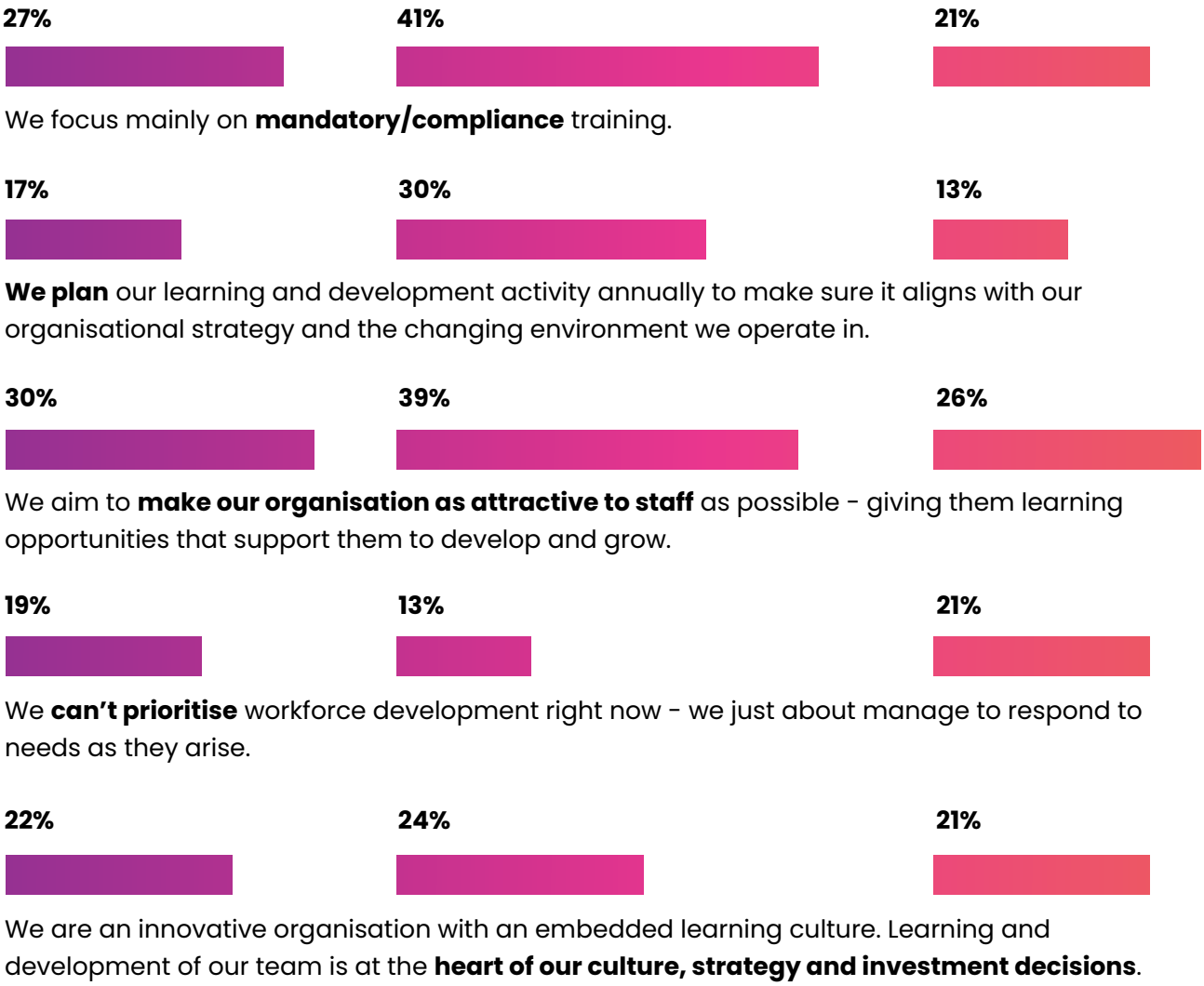
Strategic investment in learning and development

To gauge decision makers' strategic priorities when investing in upskilling, we asked, "In terms of your decision making when investing in learning and development for your team, rate the following statements in terms of how true they are for your organisation in the past year." The figure below shows answers for "definitely true" only and is separated by organisation size.

Figure 4.12 Learning and development statements by organisation size

In terms of your decision making when investing in learning and development for your team, rate the following statements in terms of how true they are for your organisation in the past year.

N: 245



The pressures on organisations around staffing and compliance are evident in the results above. We see also a firm focus in both smaller and larger organisations on training as a means of supporting and developing workers and meeting regulatory requirements. More work could be done to enable organisations of all sizes to explore using training and development at a strategic level. This would allow these organisations to unlock innovation as well as organisational and sectoral responses to social transformations.

Only 13% of small organisations say they "plan our learning and development activity annually to make sure it aligns with our organisational strategy and the changing environment we operate in." Overall, this research shows that smaller organisations are generally at a much lower level of strategic maturity than larger organisations.

Positive Impact of rolling out necessary training

We asked the decision makers: "If by this time next year your organisation has been able to invest in and roll out necessary training, how would you rate the benefits you'd expect to see?"

The benefits were analysed in terms of what were ranked as "Very significant" and "Significant". Respondents anticipate that the top three benefits would be (separated by size):

If by this time next year your organisation has been able to invest in and roll out necessary training, how would you rate the benefits you'd expect to see?

Table 4.3 Top three benefits of rolling our necessary training.

N: 191

	Full base	Small	Large
1	**86%** Lead to better staff morale and wellbeing	**83%** Lead to better staff morale and wellbeing	**96%** Increase staff retention
2	**84%** Enhance quality of services	**82%** Enhance quality of services	**94%** Lead to better staff morale and wellbeing
3	**79%** Ease the introduction of new working practices and improve productivity	**77%** Help access new income streams / funding opportunities	**91%** Improve productivity



This focus on the staffing impacts of increased training is reflective of the recruitment and retention trends already noted.

Key takeaway

Our research indicates that if current training levels remain the same, there will be a sector-wide negative impact. Our data also details the specific benefits that organisations anticipate due to rolling out necessary training in the next year. These benefits differ across organisational size showing us the wide-ranging benefit of training to the sector. This also highlights the variety of positive impacts that training enables in Ireland's diverse CV sector.

There is more work needed to support organisations in claiming the full range of benefits that workforce development can bring. These benefits can include future-focused innovation and strategic responsiveness at organisation level. However, there is evidence that organisations are aware of the potential that upskilling can bring.

4.3 There is a significant **Digital Skills Gap** in the sector that requires an all-level upskilling approach

Our survey revealed that 55% of respondents need some or significant upskilling in digital tools. This rises to 75% for AI (Artificial Intelligence). When we ask decision makers, this is even higher. Decision makers' top two organisational upskilling priorities being "Use of AI tools" (87%), and "Digital tools except AI" (85%).

Our focus group participants told us that they are seeing foundational IT literacy skills being ignored. They also noted this is happening while they are trying to keep pace with advanced digital transformation, specifically AI adoption.

> We need more targeted resources for basic digital skills. We are leap frogging over the basics when it's obvious that more resources on foundational digital skills would be really beneficial.
>
> **Training Manager from a small housing charity**



Respondents consistently raised a digital skills gap as a problem for a variety of stakeholders. This was true from small to large organisations and across charitable purposes and subsectors. It was noted that basic IT skills were being overlooked and that organisations still need support in training volunteers and employees with foundational digital literacy. These included examples like logging on and off, joining Teams calls, and sending emails.

They highlighted the need for a skills scaffolding approach that builds foundational digital competence rather than skipping over these learning steps. Skipping over these steps could lead to potential competency gaps, reliance on AI to complete tasks, or both. This echoes exploratory findings from a study carried out by The Wheel and NALA in 2024. This study found that almost 3 in 10 respondents in the sector had met a challenge with at least one basic digital skill (2024b:2).

The latest DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index) findings indicate that 83% of the adult population has basic digital skills (2026). Further research is required to identify if a greater proportion of the CV workforce is indeed challenged when it comes to basic digital skills.

In the context of the Government's Digital Public Services Plan 2030 and the ambition of public service transformation that it promises, this digital skills lag in the CV sector is concerning. As noted earlier, the sector is a key partner of the state in the provision of public services. At least one in three workers delivering public services is working in the CV sector.

The growing penetration of AI tools into all aspects of the workplace has been reiterated in the Government's National Digital and AI Strategy, Digital Ireland (2026). This emphasises how this potential digital skills gap is now even more pressing.



There is clear evidence of a digital skills gap that is complicated by an AI skills gap among CV workers. In addition, there is a lack of a "house view" in the sector in terms of strategic direction.

