



EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE

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CHAPTER

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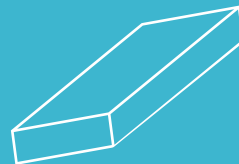
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VOLUNTEERING  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
IN EUROPE

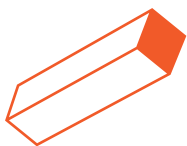


NORTHERN  
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# 1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE CONCEPT DEFINITION

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Social Development is the Government department responsible for supporting and developing volunteering and more specifically delivering on the objectives set out in the *Volunteering Strategy*<sup>1</sup>.

Currently the volunteering infrastructure support is provided by seven organisations. Firstly, Volunteer Now, a regional organisation, which provides information, policy, training and support to enhance the involvement and maximise the contribution of volunteers as well as promoting volunteering opportunities and supporting the recruitment of volunteers. Volunteer Now was created in April 2010, through a merger of 10 organisations, the Volunteer Development Agency and nine volunteer centres. In addition six volunteer centres, which are independent organisations, provide support in the promotion and development of volunteer opportunities and the recruitment of volunteers across specific areas of Northern Ireland.

The existing local volunteering infrastructure depends on funding through the Volunteer Bureau Initiative programme, this strategic investment is provided by the Department for Social Development however, this is currently under review.

The joint Voluntary, Community and Government Sector Forum is made up of representatives from across government departments and the voluntary and community sector. The forum is a platform to plan, discuss and review collaborative and complementary work and overall act as social partners to build a participative, peaceful, equitable and inclusive society.

Volunteering infrastructure has an important role in assisting government by advising on policy which has relevance to volunteering; this often involves offering practical examples of how a proposed public policy can have negative consequences for volunteering or demonstrating how volunteering can contribute to policy aims. The value of policy and practice expertise, and day-to-day experience of involving volunteers, places the volunteering infrastructure in the best position to rigorously test public policy proposals. Volunteering has strategic links to the work of all central Government Departments and to Local Government. This is recognised across Government, many government departments fund different types of volunteering programmes which meet the objectives of their delivery plans.

When national policy consultations are published, communication between the Northern Ireland volunteering infrastructure and those of England, Scotland and Wales are useful, as they offer an opportunity for the practical implications of policy changes to be widely and robustly considered. Volunteer Now also represents the Northern Ireland volunteering infrastructure within the UK Volunteering Forum (UKVF) and within its research and policy subgroups.

1. Department for Social Development (2011) "Join in, Get Involved, Build a Better Future", available at <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/supporting-organisations/volunteering-strategy>

The Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland exists in challenging conditions in which demand for the services exceed supply, resources are stretched to breaking point and there is a continuous state of uncertainty due to insufficient funding. For these reasons, it is impractical to expect volunteer involving organisations, particularly small volunteer led groups to keep abreast of new practice guidance and policy changes. The volunteering infrastructure, most notably Volunteer Now, with its regional to local reach, dedicated resources, knowledge and expertise is in the best position to promote volunteering and represent the interests of volunteering and volunteers. These services include promotional work and linking individuals to opportunities, influencing policy, monitoring legislation, promoting and enabling good practice in recruitment, management and retention of volunteers.

## 2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

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Volunteering as defined with the Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland is “*the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice*”.

This definition refers to both formal volunteering (carried out with, or under the auspices of an organisation/group) and informal volunteering (carried out outside the organisation, often at neighbourhood level but outside, or in addition to, the immediate family)<sup>2</sup>.

The last Northern Ireland wide survey of volunteering was carried out in 2007, and its results were published in a report titled “It’s All About Time”. Previous to that, similar surveys had been conducted in 1995 and 2001. A comparison of the results from these reports have showed that “formal” volunteer numbers have remained at best static since 1995 (282,000, 21% of population) whilst informal volunteering have fallen substantially from 600,000 in 1995 to 470,111 in 2007 (35% of population)<sup>3</sup>. The research showed that women were more likely to volunteer than men and over one third were aged between 19-24 years old. In addition, nearly 30% of volunteers were aged between 25-54 years old. Lack of time and competing commitment are the main barriers to people starting or staying with volunteering. There is also an issue of supply and demand, 60% of voluntary and community sector organisations surveyed, in “It’s All About Time”, said that volunteers are becoming harder to recruit, yet 77% said that they couldn’t operate without them. Also, there is an under-representation of certain groups with regards to volunteering, generally volunteers tend to be mainly white, middle aged and from higher socio-economic groups.

