

# Volunteering And COVID 19

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**volunteer centre**

Ionad d'Obair Dheonach Cill Mhantáin

WICKLOW

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## Abbreviations

CCMA	County and City Managers Association
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
EU	European Union
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
HSE	Health Services Executive
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
V&C Sector	Voluntary and Community Sector
VC	Volunteer Centre
VIO	Volunteer Involving Organisation
VI	Volunteer Ireland
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organisation

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## 1.0 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has changed the voluntary sector. Covid-19 has impacted the delivery of services, how they are being delivered, to whom they are delivered and, often, by whom they are being delivered. It has impacted how voluntary and community groups are being managed, as new risk factors, new methods of communicating with service users and new methods of funding, (when mechanisms such as flag days, street collections and events are no longer possible), add extra pressure to already stretched management resources.

And yet, as repeatedly testified to by local and national government, the sector has risen to the current challenge with enthusiasm. The factors now impacting the voluntary sector will continue to impact long after the current crisis is over and local and national government must be prepared to support the sector in order to ensure that it continues to sustain vibrant, resilient and inclusive communities

“As a country we have always depended greatly on the great cohort of volunteers that give so generously of their time and energy year in year out. Unfortunately, many of our volunteers are older people who have been confined to their homes as a result of the COVID 19 crisis. Back in March as the crisis was emerging, we called on people to help meet the significant needs at community level and the response has been magnificent.” *Mr Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development. Almost 17,000 people respond to government call for community volunteers during COVID-19 crisis , Press Release from Department of Rural and Community Development, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020*

“Volunteers make a vital contribution to Irish society, developing communities as vibrant, inclusive and sustainable places where people want to live. This volunteering spirit has been so clearly visible in local communities across the country throughout the COVID-19 crisis.” *Mr Seán Canney TD, Minister of State for Community Development, Natural Resources and Digital Development. IBID*

Covid-19 has impacted the very fabric of our society causing us to look more closely at who we are as a nation, and where we would like to go. The phrase “the new normal” is commonplace as we all, whether in government or as private citizens, adapt to a future that involves cocooning, restricted travel, social distancing, queuing for shops, and social isolation. How will the country respond and will this response be largely dependent on volunteers and the voluntary sector working with central and local government?

The Government of Ireland has always recognised the contribution of volunteers and the voluntary sector. This contribution is being reaffirmed by the Department of Community and Rural Development (DRCD) in their development of a “National Volunteer Strategy”. Furthermore, according to the Irish National Action Plan in Response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Update published on the 16th March 2020 “Our voluntary and community organisations are at the heart of the State’s coordinated response to COVID-19, in caring for each other.” This cross-governmental recognition is the bedrock on which the future of volunteering and the voluntary sector lies.

## 2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to give a snapshot of the contribution of volunteers to achieving the goals of local and national government during Ireland’s response to the Covid-19 crisis, and their role in our recovery from the crisis.

The actions being taken within the health service and across Government are driven by three primary goals

- 1) to minimise the risk of becoming unwell for all people in Ireland;

2) to minimise, in particular, the health, wellbeing and social impact for people in Ireland who may be at greater risk from COVID-19 through minimising the risk of illness for them while working to maintain their quality of life; and  
3) to minimise the social and economic disruption associated with the COVID-19 outbreak and the public health measures needed to respond to it. *Irish National Action Plan in Response to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Update, p.9. March 2020*

Below are some examples of how national and local government and the voluntary sector are interacting to deliver a range of services that are aiding in the success of the state's response to Covid-19. It is important to note that the contributions of many voluntary and community organisations are cross-departmental, e.g., the Community First Responders who, though stood down role in first aid, were active during the crisis, taking on the delivery of shopping and medicines and helping to combat social isolation in almost every townland in the 26 counties.

### **3.0 National and Local Government, Covid-19 and how the voluntary sector have helped to ensure the three goals identified above are being met.**

There are 17 government departments, 203 agencies and 31 Local Authorities. It is undeniable that they have all been impacted by Covid-19. This paper will look at:

- how national and local government have involved volunteers, and
- how the close cooperation between local and national government and the voluntary sector can be used as a vehicle to lessen the impact of the expected recession and plan for the future development of sustainable communities.