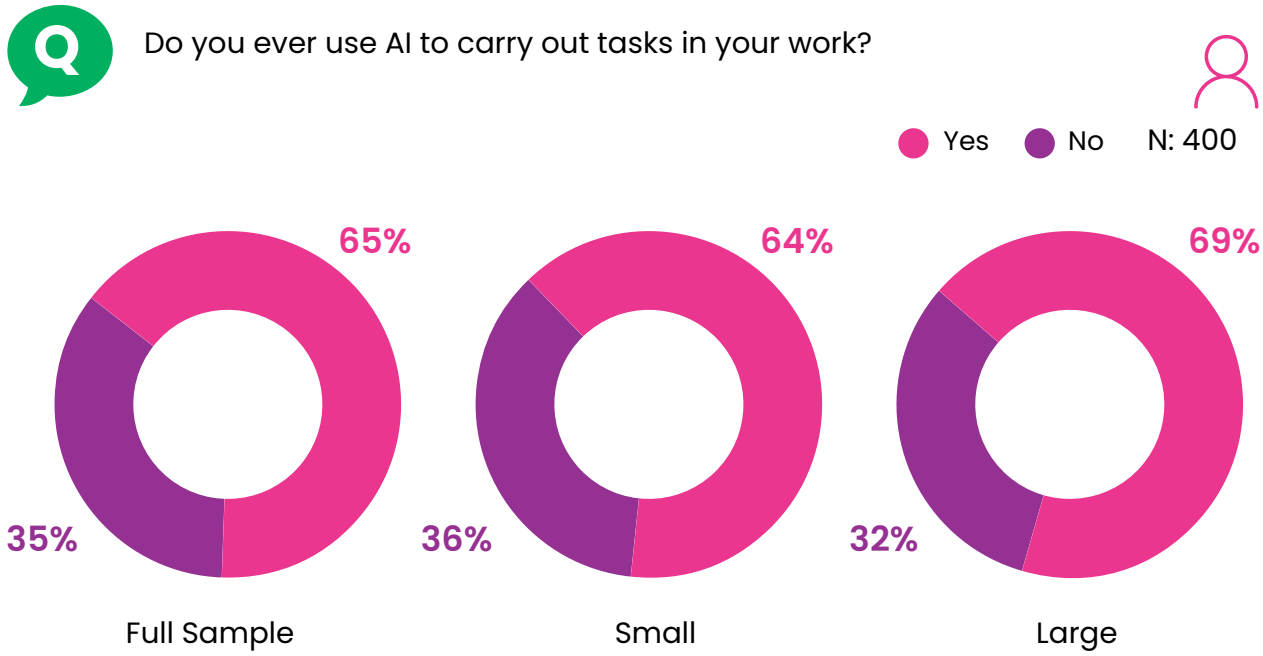
While 72% noted that "Foundational skills" (literacy; numeracy) were adequate, 20% said their organisation needed some or significant upskilling in this area. This represents one in five decision makers highlighting this specific skills gap. The focus-group feedback we received about the risk of "leapfrogging" over basic literacy is mirrored in our survey data.

Clarity within the sector on the required digital and AI competencies, and their various levels, would be helpful to this work. This could be furthered by drawing on established frameworks such as DigComp 3.0, the fifth version of the European Digital Competence Framework (Cosgrave and Cachia, 2025).

Confidence Using Digital and AI

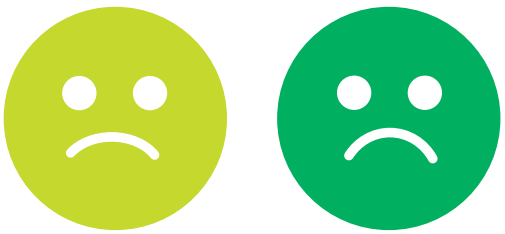
The reported need for AI upskilling is clear. But what about worker's use of AI and their confidence in that use? When asked, "do you ever use AI to carry out tasks in your work?", 65% of respondents said "yes." When the organisational size was compared, the difference was slight. For ages under 25-34 the rate is 69%. We see lower rates for those over 60, where 54% selected "yes" for using AI to carry out tasks in their work.

Figure 4.13 AI in the workplace



Almost two thirds of the sector workforce using AI. Yet, their levels of confidence in doing so are relatively low. Figure 4.14 shows the confidence of those who use these tools.

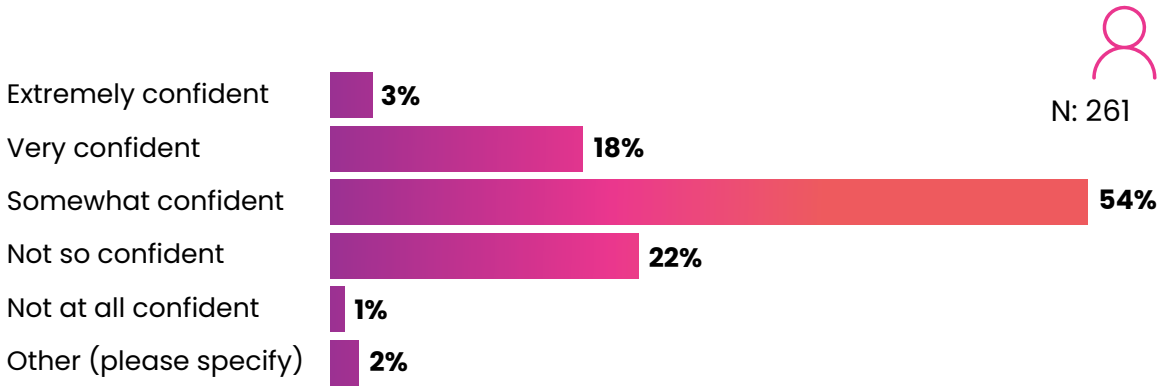




Almost a quarter of those who use AI stated that they are "**not so**" or "**not at all confident**".

Figure 4.14 Confidence rate for using AI tools in role

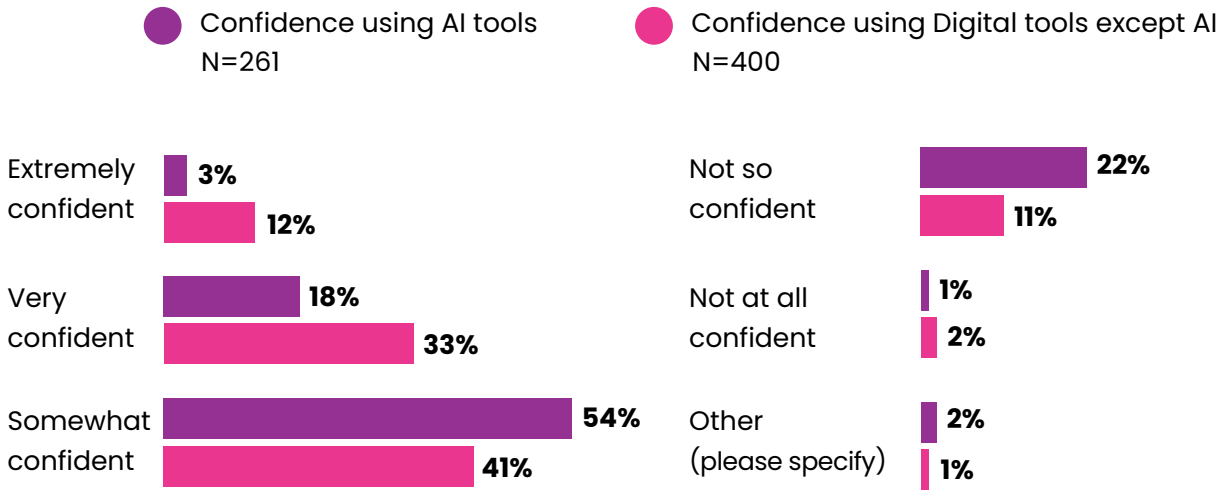
How would you rate your confidence in using AI tools for your role?



It is insightful to compare the responses to the question "How would you rate your confidence in using AI tools for your role?" N=261 with " How would you rate your confidence in using digital tools (except AI) for your role? " N=400. Responses are illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 4.15 Confidence Comparison: AI versus Digital

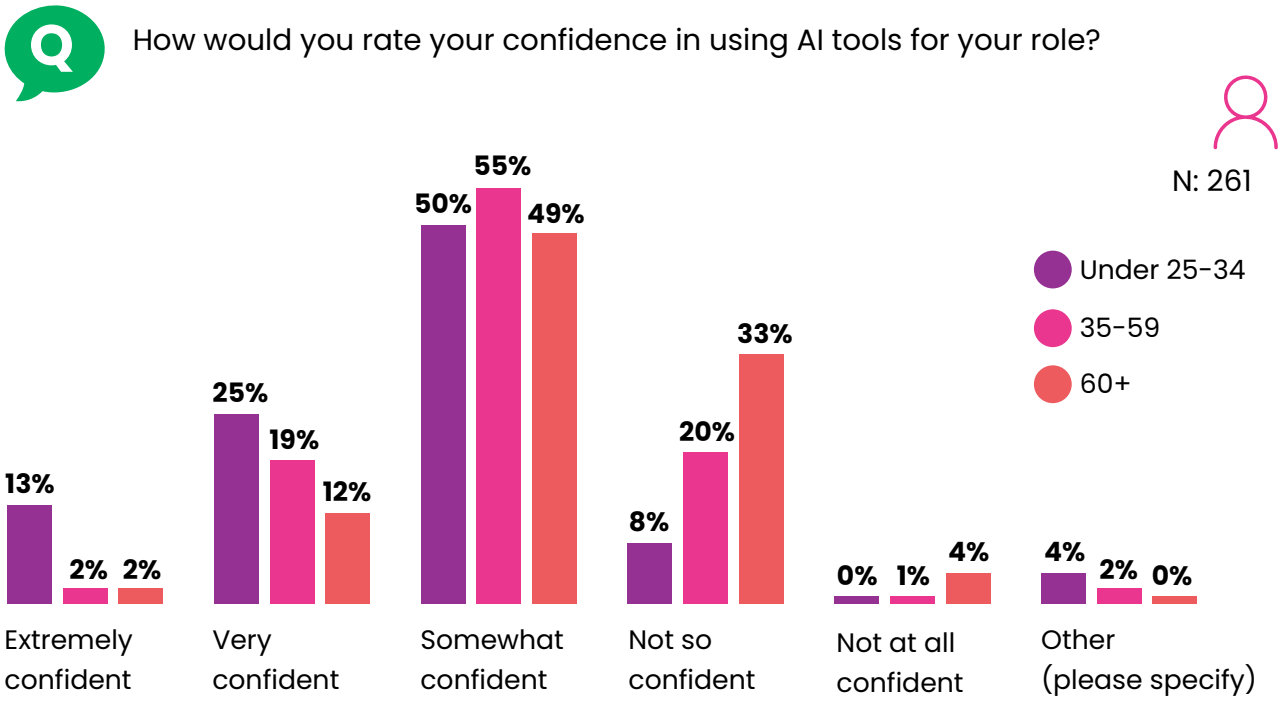
How would you rate your confidence in using AI tools for your role? Comparison with confidence level in digital skills except AI