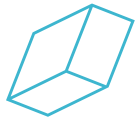
There is currently no plan to conduct another public survey about volunteering, however, the 2011 Northern Ireland Census asked one question on volunteering “In the past year, have you helped with or carried out any voluntary work without pay?”. As a whole population survey, this will provide a valuable update on volunteering rates, research that has not been carried out since 2007. Unfortunately the question did not offer examples of what volunteering is nor was probing possible. Many people who volunteer do not actually use the word volunteering to describe what they do, so this may lead to an under-estimation of volunteering rates.

Although research suggests that volunteering in Northern Ireland has been at best static for the last 15 years; there is anecdotal evidence that some organisations have more interest in

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2. Ibid

3. The 1995, 2001 and 2007 research reports are available from [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)



volunteering than they have roles to offer people. This highlights the complexity of volunteering, how patterns vary and how the challenges which volunteer involving organisations face can differ on a macro and micro level.

A recent mapping exercise of volunteer involving organisations across Northern Ireland, has indicated that volunteer management practices are generally improving<sup>4</sup>. It has also shown that generally organisations with smaller incomes are less likely to use such practices. As the majority of volunteer involving organisations across Northern Ireland have an income of £100,000 or less (70%) and a 1/3 have incomes of £10,000 or less. This is a particular challenging area for Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup>. However, a recent report of volunteer management practices in England has reported a similar issue and highlights the fact that engaging smaller organisations is not a challenge specific to the Northern Ireland volunteering infrastructure<sup>6</sup>. Research has also shown that good volunteer management makes an organisation more attractive to potential volunteers<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Social Development is the Government department responsible for supporting and developing volunteering using the Volunteering Strategy as a framework to do so.

There is a Concordat between the Northern Ireland Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector. The purpose of the concordat is to set out agreed principles, values and shared commitments on how Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector can work together to better serve the people of Northern Ireland. This concordat was reviewed in 2011 to remind parties of its responsibilities towards each other and to ensure it reflected the environment within which both Government and sectoral partners work<sup>8</sup>.

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**Unlike paid staff who have a contract, volunteers who carry out a role of their own free will and choice do not have employment rights and are not protected under anti-discrimination laws.**

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The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 places a legal onus on everyone who works with vulnerable groups, including employees and volunteers to disclose convictions and to agree to have background checks conducted to ensure they are not barred from working with children or vulnerable adults. Since 1996, Our Duty to Care Project, currently

managed by Volunteer Now has been promoting good child protection practice and providing support, information and training to the Voluntary and Community Sector. More recently this safeguarding service has extended to include vulnerable adults.

There are no legal rights for volunteers. Unlike paid staffs who have a contract of employment,

4. Volunteer Now (2010:1) Mapping Volunteer Involving Organisations in Northern Ireland, Belfast, Department for Social Development.

5. NICVA (2009) 'State of the Sector V', available from <http://www.nicva.org/publications/state-sector-v>

6. Brewis, G., Hill, M., and Stevens, D. (2010) Valuing Volunteer Management Skills: Research Summary, Institute of Volunteering Research and The Third Sector available from [http://www.ivr.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/ADA89203-CA46-4E21-BBFB-F79A2F7D2854/0/Valuing\\_volunteer\\_management\\_skills\\_summary.pdf](http://www.ivr.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/ADA89203-CA46-4E21-BBFB-F79A2F7D2854/0/Valuing_volunteer_management_skills_summary.pdf)

7. Machin, J., and Ellis Paine, A., (2008) Managing for Success: Volunteers views on involvement and support. Institute for Volunteering Research, available from [http://www.ivr.org.uk/Migrated+Resources%2fDocuments%2fM%2fmanaging\\_for\\_success\\_final.pdf](http://www.ivr.org.uk/Migrated+Resources%2fDocuments%2fM%2fmanaging_for_success_final.pdf)

8. Department for Social Development (2011) The Concordat between the Government and Voluntary and Community Sector. Available from <http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/ConcordatConsultation.pdf>

volunteers who carry out a role of their own free will and choice do not have a “contract”, therefore they do not have employment rights and are not protected under anti-discrimination laws. However, under volunteer management good practice, organisations that involve volunteers are encouraged to treat volunteers fairly, equally and with respect. Under Health and Safety legislation (Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978), organisations have a “duty of care” to protect volunteers, employees and members of the public when on their property or carrying out work on their behalf.

## 4. STRUCTURE OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland<sup>9</sup> estimate that there are between 5,000 - 6,000 volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland. However, this figure is likely to be much higher, as not all groups are required to be registered as a charity or wish to be. The establishment of a new system for registering charities in Northern Ireland, including a new definition of ‘charity’ is currently being reviewed. Once the new registering system is in place, we may have a more accurate idea of the number of organisations that are likely to involve volunteers. Volunteers are involved across a wide range of different subsectors, mostly the Community and Voluntary Sector (31%), Church and Religious bodies (25%), Sports Clubs (13%), Public Sector (10%) and the Private Sector (4%)<sup>10</sup>.

