

Trends in Volunteering

Volunteer Now

2018

Background

The key messages to emerge from these new reports on volunteering in Northern Ireland are that volunteering numbers are static overall but there are some significant trends which mean volunteer managers need to refocus on how they design volunteering roles and support volunteers.

The new reports provide a detailed analysis of volunteering in Northern Ireland both at a statistical level and in terms of academic research. They provide the most significant overview of available information conducted for many years. They are the culmination of a project funded by the Building Change Trust as part of its final legacy programme.

1. Research Reports

Three reports have been produced which provide an overview of the academic research, an overview of statistical information about volunteering in N Ireland and a report analysing the NI Census information by Local Authority area. More detail on each of these reports is set out below.

1a. Trends in Volunteering

This report provides an overview of the challenges facing volunteering based on academic research as well as an overview of the statistical information. These challenges are:

- relatively static numbers of volunteers;
- changes in the environment for volunteering such as an ageing population;
- increased levels of social isolation;
- the impact of digitalisation; and
- pressure on public services.

The report sets out the impact of these challenges on people's attitudes and behaviours. Key issues include a movement towards cause driven volunteering and a rise in episodic short term volunteering, including online volunteering.

Another key issue is the role of the stalwart volunteers and the need to protect and encourage these people to continue. The report sets out the need to see volunteering roles on a spectrum of formality. How formal a role is will influence the approach to managing volunteers undertaking that role, one approach will not work for every situation. You can read the full report [here](#).

1b. Surveying the Surveys: Review of quantitative research findings on volunteering in Northern Ireland

This second report reviews the statistical information available through the reports listed below to enable consideration of the quantitative trend information.

- National Surveys of Volunteering 1991 and 1997 (Volunteer Centre UK/Institute for Volunteering Research)
- Continuous Household Surveys 1991-92, 2008-09, 2012-13 and 2013-14 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)
- Volunteering in Northern Ireland 1995, 2001, 2007 (Volunteer Development Agency/Volunteer Now)
- Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Survey 2009-10 (Sport Northern Ireland)
- Northern Ireland Census 2011 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)
- Northern Ireland Omnibus Surveys 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency for clients in government departments).

Key findings emerging were the real need for consistency and comparability of data i.e. the use of the same questions and similar methodologies in order to make meaningful comparisons. This report also showed the lack of a real change in headline volunteering rates with a slight reduction in informal volunteers. There are no real differences in the rate of participation by gender or ethnic group. There are differences in the level of participation by people with disabilities who are less likely to volunteer. Volunteering also varies by age with highest participation in the 16 - 24 age group and lowest in the 65 to 74 age group. You can read the full report [here](#).

1c. Volunteering in Northern Ireland: Findings from the Census 2011

This report is a secondary analysis of data tables produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) from the information collected in the 2011 Census. Some of which were publicly available and some of which have been created especially for this project. We are most grateful to officers of NISRA for their generous help. The report includes

- Headline participation rates for volunteers (those who 'carried out voluntary work') as a proportion of the population ('all usual residents aged 16 and over')
- Participation rates for volunteers for each demographic characteristic
- Participation rates for volunteers in each of the new local councils.

Key findings include:

- Highest levels of volunteering are in Fermanagh Omagh District Council;
- People with higher educational attainment volunteer more than those with lower qualifications,
- People who are economically active volunteer more than those who are economically inactive;

- People who are students or in managerial, administrative or professional occupations volunteer more than others;
- Married or single people volunteer more than widowed people and
- People with dependent children volunteer more than people without children.

You can read the full report [here](#).

Feedback from ‘Trends in Volunteering Seminar’

In December 2017, Volunteer Now hosted a seminar to explore the issues raised in these research reports. In particular to support the co-design process for the Volunteering Strategy, participants were asked: What should the volunteering strategy include to provide support for volunteering to meet the trends?

The answers laid out below represent the themes which emerged from these discussions.

Public Policy

- Co-ordinated approach from government.
- Tackling barriers to volunteering e.g. – regulation, age, driving, child care, digitally excluded.
- Policy proofing – make sure policies are not discouraging but encouraging volunteering.
- Consistent data measurement at regional and local level on volunteering.
- The introduction of Universal Credit – will impact volunteering.

Support for volunteer involving organisations

- Extending volunteering good practice in a changing world, more individualised volunteer management.
- Exploring new roles to take account of episodic volunteering and needs of stalwarts.
- Social isolation – social exclusion. How to engage people who are not involved in their communities.
- Differences in rural and urban groups.
- Support organisations to be able to be aware of and adapt to trends.
- Meaningful social action – measurement tool/model for all age groups/disability etc.
- Collective volunteer recruitment for similar roles across different organisations.
- Promote networking of groups and partnership working.

Promotion of Volunteering

- Need to make people aware of opportunities.
- Digital revolution/social media - support for groups to get best from it.
- Engaging 65+ as volunteers.
- Encourage businesses to get involved.
- Encouraging overseas volunteering.
- Youth volunteering needs to be encouraged.

Volunteer now delivers services across Northern Ireland. We have offices in Belfast, Broughshane, Enniskillen and Newry. Registered Office: Volunteer Now, Skainos Centre, 239 Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 1AF Charity Registration No. NIC101309. Company Limited by Guarantee No. NI602399. Registered in Northern Ireland.

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