As illustrated above, there are lower rates of "very confident" and "extremely confident" when using AI tools. This is to be expected with a new tool. Coupled with double the rate of "not so confident", this data shows the need for sector wide AI training, especially when we consider the high amount of use.

The difference across age cohorts is like confidence levels with "tools except AI". The breakdown by age for confidence level using AI tools is illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 4.16 Comparison in the use of AI across age cohorts



The data shows that younger workers are leading in confidence in their use of AI. However, where they rated 83% "very confident" or "extremely confident" for other digital tools, this fell significantly to 38% for AI tools. For people over 60, they reported "not so confident" and "not at all confident" at the highest rate (37%). While the 35-59 cohort reported 52% combined for "very confident" or "extremely confident" for tools except AI, this fell to 21% for AI use. This shows a marked reduction in confidence across generations and a need to upskill at every age cohort. This will help to ensure that younger workers and volunteers are not assumed to be experts. It will also ensure that older workers and volunteers are not left behind.

AI is an emerging tool, we are currently reviewing and developing an AI policy, and organising AI training for staff

Senior CV leader

I am confident but suspicious

Administrator in rural support service



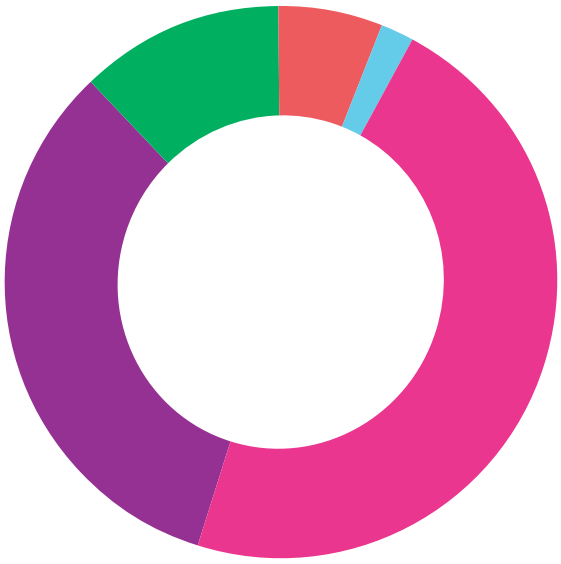
Strategic approach to Digital Transformation

Our survey included a batch of questions for decision makers in organisations with over 50 employees (N=49). The following illustrates their responses when asked "Which of the following best describes your organisation's approach to using digital tools (except AI):

Figure 4.17 Strategic Approach to Digital Transformation

Which of the following best describes your organisation's approach to using digital tools (except AI)"

N: 49



12%
An annual digital strategy with associated budget

6%
We have undergone a Digital Transformation process

2%
Other (please specify)

33%
No formal approach (ad hoc only)

47%
Some formal planning

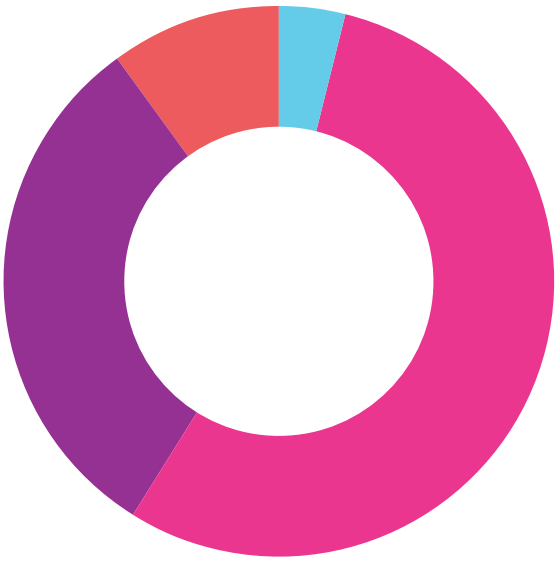
33% have "no formal approach" to the use of digital tools, with 47% having some formal planning place. Only 20% demonstrate a mature level of organisational strategic planning around digital transformation, with 6% reporting they've "undergone a Digital Transformation process". Unsurprisingly, the rate of formal planning for AI is even lower, as illustrated in Figure 4.18.



Figure 4.18 Strategic Approach to AI

Which of the following best describes your organisation's approach to Artificial Intelligence

N: 49



10%
We have a digital strategy that will over time incorporate AI elements

4%
We have a strategic AI plan in place with associated budget

31%
Some formal planning

55%
No formal approach (ad hoc only)

14% report some form of AI strategy embedding; 31% have "some formal planning", and 55% have "no formal approach". Considering the rates of AI use in the wider sample (65% using AI tools currently) the lack of a formal approach to AI in most large organisations is concerning.



The respondents here are drawn from larger organisations with likely **more resources and structures** to support formalising approaches to digital and AI. As such, **more research** is needed to understand the sector-wide picture.



As an international comparison, the UK's Charity Digital Skills Report (2026:6) found that:

79% of UK charities are using AI.

Successive studies over the past two years in the UK have seen a decrease of 20% in the number of charities that have reported struggling with, or not using, AI (2026:38). This indicates a rapidly evolving picture.

Key takeaway

The sector is faced with foundational skills challenges. It also faces challenges in equipping its workforce with appropriate digital skills levels to address a rapidly changing 21st century workplace. Not to mention the introduction of digital public service delivery mechanisms.

On top of this, the sector needs to assess the risks and seize the potential opportunities of ethical AI use. AI is the most disruptive innovative technology we have encountered in decades. To upskill the sector in the most effective way possible, basic digital skill competencies need to be assessed and catered for. This must be achieved in tandem with more advanced AI learning.

Further research is required to fully assess the digital maturity of the sector and to understand the levers required to undertake its digital transformation.

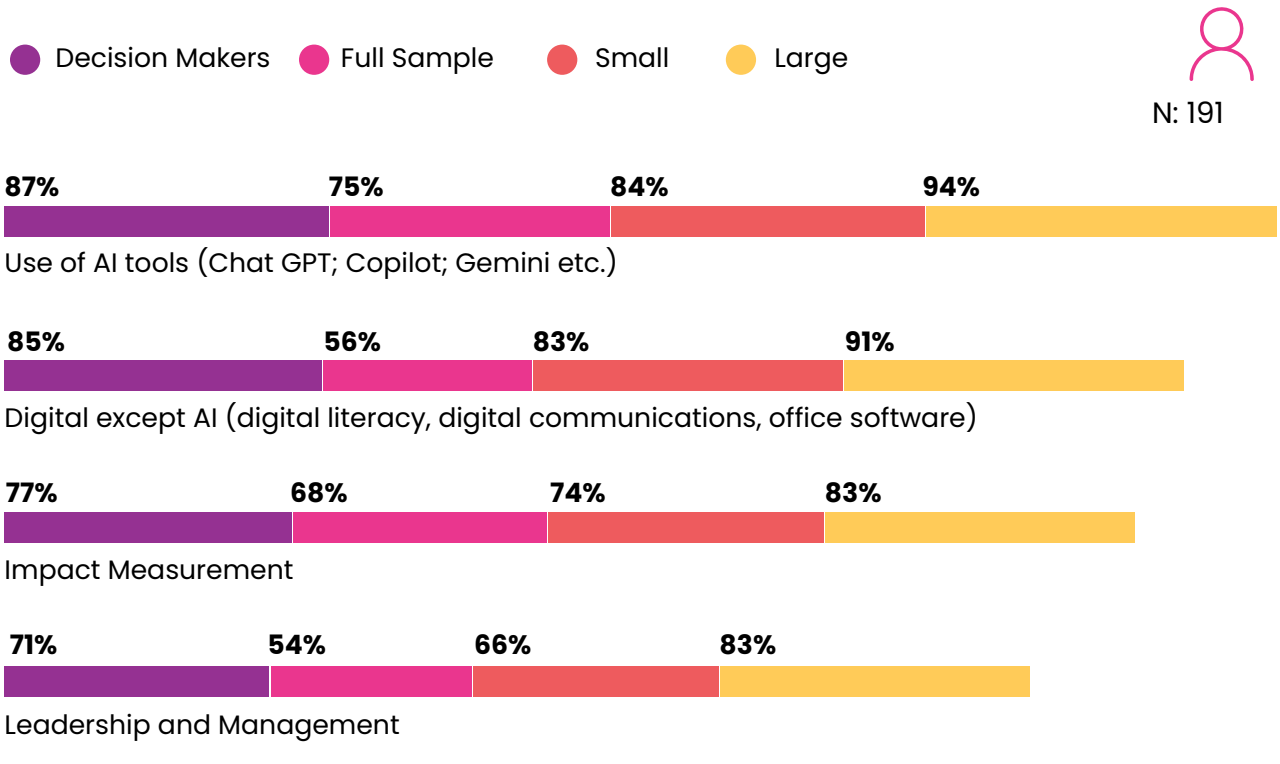
4.4 There is a clear need and **high demand** for sector-specific upskilling

