

State of the Sector V  
Volunteers



# 10. Volunteers

**This chapter examines the levels of volunteering in the voluntary and community sector. The data presented in this section is based on information derived from the Volunteer Development Agency's *It's All About Time, Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2007* report and information received from organisations in relation to *State of the Sector V*. Where it is possible direct comparisons have been made with previous *State of the Sector* reports.**

**Current estimates indicate that there are approximately 87,723 individuals who volunteer with a voluntary and community sector organisation.** This represents a third of all formal volunteers in Northern Ireland. The number of formal volunteers has remained relatively static over the past 12 years. Between 1995 and 2007 the proportion of formal volunteers of the entire population has only increased by 3%.

**50.3% of respondents to the *State of the Sector V* survey indicated that they intend to increase volunteer numbers over the next 12 months.** A further 37.0% stated that the level of volunteering in their organisation is likely to remain static while 1.9% indicated that the number of volunteers is likely to decrease. This intention to increase volunteer numbers could be in direct response to an overall decrease in the funding available to the sector.

**Raising or handling money is the most common activity for volunteers to undertake with a voluntary and community organisation (43.9% of all volunteers).** Significant numbers of volunteers are also involved in organising and running events (25.8%) and serving on committees or other governing bodies (19.7%). Working with young people is also a popular activity for volunteers to undertake with voluntary and community organisations.

**The economic value of formal volunteering is estimated to be £504 million per year.** This equates to an average of 13.4 hours given by formal volunteers each month.

**An estimated 45,000 individuals are involved in the governance of voluntary and community organisations.** This figure does not take into account the fact that some individuals may serve on more than one committee. This level of commitment by individuals in terms of the governance of organisations reinforces one of the key strengths of the voluntary and community sector.

**27.3% of individuals volunteer in the young people and children sub-sector (22,452 individuals).** Just over 18% of individuals volunteer with organisations in the community development sub-sector and 13.3% volunteer in the disability sub-sector.

## 10.1 Volunteer profile

*It's All About Time, Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2007*<sup>[19]</sup> (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007) found that 21% of respondents had engaged in formal volunteering<sup>[20]</sup> over a 12 month period (an estimated 282,607 individuals). Just under one third of all formal volunteers (31.1%) are engaged with a voluntary or community organisation which equates to an estimated 87,723 individuals.

There has been considerable variation in the level of formal and informal volunteering since 1995. Between 1995 and 2001, the proportion of formal volunteers increased by 10%. While it is difficult to attribute any one factor to this increase, changes in the wider social and cultural landscape in Northern Ireland, the influence of the Millennium and a more co-ordinated approach to promoting volunteering may have all contributed to this increase. It is also difficult to discern why the levels of volunteering reported in 2001 have not been maintained in 2007 (the number of volunteers fell by 21.3% between 2001 and 2007). The pressures of time and other commitments on individuals or a wider cultural shift in Northern Irish society, which may be indicative of a wider apathy towards volunteering or civic participation, could be impacting upon the overall number of volunteers. Table 10.1 provides an analysis of the estimated number of formal volunteers and the types of organisations they volunteer with.

**Table 10.1 - Type of organisation respondents volunteered with most**<sup>[21]</sup>

	%	Estimate of volunteers
Voluntary and community sector	31.1	87,723
Church/religious body	25.1	70,799
Sports club	13.2	37,233
Other	12.7	35,823
Public sector (eg hospital, nursing home, etc)	10.4	29,335
Private sector	4.2	11,847
Don't know	2.4	6,769
Political party	0.9	2,538
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>282,067</b>

Source: *It's All About Time: Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2007*

19 This research is based on the responses of a representative sample of 1,020 individuals aged 16 and over across Northern Ireland in January 2007.

20 Formal volunteering is unpaid voluntary work carried out with, or under the auspices of, an organisation.

21 Respondents were asked to describe the nature of the organisation they volunteer for the most (if they volunteered for more than one organisation).

Just under one third of all formal volunteers (31.1%) is engaged with a voluntary or community organisation which equates to an estimated 87,723 individuals. The next most common type of organisation volunteers are engaged with is the church or religious bodies (70,799). One quarter of all formal volunteers describes this as the type of organisation they volunteer with most. This is followed by sports clubs which have an estimated 37,233 individuals who have formally volunteered with them over the previous 12 months.

Looking to the future, 50.3% of respondents to the *State of the Sector V* survey indicated that they intend to increase volunteer numbers over the next 12 months. A further 37% stated that the level of volunteering in their organisation is likely to remain static while 1.9% indicated that their number of volunteers is likely to decrease. Although the figures for volunteering are derived from a different source<sup>[22]</sup> and use a different methodology to produce them, there is an indication, amongst voluntary and community organisations at least, that volunteering levels are increasing. The estimated number of individuals who volunteered with a voluntary and community organisation in 2005 was 75,780 (NICVA, 2005). When compared with the Volunteer Development Agency's 2007 figures, there has been a 15.7% increase in the number of volunteers since 2005. This is not necessarily reflective of the overall picture

22 The figures from *It's All About Time* (Volunteer Development Agency, 2008) are based on interviews with the general public, whereas volunteering figures in previous *State of the Sector* reports have been based on responses from voluntary and community sector organisations.

for volunteering in Northern Ireland and methodological differences could in part account for this difference. Nevertheless, organisations themselves are stating their intention to increase volunteer numbers which could be in direct response to an overall decrease in the funding available to the sector.

The economic value of volunteering is an area that, although difficult to quantify accurately, demonstrates the impact and value of volunteering in Northern Ireland. The average hourly wage in Northern Ireland (£11.49)<sup>[23]</sup> is used to estimate the economic value of formal volunteering. In 2007 the overall economic value of formal volunteers, based on the average hourly wage, was £504 million per year. This equates to an average of 13.4 hours volunteered by formal volunteers each month. This is a small decrease compared with the average hours volunteered in 2001 which was 15 hours per month. So despite the fact that there are fewer formal volunteers in 2007 compared with 2001, individuals are more or less committing the same amount of time each month to voluntary activities (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007).