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The most common type of volunteering opportunities offered to volunteers across all sectors are raising and handling money (32%), organising and helping to run an activity (25.9%) followed by leading a group or being a member of a committee or Trust (19.3%).

The *Volunteer Policy Forum* is chaired by *Volunteer Now* and the secretariat provided by the *Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)*. This is the umbrella group who's role it is to support and represent the views of the Voluntary and Community Sector. This forum is open to all those interested in volunteering and is held 3-4 times per years. The purpose of the forum is to disseminate policy information, facilitate policy development and influence decision-making.

## 5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

There is volunteer involvement across a wide range of statutory health provision e.g. volunteer roles such as, volunteer driving, befriending, helping in acute hospitals and meeting and greeting. However, there is scope for greater numbers and types of opportunities for volunteers across all Health Trusts. More generally, there is potential for more volunteer involvement across the whole Public Sector i.e. hospital, nursing home etc. ‘Its All About Time’ which offers the most up to date statistics on volunteering patterns found that 10% (estimated as 29,335 volunteers) of volunteers work within the Public Health Sector compared to 31% (estimated as 87,723 volunteers) in the Voluntary and Community Sector<sup>11</sup>.

The Health and Social Care Board who are responsible for planning and commissioning

9. <http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/>

10. NICVA (2009) ‘State of the Sector V’, available from <http://www.nicva.org/publications/state-sector-v>

11. Volunteer Development Agency (2007) ‘It's All About Time. Available from [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)

health and social care services are aware of the opportunities for greater investment in the development of volunteering. They are currently mapping the level of volunteer involvement, with a view to providing a more strategic approach to volunteer development. Creating the conditions for greater public involvement across Health and Social Care has the potential to greatly improve the services provided and to strengthen the relationship between the services and the community.

Employer Supported Volunteering is promoted throughout NI. The most up to date research states that 23% of organisations in Northern Ireland offer this form of volunteering<sup>12</sup>. Business in the Community and Volunteer Now carry out partnership work to match organisations that are willing to support staff to volunteer with charities that have suitable opportunities. This usually involved employers giving staff a half-day or full day off to volunteer. The Public Sector remains the biggest employer in Northern Ireland and some have employer supported volunteering policies. However, overall the number of employer supported volunteering policies and uptake within the workforce could be improved.

There is a long history in Northern Ireland of Schools, Universities and Further Education Colleges promoting volunteering as a way for young people to develop their CV but also to gain new experiences. The Millennium Volunteers Programme offers young people aged 14-30 a structured way of getting involved in volunteering and which offers recognition. Delivery partners of the programme include many community and voluntary organisations of varying sizes but also the 5 Education and Library Boards who are rolling out the programme across their areas. The 2006 Youth Council Geomapping report showed that 23,305 people were involved in the youth service, of which 91% were volunteers. Many schools have a civic engagement module which encourages young people to consider citizenship and civic responsibility.

## 6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The Department for Social Development currently core funds the infrastructure support for volunteering and also provides direct support to volunteering through a small grant scheme to support local volunteer involvement. Volunteering in Northern Ireland is also supported through central and local Government funding for regional and sub-regional organisations providing direct service delivery advice, community development, etc. Further funding comes through philanthropic support, Trust Funds, Lottery Funding and fundraising.

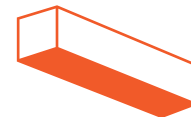
## 7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

There has never been a regularly conducted survey on volunteering in Northern Ireland. The last Northern Ireland wide survey was conducted in 2007, previous to that surveys were carried out in 2001 and 1995. In 2010, Volunteer Now commissioned a Northern Ireland wide piece of research to map out the number of volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland, the sector and field of work they are involved in, how many volunteers they involve, type of roles offered and extent of volunteer management practices employed<sup>13</sup>.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

Although not specifically regular or systematic, Volunteer Now is responsible for carrying out or commissioning the majority of research that exists on volunteering in Northern Ireland. This includes research on volunteering and older people, young people, sports, ethnic minorities, volunteering patterns, and neighbourhood renewal, mentoring and management committees. All of the research is available from <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/supporting-organisations/publications>. The funding for research, such as those listed above comes from a variety of sources both government departments as well other non-government funding sources. Having more regular surveys with the general public would help to better understand the patterns of volunteer involvement. It would also be useful to have a methodology which was agreed across the world, so that rates could be compared using a standard measure, a goal which has been expressed by the International Labour Organisation and lead to the production of the *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*.