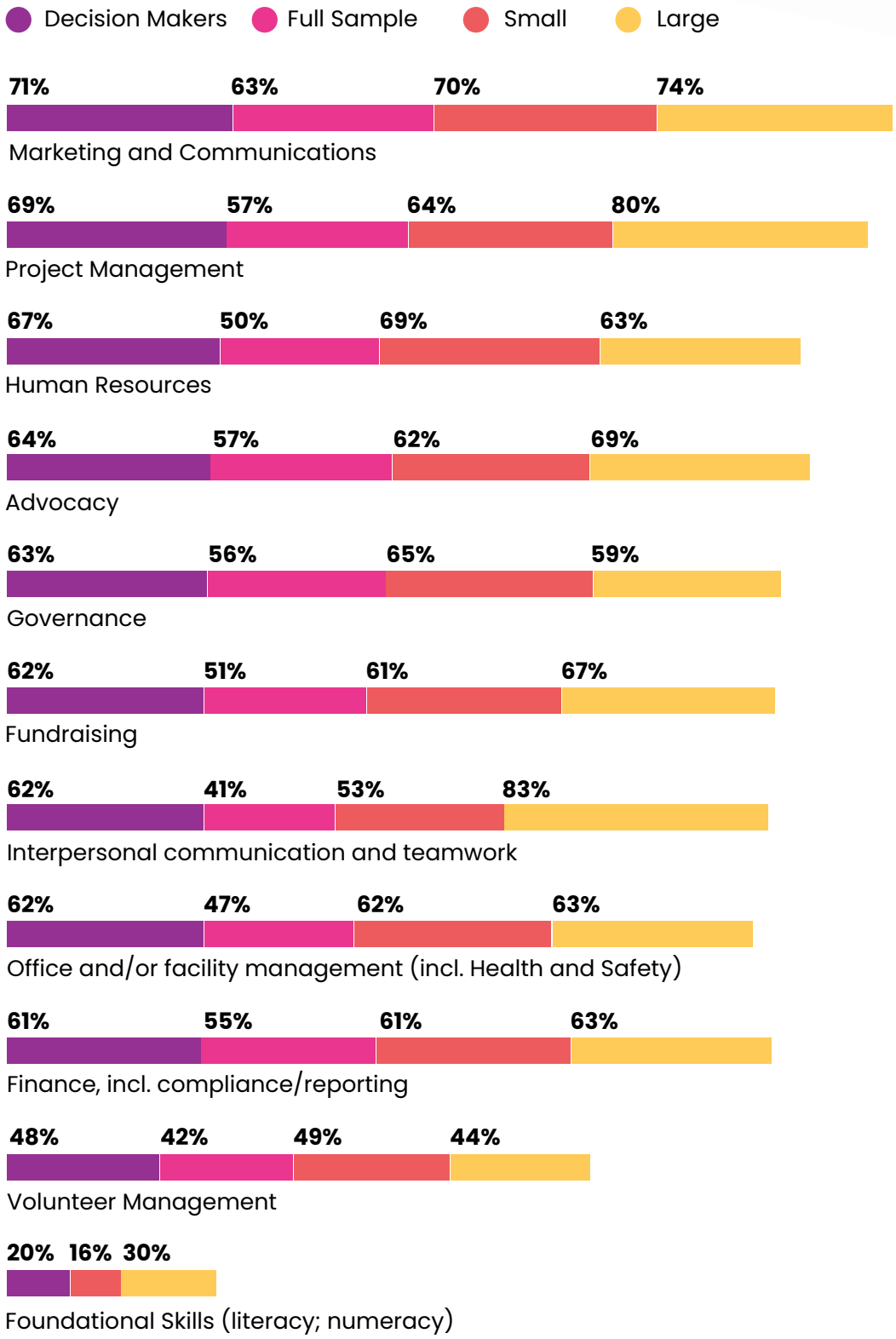
The Wheel's skills survey gathered insights on current skills gaps. The survey revealed that 68% (272 out of 400) of respondents indicated that they needed "significant upskilling." This was true in one or more of the skills listed in our survey. This further underlines the clear appetite for upskilling in the sector workforce. This report has detailed the digital skills gap in the previous section. This section will focus on sector-specific skills needs.

The chart below shows the ranking of skills where both "some" and "significant upskilling" are combined. This gives a more all-inclusive view of skills gaps than just focusing on the significant upskilling ranking. It is also separated out for decision makers, the full base (including staff and volunteers), and small and large organisations. Please note that the full base results do not show "foundational skills" as we only asked decision makers this question.

Figure 4.19 Skills that need significant upskilling

In your organisation, what is the general level of ability in the following skills?





As noted in our previous finding, both Digital (except AI) and AI skills are ranked highly for all segments. Setting aside these skills sets, we note the sector-specific nature of many of the upskilling needs featured.

These include

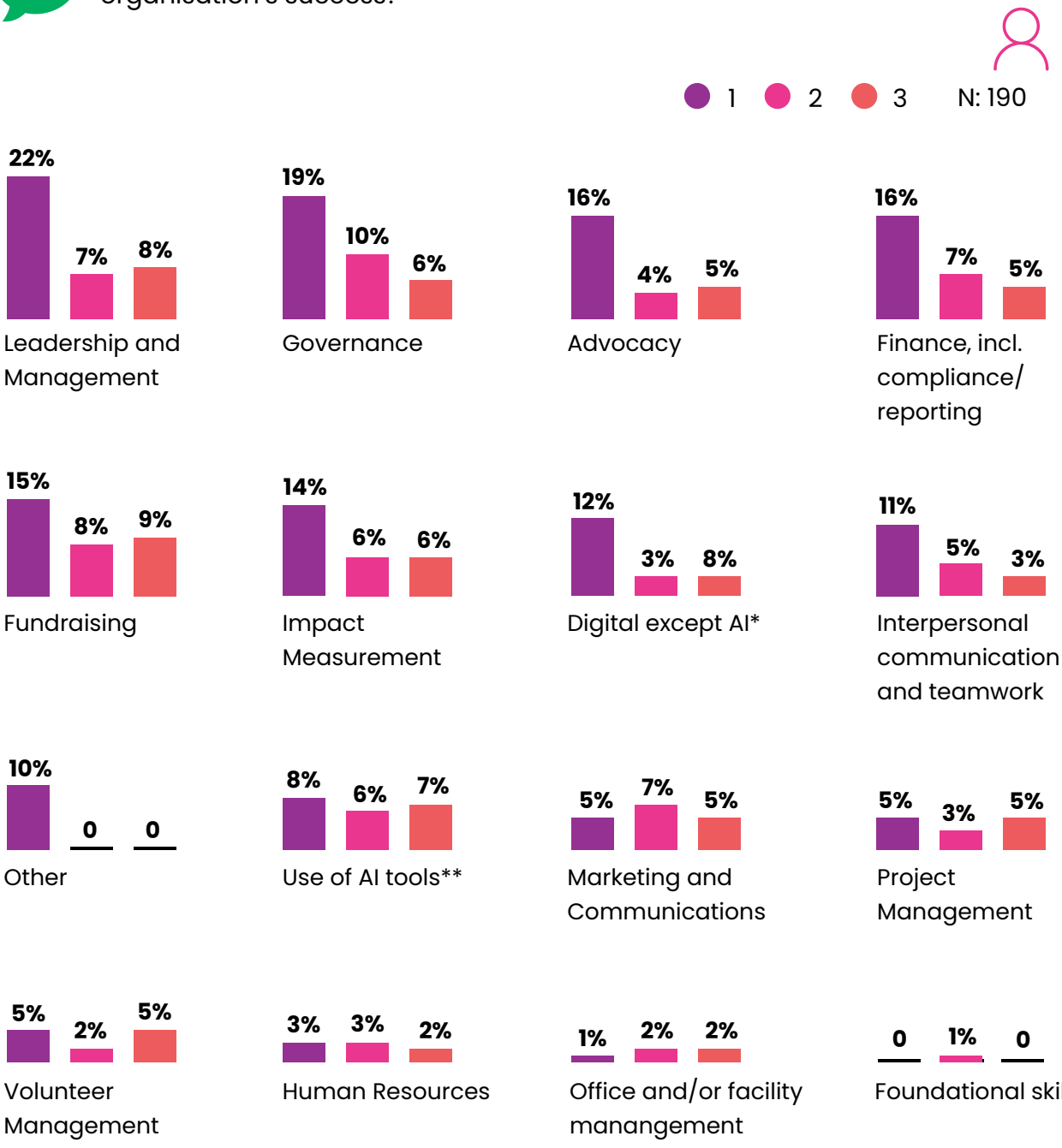
- Impact Measurement;
- Leadership;
- Advocacy;
- Governance; and,
- Fundraising.