Table 10.2 examines the various roles that these 87,723 volunteers undertake with voluntary and community organisations.

As is shown in Table 10.2 the most common activity for volunteers to undertake for a voluntary and community organisation

23 Source: *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings* (ASHE): [www.detini.gov.uk/](http://www.detini.gov.uk/) (DETI NI).

is raising or handling money (43.9% of all volunteers). Significant numbers of volunteers are involved in organising and running events (25.8%) and serving on committees or other governing bodies (19.7%). Working with young people is

also a popular activity for volunteers to undertake with voluntary and community organisations. As will be seen later in this section, organisations in the young people and children's sub-sector involve the highest number of volunteers.

**Table 10.2 - Activities undertaken by formal volunteers over a 12 month period with voluntary and community organisations**

	%
Raising or handling money	43.9
Organising or helping to run an activity or event	25.8
Leading the group/member of a committee/trustees	19.7
Working with young people	16.7
Visiting people	16.7
Selling tickets	15.2
Secretarial, administrative or clerical work	12.1
Collecting/making things to be sold for charity	9.1
Other	9.1
Befriending or mentoring people	7.9
Teaching or training	7.6
Working in a charity shop	7.6
Representing	7.6
Providing transport/driving	7.6
Promotion	7.6
Giving advice/information/counselling	4.5
Helping in church or religious organisation	3.0
Coaching	3.0
Other practical help (eg shopping, gardening)	3.0
Campaigning	1.5

Source: *It's All About Time: Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2007*  
 Responses exceed 100% as this was a multiple response question

### 10.1.1 Governance

A significant way in which individuals can volunteer in Northern Ireland is by serving on voluntary management committees. *The Volunteering in Northern Ireland Report 2007* asked voluntary and community organisations how many volunteers were involved in the governance of the organisation. The estimated number of volunteers involved in governance is 45,000 (which equates to an average of nine volunteers per committee). This estimate does not take into account individuals who serve on more than one committee.

In 2003 the Volunteer Development Agency published *Committee Matters* which examined governance in voluntary and community organisations. The *Committee Matters* report found that there were an estimated 42,315 places on voluntary management committees in Northern Ireland (this translates into an estimated total of 33,519 individuals). This suggests that figures derived from both surveys support one another and the number of individuals involved in the governance of organisations is somewhere between 30,000 and 35,000.

### 10.2 Sub-sectoral volunteer profile

Table 10.3 examines the profile of volunteers by sub-sectors. The data for this section is taken from the responses provided by voluntary and community organisations to the *State of the Sector V* survey.

**Table 10.3 - Volunteer profile by sub-sectors**

	Estimate	%
Advice and information	4,574	5.6
Arts/cultural/heritage	3,623	4.4
Community development	15,109	18.3
Disability	10,985	13.3
Education/training	2,383	2.9
Environment/conservation	10,442	12.7
Health and wellbeing	5,857	7.1
Housing/homelessness	344	0.4
Older people	2,825	3.4
Volunteer development	1,867	2.3
Women	1,915	2.3
Young people and children	22,452	27.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>82,376</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 10.3 illustrates that significantly more individuals volunteer in the young people and children's sub-sector than any other sub-sector in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. Just over a quarter of individuals (27.3%) volunteer in this area. The areas of community development and disability are also popular in terms of volunteering. 18.3% of individuals volunteer within the community development sub-sector and 13.3% of individuals volunteer in the disability sub-sector. Organisations in the environment/conservation sub-sector also benefit from a large number of volunteers, with an estimated 10,442 individuals volunteering with an environmental organisation (12.7% of all volunteers).

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**Other sources of information on volunteering:**

**The Volunteer Development Agency**

has published a number of important reports examining volunteering in Northern Ireland. *It's All About Time, Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2007* is the most recent but many other research reports and information about volunteering can be accessed at [www.volunteering-ni.org](http://www.volunteering-ni.org).

**The Office of the Third Sector**

publishes reports into volunteering and provides information on a number of volunteering initiatives across the UK ([www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector)).

**Institute of Volunteering Research**

conducts a wide range of research into volunteering issues and also publishes volunteering statistics for England ([www.ivr.org.uk/](http://www.ivr.org.uk/)).

*State of the Sector V* is the latest edition in the *State of the Sector* research programme. The previous *State of the Sector* reports have developed the only comprehensive picture of the scale and scope of the economic activities of the Northern Ireland voluntary and community sector. The publication of each *State of the Sector* report represents another step in the evolution of this type of statistical analysis and as such adds to the already broad and in depth knowledge of the sector, by examining many of the key issues currently affecting and shaping it.

*State of the Sector V* provides high level statistics on the various types of resources available to the sector and the relationship between voluntary and community organisations, government, funders and the general public.

*State of the Sector V* is invaluable to all those who need an up-to-date and reliable source of statistics and commentary on the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. People working in the sector — academics, decision-makers, social science students and journalists — will all find this publication useful.



Published February 2009 by:  
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

Tel: (028) 9087 7777  
Fax: (028) 9087 7799  
Minicom: (028) 9087 7776  
International code: +44

Email: [nicva@nicva.org](mailto:nicva@nicva.org)

Websites: [www.nicva.org](http://www.nicva.org)  
[www.communityni.org](http://www.communityni.org)

ISBN 978-0-903087-54-5

Price:

£12.00 plus P&P (NICVA members)

£15.00 plus P&P (non NICVA members)

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Company limited by guarantee (No1792)