Measuring social impact from volunteering activities is vital. Volunteer involving organisations ability to make a “value added”, ‘positive impact’ for a community, on a shoe string, is how it sets itself apart. This need to evidence worth is increasingly important as year on year public expenditure cuts are forecast. Many volunteer involving organisations or volunteer led groups do not have the resources or time to carry out evaluation work which can detract from their main aims. However, the Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit is an inexpensive, tried and tested way for organisations of all sizes to evidence social, cultural, human, physical and economic impact. This recently reviewed toolkit enables organisations to assess the impact of volunteering on key stakeholders - the volunteers, the organisation, the beneficiaries, and the broader community. Organisations are able to use it to assess a wide range of impacts, from the skills development of volunteers to the economic value of involving volunteers. The toolkit is owned by Volunteering England, since 2010, Volunteer Now has been licensed to support volunteer involving organisations in the North and South of Ireland to use the Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit. Through funding sources, such as the Building Change Trust and The Atlantic Philanthropies, a range of organisations are being supported to measure the difference that volunteering is making through the toolkit. To find out more about the toolkit and how it has been used in NI, go to <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/supporting-organisations/measuring-impact/volunteering-impact-assessment-toolkit>.



## 8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

The *Concordat between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector* sets out the principles, values and practical guidelines around which Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations can work together to better serve the people of NI<sup>14</sup>.

*Investing in Volunteers (IiV)* is the UK quality standard of good practice in volunteer management. IiV is owned by the UK Volunteering Forum, which consists of the chief executives of Volunteering England, Volunteer Now (Northern Ireland), Volunteer Development Scotland and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. IiV gives organisations the opportunity to benchmark the quality of their volunteer management and involvement against a set of practices deemed important when involving volunteers. Working towards the standard allows organisations to prove and improve the effectiveness of their work with volunteers and enhance their

14. Department for Social Development (2011) *The Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the NI Government*. Available from <http://www.nicva.org/sites/default/files/ConcordatConsultation.pdf>

organisation's reputation. Fifty organisations have achieved this quality accreditation in NI. Volunteer Now was involved in the development of the "National Occupational Standards" for Volunteer Managers which sets out the required competencies for those managing volunteers. The Effective Management of Volunteers is a university accredited course for Volunteer Managers in Northern Ireland and is jointly delivered by Volunteer Now and Queens University of Belfast. It provides individuals with the skills and knowledge to manage volunteers.



## 9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteer Now launched a new website in 2011 [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk) which offers a 'one stop shop' for volunteers to search for opportunities and for volunteer involving organisations to advertise roles by posting them directly. It also offers a space for volunteer involving organisations to access the latest volunteer news, good practice guidance and publications, to engage with campaigns and avail of a full calendar of training. Volunteer Now has 50 information points from which people can access information on volunteering; this includes all of the libraries across Northern Ireland. Research also indicates that people find out about opportunities through word of mouth, newspapers and individual organisational recruitment<sup>15</sup>.

## 10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

All the relevant aspects have been described in the previous sections.

## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland which was only launched last year outlines, the main areas of development required in NI with respect to the development and promotion of volunteering. The Government and therefore the volunteering infrastructure will be guided by this strategic framework.

This relates firstly to recognising the value and promoting the benefits of volunteering by building public recognition for volunteering, recruiting more volunteers, measuring the impact of volunteer involvement on volunteers, individuals, organisations and society and seeking to protect volunteering from the unintended negative consequences of legislation and Government policy on volunteering.

Secondly, it is related to enhancing accessibility and diversity so that people from all walks of life are given the opportunity to volunteer.

Thirdly, it aims to improve the experience through improving volunteer management practice, increasing the number and quality of volunteering opportunities, encouraging and supporting the development of skills by volunteers and extending volunteering in the public sector, and supporting and strengthening of the infrastructure. These are all objectives which we believe are useful objectives for the volunteering infrastructures across Europe.

<sup>15</sup>. Volunteer Development Agency (2007) 'It's All About Time', available from [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)



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## Resources

Brewis, G., Hill, M., and Stevens, D. (2010) *Valuing Volunteer Management Skills: Research Summary*, Institute of Volunteering Research and The Third Sector. Available at: [http://www.ivr.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/ADA89203-CA46-4E21-BBFB-F79A2F7D2854/0/Valuing\\_volunteer\\_management\\_skills\\_summary.pdf](http://www.ivr.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/ADA89203-CA46-4E21-BBFB-F79A2F7D2854/0/Valuing_volunteer_management_skills_summary.pdf)

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Volunteer Now (2010:1) *Mapping Volunteer Involving Organisations in Northern Ireland, Belfast*, Department for Social Development.

Volunteer Now offers access to the full range of research that it has produced on volunteering in Northern Ireland through the publication section of its website- <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/supporting-organisations/publications>