Future Skills Needs

We can also look beyond the day-to-day focus and shift to a more strategic view of the sector's skills situation. We asked decision makers to rank the critical importance of these same skills for the sector in 2030. The chart below visualises the results.

Figure 4.20 Future Skills Needs

Imagine it's 2030, what top 3 skills are going to be critical to your organisation's success?

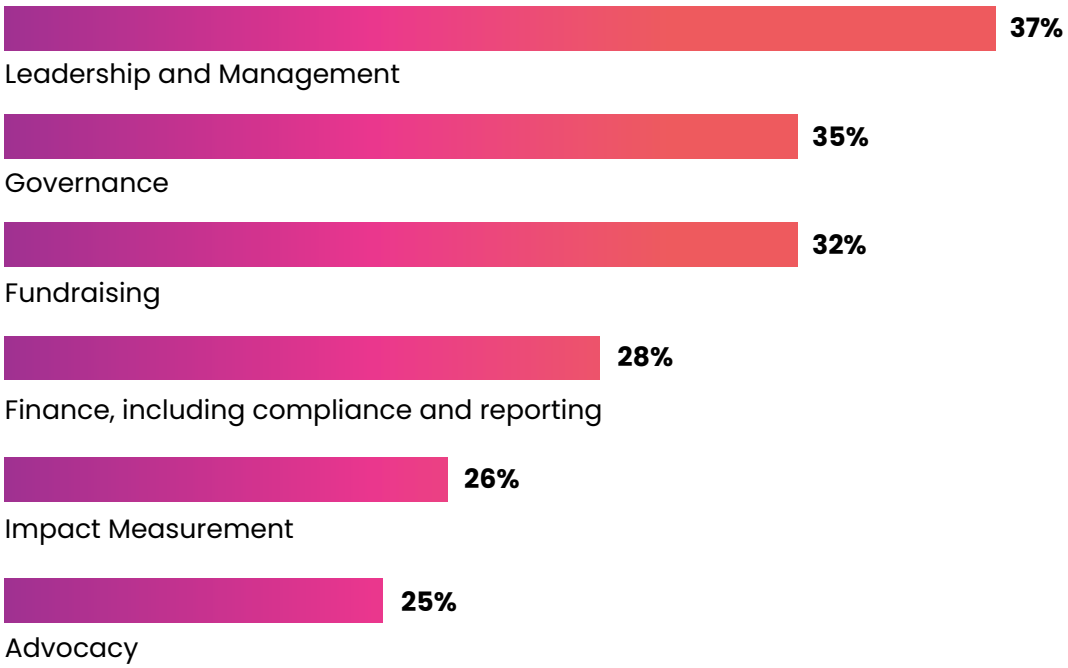


* Digital literacy, digital communications, office software

** Chat GPT; Copilot, Gemini etc.

*** Literacy, numeracy

The **top six emerging skills** ranked in the top three by respondents are:



For the 10% of respondents who selected "other", they mentioned "change management" frequently. This was articulated by a senior leader in one of our focus groups. They said:

> Keeping pace with the rate and modes of change is a skill in itself.
>
> **Senior Social Enterprise leader**

Another participant working in community development said:

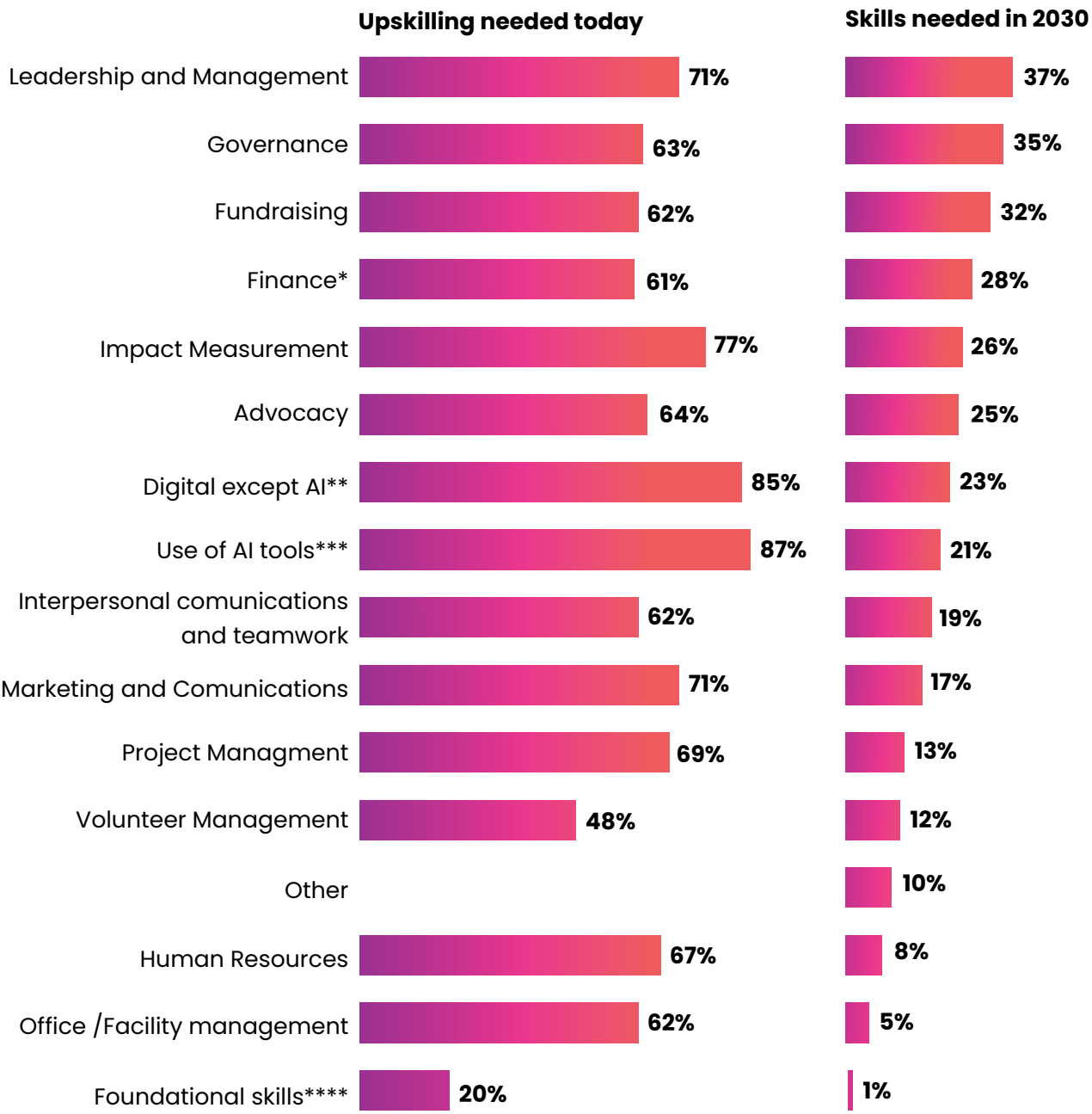
> We will badly need what I would call people skills or face-to-face communication skills [...] I'd rank these as following:
>
> 1. Relationship-based practice,
> 2. Working in anti-bias workplaces,
> 3. Critical thinking and its application.
>
> **Youth worker**

Digital and AI skills slip to 7th and 8th place respectively when decision makers consider emerging skills needs. This indicates the persistent importance of cross-cutting sector-specific skills over time and beyond any predicted digitalisation or AI transition. The top six emerging skills incorporate both technical and relational aspects. All, however, require an in-depth understanding of the nonprofit context and operations.

Figure 4.21 Assessing the need for Future Skills

In your organisation, what is the general level of ability in the following skills

N: 191



* Incl. compliance/reporting

** Digital literacy, digital communications, office software

*** Chat GPT; Copilot; Gemini etc

**** Literacy; numeracy

Even though digital upskilling emerged as a clear need in our skills barometer data, respondents predict a future where **sector-specific**, and **people-centred skills** are key.



It is important to note that in our focus groups, **accessibility** was raised as a key issue (from learning to work with people who are visually impaired and older people to creating content compliant with the EU Accessibility Act) although not framed as a future skill, rather it was highlighted as the cornerstone of creating an inclusive sector of the future.



We now explore the top **six emerging skills** mentioned above.

Leadership and Management

Ranked: First place

Just over one in three respondents rank Leadership and Management (37%) to be a top three future skill for the sector. Our focus group attendees mentioned a need for critical skills that fall under leadership.

Examples included:

- multi-annual strategic planning;
- change management;
- succession planning; and,
- leading and serving culturally competent teams.

In a recent report conducted by the Charity Learning Consortium in the UK, the authors sum up the importance of getting this skillset right for the sector:

> "Organisations are undergoing a huge transformation... we need leaders capable of getting us there [...]Technical excellence doesn't automatically translate into leadership effectiveness. Charities must build that bridge intentionally for those promoted" (2026:10).

Governance

Ranked: Second place

Of our respondents, 35% ranked Governance as a key skill for the sector in 2030. This continuing skills trend can be traced back to Indecon's 2020 assessment. There, 54% of respondents predicted a "very significant increase in demand" in governance. Governance is key to the legal and cultural health of the sector. When done right, governance has many benefits for organisations, for example:

- improved decision making and accountability;
- enhanced reputation and trust with funders and the public; and,
- greater transparency for stakeholders.

Cahill (2021) highlighted the need for upskilling staff and boards on governance. The report specifically named:

- understanding roles and legal duties;
- running effective meetings;
- working with the CEO;
- getting transparent and understandable information about strategy and finances;
- recruiting and managing board members; and,
- complying with Charities Governance Code (2021:18)

Fundraising

Ranked: Third place

32% ranked Fundraising as a key skill for the sector in 2030. Small organisations (under 50 employees) ranked this skill as their number one for skills they will need in 2030. Our focus group participants said it is "hard to get skilled fundraisers". They also said that peer-to-peer training in this area would be hugely beneficial.

Cahill (2021:6) highlighted the need for support in fundraising, specifically:

> "exploring options including statutory, philanthropic, fundraising, earned income, social finance; funding map that sets out who funds what and funding deadlines; dealing with funding process, including assistance with filling out application forms; developing a business model and business plan, including building markets for services or products; dealing with procurement and commissioning process; complying with reporting requirements; advice on fundraising methods; setting up online fundraising."

Finance

Ranked: Fourth place

28% of respondents ranked Finance, including compliance and reporting in the top three future skills for the sector. Across the labour market in Ireland 11% of all difficult-to-fill roles are in the financial area (SLMRU; November 2025). Our focus group participants noted "we have skills shortages for finance, auditing, insurance and compliance. This is complicated by multiple guidelines at national and EU level, and we just don't have capacity in place."

Cahill (2021:1) reported that support was needed for

> "book-keeping; payroll; financial reporting; protecting against fraud."

Another focus group participant, with decades of sector experience, said they need help maintaining a

> recession proof organisation, someone to lead on financial growth and long-term sustainability.
>
> **Finance manager in a national charity**



Impact Measurement

Ranked: Fifth place

The CV sector constantly seeks to effectively communicate the impact it creates to society, funders and service users. It is not surprising, then, that "impact measurement" was ranked a top-three upskilling need by by 26% of staff, volunteers, and decision makers.

The "Trading for Impact": National Social Enterprise Policy (2024–2027) accelerated the awareness of impact evaluation in Ireland. It also highlighted the importance of impact measurement in Ireland's national economic strategy. Impact metrics are now actively linked to public procurement, social finance, and the green transition. These are given further impetus by the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive.

One in four participants in our survey cite Impact Measurement (26%) as a top future skill for the sector.

Cahill (2021:18) highlighted that those she consulted needed help

> "developing a theory of change; deciding relevant data to collect and setting up appropriate data management systems; how to interpret and communicate the findings".

> Impact measurement is key - learning how to measure success and knowing what success looks like is becoming increasingly important from both a funding and comms perspective
>
> **Senior leader in a small nonprofit**



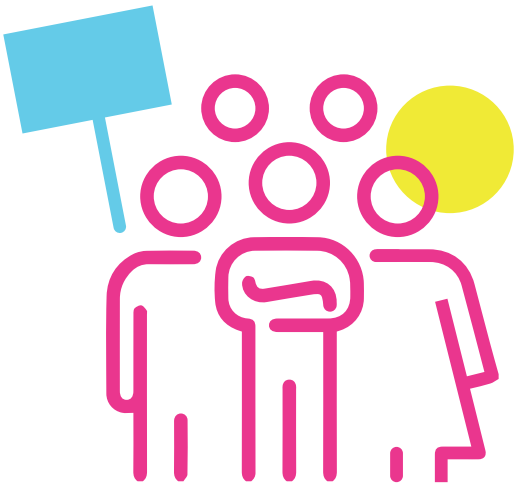
Advocacy

Ranked: Sixth place

The importance of advocacy has been noted widely and internationally (Košir 2024). Our data shows that respondents see this skill as key to the sector's future success. One in four of our survey respondents ranked advocacy as a top three future skill.

Advocacy skills in the sector can include a range of different activities. For example, advocacy can represent:

- specific skillsets and actions in organisations that support or act on behalf of individuals seeking to enact their rights; and
- activities related to seeking systemic or policy change and interacting with the political or civic system to bring about that change.



The CV sector in Ireland must be a leader in advocacy excellence. This is true whether the focus is on translating policy into practice or providing legal advocacy to service users. Indecon (2020:32) noted that 21% of their respondents predicted a "Very significant increase in demand in advocacy". One example of how this increase has come to fruition is evidenced by Sage Advocacy's Annual Report 2024. This report states that Sage's advocacy service grew by 56% from 2023-2024 (Sage 2025). In our focus groups, "Rights-based advocacy" was mentioned as an area that needs significant upskilling. This was mentioned by people working in disparate fields within the CV sector, such as health-related and immigration services.

In conclusion, this section outlined sector-specific skill needs and the top future skills identified by our survey and focus group. It is important to place our sector workforce development trends in the context of previous research (e.g. Indecon 2020 and Cahill 2021). However, the data provided here illustrates up-to-date skills gaps that need to be addressed. This is clearly needed to rise to the challenges that the sector will face in 2030.

Foundational Skills

Foundational skills were ranked the lowest in terms of future skills. When decision makers were asked to rate their organisational ability in this category, "adequate" scored highest at 72%.

However, 20% said that some upskilling was needed in foundational numeracy or literacy in their organisation today.



That is **one in five** decision makers noting that workers need additional support in foundational skills.

This goes up to 30% in larger organisation and down to 16% in smaller organisations.

The fact that 20% of decision makers think sector workers in their organisations need foundational skills support should be considered carefully. This is particularly true when organising training responses to skills gaps that provide an important basis for learning and development more generally. Without these foundational skills workers will be disadvantaged. These skills are most important in terms of:

- acquiring the other skills needed to advance in their careers;
- partake in education; and,
- take their full part in democratic and civic life.

Key takeaway

The CV sector is fuelled by workers and volunteers with a unique set of sector-specific skills. The sector experiences the effects of wider workforce, economic, and social trends. But sector-specific skills continue to be in high demand.

The top six emerging skills ranked by respondents are:

- Leadership and Management (**37%**);
- Governance (**35%**);
- Fundraising (**32%**);
- Finance, including compliance and reporting (**28%**);
- Impact Measurement (**26%**); and,
- Advocacy (**25%**).

Smaller organisations rank **Fundraising** over Leadership and larger organisations rank **AI skills** in their top three.

4.5 A **consolidated, strategic approach** to sector skills data and research is needed

The process of conducting this research programme and the findings that have emerged as a result have revealed a lack of sector data. Specifically, there are systemic blocks to accessing quality, up-to-date information that could inform the sector skills agenda.

According to our research participants, they face difficulties when trying to conduct skills gap assessments or build policy submissions. Specfically, the databases that would strengthen sectoral research insights are either non-existent, incompatible with existing datasets, or publicly unavailable.

The OECD have identified a need to "strengthen the collection, exchange and use of skills information" in Ireland. They refer to the need for a more comprehensive and detailed approach to the collection of skills data (OECD, 2023: 242). Our research indicates clear gaps that exist relating to CV sector workforce and skills in Ireland's data infrastructure.



Data on the sector

There is a lack of data on the CV sector since Benefacts ceased operation in 2021. The CSO, SLMRU, OECD, Eurostat, and the Charities Regulator collect some data on skills that can be useful when assembling CV skills data. However, these key sources of information have limitations and gaps and cannot substitute a purpose-built sectoral data dashboard.

The key challenges the CV data sphere currently faces are outlined below:

1. Lack of a standardised approach to how the sector collects data and how data is collected on behalf of the sector (for example, a sector data taxonomy and agreed units of measurement);
2. Lack of up-to-date data on training levels e.g. latest CVT (Continuing Vocational Training) data is from 2020.
3. Low compatibility with existing datasets on national skills and the sector's role in that space;
4. Little to no information on entities that are not registered charities;
5. Inability to extract the CV sector as an "economic sector" in the CSO's labour market statistics
6. Lack of spatial data on where nonprofits operate and carry out their work
7. Data silos within subsections of the sector mean that comparability is difficult or impossible

The lack of coordination on patterns of data collection results in duplication of data collection and collection saturation and "survey fatigue"

The pre-budget submissions from The Wheel and the Charities Institute Ireland both highlight the need for strategic and financial investment. The Wheel describes this as needed "for the development of a codesigned, accessible database on the sector that meets the needs of organisations, researchers, policymakers, and funders" (The Wheel, 2026:11).

Data for the sector

There are varying degrees of awareness of existing key training and skills information for the sector.

Gaps in information about training offered

There are information gaps, which leave many CV sector employers not knowing where to access information about relevant upskilling opportunities. We heard that it is difficult to access relevant and timely training information and that is experienced as disconnected or incomplete.

The focus groups revealed that there is a real need for a consolidated information hub such as a "Skills Portal." Such a hub would provide a place where important dates and upcoming deadlines for training and funding are listed. There were several requests for a downloadable excel list of all the training that is on offer in the sector.

Facilitating a site where all or most sector skills training events can be listed, signposted, or both in one place would mitigate frustration. This would help address a perceived lack of information consolidation on current skills and training offerings. Part of addressing this issue may be refreshing communications on existing sites and resources to new and existing stakeholders.

Gaps in Skills Needs Assessment information

Our research revealed a skills gap in the sector. We also heard that people working to address these gaps in the sector require an accessible Skills Needs Assessment tool. Our focus group participants consistently called for a standardised tool that generates a report using sector specific language.

It is important to recognise that the sector is diverse and that one tool may not suit the whole sector. It is, however, apparent that an assessment tool would help to consolidate a shared language, barometer, and future benchmark for sector skills.

Key takeaway

There is a lack of consolidated data for CV training and skills in Ireland. This is expressed by a shortage of data on sector labour statistics and up-to-date sector skills datasets. There is also a lack of harmonised resource signposting and assessment tools for the sector.

Our research has corroborated this data gap. It has also uncovered some potential solutions to achieve a future where the CV sector is enabled to access essential information that underpins its vital work throughout the country.



05

Conclusions and Recommendations

5. Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, our data shows that the CV sector has continued to develop a more engaged culture of workforce development since 2020. Sector employers are committed to upskilling and know the value and impact investing in training will bring.

There is a clear appetite for education and training opportunities among staff and volunteers, and across a range of established sector-specific skillsets. However, we have found that smaller organisations face specific challenges when it comes to strategically planning and investing in workforce development.

While barriers to upskilling remain, new social, economic, and technical challenges have emerged since 2020. Organisations of all sizes are juggling shifts in resources and transformation at increasingly rapid rates. This includes the expanding influence of AI. As is the case at a societal level, this necessitates renewed efforts across the CV sector. These efforts are needed at all levels and among all stakeholders, to facilitate workforce learning and development as a central strategic priority and enabler.

Below are a set of recommendations based on our findings which we propose as a contribution towards this sectoral effort.

They are sorted into **four themes**:



The recommendations are relevant to a range of stakeholders within and beyond the sector. These include sector employers and representatives, education and training providers, policy makers, funders, and researchers.

Invest

	Recommendation	Finding
1	Increase provision, across the whole education and training system, of targeted, co-designed and low-cost upskilling measures. Ensure they are culturally appropriate for the community and voluntary sector, meeting proven unmet demand.	4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4
2	Extend provision of a cost-recovery incentivisation scheme to nonprofit employers, like the Upskill SME Training Grant (Skillnet 2026b)	4.1
3	Provide funding for a tiered digital upskilling programme for the sector from foundational to advanced levels. This will support a sustainable, inclusive, and empowered sector into the future.	4.3
4	Provide strategic and ongoing investment for the development of a codesigned national database on the sector. This database must meet the needs of organisations, researchers, policymakers, and funders.	4.5



Act

	Recommendation	Finding
5	Sector specialist training providers continue to build and develop accessible, sector-specific programmes that respond to the demand identified in this study, including: • Leadership and Management; • Governance; • Fundraising; • Finance; • Impact Measurement; and, • Advocacy.	4.1; 4.4
6	Establish a sector-led Learning and Development Network to provide real-time intelligence, peer knowledge sharing, and support an emergent shared sectoral understanding of workforce development needs. These include shaping competency frameworks, sector-skills needs assessment capacity, and career pathway models.	4.1; 4.4; 4.5
7	In partnership with sector skills leaders, explore the opportunity of a "Skills Portal", like the National Enterprise Hub, that would provide up-to-date information and signposting regarding workforce development.	4.1; 4.5
8	Sector partnership to provide guidance on digital skills needs assessment within the CV sector. Work to be undertaken with sector expertise to utilise DigComp 3.0 (Cosgrave and Cachia, 2025) as a basis for shared sector understanding.	4.3
9	Continue to build capacity to involve CV sector expertise in shaping the national skills agenda. Achieve this through contributions at National Skills Council and the National Skills Observatory.	4.4; 4.5



Research

	Recommendation	Finding
10	Scope the requirements and means to address the needs and constraints, of smaller organisations. Particularly where investment in, planning for, and commitment to training lags well behind larger organisations.	4.1;
11	Conduct research on how best to unlock the innovation and strategic benefits of upskilling for the sector. Explore, for example, knowledge sharing and peer networks, and how to support sector organisations to make the most of these opportunities.	4.2; 4.3; 4.4
12	Conduct further research to fully assess the digital maturity of the sector. Explore the levers required to undertake a digital transformation at sector and sub-sectoral levels.	4.3
13	Assess and cater for basic digital skill competencies within the sector workforce, in tandem with AI learning.	4.3
14	Assess the risks and seize the potential opportunities of ethical AI use. Establish a consultative group to report on acceptable use for AI in the sector.	4.3



Advocate

	Recommendation	Finding
15	Advocate that State funders provide an additional allocation for training and workforce development of between 0.5 - 1% of payroll allocation.	4.1
16	Recommend and support organisations to ringfence funding for training within organisational budgets and strategies.	4.1
17	Advocate for the extension of funding, already available to private firms, to subsidise training related actions. Key models to examine should include, for example, Upskilling SMEs cost recovery programme and Digital Transformation voucher schemes.	4.1; 4.3
18	Advocate for a nationwide workplace literacy programme. This programme will provide flexible, accessible literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy programmes, free at the point of access.	4.1; 4.3; 4.4
19	Advocate for a proactive campaign to encourage the engagement of CV sector employers with Regional Skills Forum structures.	4.1; 4.5





06

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07

Appendices

Annex 1: List of Tables and Figures

Figures

Readers can download data for the figures listed below via the hyperlinks. Each link brings you to the data visualisation site, Datawrapper, where the graph can be accessed. Readers can also download an excel file of the relevant data on Datawrapper by clicking "Get the data" underneath each graph.

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https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/dvapB/1/

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https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/GWKRo/1/

Figure 4.2 Lifelong learning across age cohorts
https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/UgX24/2/

Figure 4.3 Lifelong learning compared across organisation size
No hyperlink to Datawrapper, recorded as an average from survey data.

Figure 4.4 Comparison of learners who wanted to participate but could not
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https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/daGGY/2/

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https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/5f6VI/1/

Tables

Readers can download data for the figures listed below via the hyperlinks. Each link brings you to the data visualisation site, Datawrapper, where the graph can be accessed. Readers can also download an excel file of the relevant data on Datawrapper by clicking "Get the data" underneath each graph.

Table 2.1 Educational Attainment across EU27; Ireland; and The Wheel data

Table 2.2 Focus Top 5 compared with Charities Regulator (2026)

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Table 3.2 Lists of Datasets reviewed

Table 3.3 Sample segmentation for The Wheel's Training and Skills Survey 2026

Table 4.1 In the past 12 months, how much time have you spent on training

Table 4.2 Staff training budget disaggregated by annual income bracket

https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/qXPSs/1/

Table 4.3 Top three benefits of rolling our necessary training.

Annex 2: Approaches to measuring Lifelong Learning

The table below lists a selection of relevant organisations that collect this information, the specific question asked of respondents, and the % reported.

Organisation	Question asked	% reported greater than zero
The Wheel 2026	In the past four weeks, have you engaged in any learning opportunities (through either formal or informal education or training)? This can be related to your role in the sector or completely unrelated. **N=400**	**62%**
Skillnet 2025 See link	What percentage of your workforce recently engaged in upskilling/ training? **N=500**	**75%**
CSO the Labour Force Survey Q2 2026. See link	Have you attended any courses or evening classes outside the regular education system in the last four weeks? For example, a conference, a language course, driving lessons, art classes or instructor led exercise classes. Please also include any online courses. Do not include guided on the job training. **N=12,518**	**10.7%**
OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2022 See link	During the last 12 months, that is since ^MonthYear, have you participated in any training activity? Include any training activity even if it lasted for only one hour. Please also include training activities that are still ongoing. **N=160,000**	**Ireland 51.3%** **OECD 40.4%**

Annex 3: List of organisations that participated in this research*

2into3
A Partnership with Africa
Academy Street Workshop
Access I.T. CLG
Ace Enterprise Park
Action Community & Enterprise
Active Disability Ireland
Active Retirement Ireland
Adelaide Health Foundation
ADHD Ireland
Age & Opportunity
Aghada Community Council
All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care
Allenwood Campus
AllSkills Education CLG
Alone
Alternatives to Violence Project Ireland
An Taisce — the National Trust for Ireland
Ana Liffey Drug Project
Anam Cara
Annagh Watersports & Leisure Ltd
AONTAS
Aosog Child And Family Project
ARC Cancer Support Centres
Arthritis Ireland
Ashford Community Group
AslAm
Ataxia Foundation Ireland CLG
Aurora
Avista
Aware Ireland
Axis Ballymun
Balally Family Resource Centre
Balla Tidy Town
Ballyglunin Development Company
Bantry Development & Tourism
Barnardos
BeLong To Youth Services
Benchspace
Blackpool Community Co-Op Service Centre
Blakestown & Mountview Youth Initiative CLG
Blanchardstown Centre For Independent Living
Blanchardstown Local Drug & Alcohol TF
BLCC
Bluestack Special Needs Foundation
Bodywhys - The Eating Disorders Association of Ireland
Border Bounce Gym Club
Borris Town Hall Committee
Bóthar CLG
BOUNCE BACK RECYCLING
Boyle Active Age and Retirement Group
Breaking Through CLG
Buíon Phort Láirge
Bunratty Community Childcare Centre
Burren Animal Rescue
Business in the Community Ireland
CAD Aid Foundation CLG
Cahir Park AFC Development Ltd.
Campaign Solutions
Camphill Communities of Ireland
CareBright
Carlow County Council
Carlow Day Care Centre
Carlow Flower Club
Carlow PPN
Carmichael
Carrigaline Scouts
Carrigallen Tidy Towns
Catkins Early Years Service
Catkins On the Move
Cavernoma Ireland
CDYS CLG
Centre for Effective Services (CES)
Cheshire Ireland
Childhood Development Initiative

* Those who entered "prefer not to say" are not listed

Children in Hospital Ireland
Christians Against Poverty Ireland CLG
Chrysalis CDP Clg
CIL
Cill Barra Gym & Sports Centre
Claddagh Watch Patrol
Clanmil Housing Association
Clann Mór Residential & Respite CLG
Clanwilliam Institute
Clare Immigrant Support Centre
Clare Local Development Company
Clonbalt Woods Residents Association
Clonmany Genealogy and Heritage Group
CNLI
Co Cavan Local Development
Cobh (Great Island) community centre
Cobh Family Resource Centre
Codema
Cois Nore Cancer Support Centre
Comhar Fhánada & Ghleann Bhairr
Comhlámh
Common Ground CLG
Community Connect - Ireland's Baby Bank
Community Law & Mediation
Community Response
Concern Worldwide
Connemara West PLC
Coolmine Therapeutic Community
COPE Galway
Cork CIL
Cork City PPN
Cork Deaf Association
Cork Volunteer Centre
Corlann
Corlann South
Corlann South East Region
County Wicklow Partnership
Courtown Community Council (soon to be Courtown Riverchapel Community Development Group)
Crash Ensemble
Critical: Emergency Medical Response
Cuan Saor Women's Refuge & Support Services Clg
Cumann Na Daoine
Dara Residential Servcies t/a Dara
Daughters of Charity Child and Family Service (DoCCFS)
Delta Centre CLG
Depaul Ireland
Develop Tullow Association
Disability Federation of Ireland
Dogs Trust
Donegal GAP Heritage and History Group
Down Syndrome Ireland - Sligo Branch
DP Language Services
Dublin Adult Learning Centre
Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education & Training Board (DDLETB)
Dublin Central Mission
Dublin City Volunteer Centre
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Dublin Simon Community
Dunganstown Union of Parishes
Dungarvan Care of the Aged clg
Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland
East Clare Community Coop
ECO UNESCO
Embrace FARM
Empower CLG
Enclude
Engineers Ireland
Enhance
Ennistymon Women's Shed
EPIC Empowering People in Care
Epilepsy Ireland
Equestrian Special Olympics
EradaCollective
Erne District Chinese Families and Friends
Exchange House Ireland
National Travellers Service
Féach
Feileacain
Fighting Words

Fingal County Council
Fingal Volunteer Centre
Foróige
Friends of James Joyce Tower
Front Line Defenders
Gaeloideachas
Gaisce - The President's Award
Galway Co-operative Housing Development Society Ltd
Galway Hospice
Gateway Mental Health Project
Gerry Egan Consulting
Greystones Family Resource Centre
Grow Mental Health
Hart Communications
Headway
Health Research Charities Ireland
Health Service Executive
Hearth and Mind
Helium
Horizons (Cope Foundation)
Horses Connect Enterprises
Huntstown Family Resource Centre CLG
Immram Consulting
Inishowen Development Partnership
Inishowen Traditional Singers' Circle
Inniscarra Community Centre
International Centre for Local and Regional Development
Irish Architecture Foundation
Irish Bible Institute
Irish Cancer Society
Irish Council for International Students
Irish Cycling Campaign
Irish Deaf Society
Irish Environmental Network
Irish Girl Guides
Irish Green Building Council
Irish Landmark Trust
Irish Penal Reform Trust
Irish Red Cross
Irish Stammering Association
Irish Traveller movement
Irish Vasculitis Organisation
Irish Wheelchair Association
Irish Yoga Association
iScoil
Jigsaw
Junior Achievement Ireland
Kerry Parents and Friends Association
Kerry PPN
Kildare County Childcare Committee
Killeagh Community Centre
Kilmore West Youth Project
Kilmovee Community Housing CLG
Kilworth Active Retirement Association
Knockmore Rathduff Recreation & Resource Centre
L'Arche Ireland
Lámh
Laois Partnership Company
Laois Volunteer Centre CLG
LauraLynn Children's Hospice
LeanIn Ireland
Léargas
Learning & Development Institute
Learning Hub Limerick
Leave No Trace Ireland
Leitrim PPN
Leitrim Volunteer Centre Board
LGBT Ireland
Liffey Partnership
Limerick City Partnership
Lisavaird women's shed
Living Life Counselling
Longford Women's Link
Louth Local Development (Louth Social Prescribing)
Louth Meath Education and Training Board
MADRA
Mantra Strategy
Margaret of New Orleans Community Association CLG
Mayfield Community Adult Learning Project

Mayo North East
Mayo North Family Heritage Centre CLG
Meath Travellers Workshop
Medical Missionaries of Mary
Mental Health Ireland
Merchants Quay Ireland
MidWest Simon Community
Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
Misean Cara
Mitchelstown Tidy Towns
Moate Community Development Association CLG
Monaghan Integrated Development CLG
Mullingar Employment Action Group
Nano Nagle Place
Nasc, The Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre
National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers
National Learning Network
National Meals on Wheels Network/Irish Rural Link
National Suicide Research Foundation
National Women's Council
National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
North Leinster MABS - Drogheda Office
North Tipperary Development Company
North West Hospice Charity CLG
North West Migrants Forum
Northstar Family Support Project
NOVAS
Ó Cualann
Offaly local development
Offaly Public Participation Network (PPN)
Offaly Volunteer Centre
Ógras
Omeath District Development CLG
One Family
One in Four Ireland
Open Training College
Order of Malta Ireland
Parents Plus
Parkinson's Ireland
Passage West Creates
Patient Advocacy Service
PayPal Giving Fund Ireland
Peter McVerry Trust
Polio Survivors Ireland
Politics In Action
PositivePathways
Probation services
Psychology at Work
Purple House Cancer Support
Quality Matters
Quarryvale FRC
Raach Deaf services
Raidió Rí-Rá
Rathdrum Men's Shed
Rather Gather
Rediscovery Centre
Rehab Group
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Remember Us
Restorative Justice Services
Rhode Tidy Towns
RKC
Ronald McDonald House
Roscommon Volunteer Centre
Rosminians Ireland
Ruhama
Rylane Community Park Association
Sacred Heart Family Resource Centre
Safe Home Ireland
Safe Ireland National Social Change Agency
Sage Advocacy
Saint Joseph's Centre
Sandymount Community Centre
Saoirse Domestic Violence services
SCFRC
Scouting Ireland
Shankill a service of St John of God Hospital clg
Shannon Family Resource Centre
Sharp and Fruity
Shine

ShoutOut
Silver Arch North Tipperary Community Services trading as Silver Arch FRC
Simon Communities of Ireland
Simonstown Gaels Management Co CLG (Community Centre)
Sing Ireland
Sixmilebridge Town Team
Sligo Bay Catchment River Trust CLG
Social Enterprise Solutions Ireland
Social Factory CLG
Solas Cancer Support Centre
Sonas Domestic Violence Charity
SOS Kilkenny CLG
South Dublin Volunteer Centre
Southill Hub
Specialisterne Ireland
Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Ireland
Spraoi agus Spórt
SpunOut
Sráid An Mhuilinn Residents Association
St Catherine's Community Services
St Michael's House
St. Brigid's Family and Community Centre
St. Christophers Services, Longford
St.Patrick's Cathedral
Stewarts Care
StreamScapes
Sunbeam House Services
Tabor Group
Taghmon Family Resource Centre
TCTC
TFI Local Link Wexford
The Anne Sullivan Centre
The Avalon Centre CLG
The Bike Hub
The Countrywomen's Trust
The Culture Wheel
The Donkey Sanctuary Ireland Ltd
The HX Consultancy
The Ireland Funds
The Irish Blue Cross
The Iveagh Trust
The Liberties Weavers
The Mater Hospital Foundation
The Representative Church Body
The Sons of Divine Providence
The Three Sisters Women's Shed
The Wheel
Threshold
TI Local Link Wexford
Tiglin Challenge Ltd
Tinryland Tidy Towns
Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)
Traveller Visibility Group CLG
Treoir
Trócaire
Trustus Senior Care
TU Dublin Student's Union
Tuam Cancer Care
Tuath Housing Association
Ukrainian Crisis Centre Ireland
University College Cork
Vision Ireland
Volunteer Galway
Volunteer Ireland
Water Safety Ireland
Waterford Childcare Committee
Waterford PPN
Waterford Volunteer Centre
West Cork Beacon
West Cork Development Partnership
Western Care Associate
Westgate Foundation
Westmeath Community Development
Wexford Centre Project
Wexford Local Development
Wexford Volunteer Centre
Wicklow Public Participation Network
Wicklow Uplands Council
Wild Atlantic Pool and Fitness Centre
Women's Collective Ireland
YMCA Dublin
Youghal Active Retirement Association
YWCA Ireland

Notes

Notes

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The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups and social enterprises.

As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the 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 sector.