National and local government collectively address

- the needs of the citizens of the state, e.g., law and order, health, education, employment, the economy, and the environment - the social and cultural fabric of society
- Ireland's relationships with the world and its standing in organisations such as the EU, UN, IMF and WHO.

Their work is affected by the following factors:

- External – world affairs, international relationships, global markets and trade, technological development, EU regulations, Global Health Crisis such as Covid-19, Sustainable Development Goals, and much more
- Internal – tax take, job growth, population growth and age, immigration and emigration, health and welfare, law and order, level of education, public expenditure etc.

On the 2nd of April 2020 The Community Call, a major initiative that linked local and national Government with the V&C sector, was announced by then Tánaiste Simon Coveney TD, the Minister for Rural and Community Development Michael Ring TD, the Minister of State for Local Government and Electoral Reform John Paul Phelan TD, and the Chief Executive of Fingal County Council, AnnMarie Farrelly who represented Local Authorities. The Community Call was an unprecedented mobilization of state and voluntary resources to combat the effects of COVID-19. Its purpose was to coordinate community activity, direct community assistance to where it is needed, and marshal the volunteering energy of the country.

Its immediate focus was on the elderly and the most vulnerable, and mobilizing a rapid response in every county to make sure everyone was looked after. Following this, the focus of the call expanded to address the wellbeing of our society and how communities can work together to help the country through the on-going Covid-19 crisis. Led and coordinated by local authorities, the Community Response Forums provide help and support to those in need in

communities around the country, while also looking at issues such as the effects of the digital divide on various sections of the population including older people, disadvantaged youth, children and others. At national level, the Community Call is overseen by a group from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Health, and the County and City Management Association. Volunteer Centres across the country are represented on the local Community Response Forums and Volunteer Ireland is represented on a group of national partners to the programme coordinated by the County and City Management Association. The vast majority of Community Response Forums are utilising the resources of their local voluntary groups to deliver a range of services in response to the 41,500 and 17,000 follow-up calls received and made by Community Response Forums (May 2020). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this number represents an underestimation of the amount of calls responded to, as the development of direct relationships between volunteers who are delivering shopping, medicines etc., and the person in receipt of this help are not counted.

**4.0 The Department of Rural and Community Development** played a crucial role in providing vital supports to communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department has acknowledged its strong relationship with Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteers Centres and Volunteer Information Services. On the 24th of May 2020 when praising the response of people, - almost 17,000 have registered to volunteer through the network of Volunteer Centres, Minister Ring said, “I am very happy to be in a position to provide the necessary supports to underpin this important work through my Department’s collaboration with Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres. Together, we will ensure that the work of these volunteers results in a permanent legacy for the benefit of our communities.” Minister Ring goes on to say “The response to the COVID crisis shows once again what a fantastic resource we have in our volunteers. We need to build on this momentum for the future development of volunteering. I urge people who are in a position to help out to contact their local Volunteer Centre.”

Clearly showing their regard for the sector during the crisis, DRCD introduced a number of additional measures to provide extra support to the sector, including:

- additional funding of €407,000 to Volunteer Centres to support the COVID-19 volunteer efforts
- a COVID-19 Communication Pack for Communities
- a collection of seven leaflets offering practical advice and information on topics ranging from sensible volunteering to vulnerable persons, to the prevention of fraud and theft
- a €2.5 million COVID-19 Emergency Fund for local authorities to administer to community groups partaking in the ‘Community Call’
- €40 million support package of supports for Community and Voluntary Organisations, Charities and Social Enterprises

#### **4.1 Department of Health**

The mission of this Department is to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Ireland: by keeping people healthy; providing the healthcare people need; delivering high quality services and getting best value from health system resources.

At the very heart of the Crisis, the Department of Health and their agency the Health Services Executive realised that volunteers would play an important role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their “Be on Call for Ireland” campaign,

while primarily aimed at healthcare professionals, also included a call for volunteers though there were no roles specified.

As the pandemic unfolded, volunteers became directly involved in

- test centres, and other support roles (South County Dublin, Dublin City, Kildare and Fingal, among others).
- making face-masks and other PPE (EastCoast Mask Makers, Sew Scrubs for Ireland, Northwest Sews Masks and Scrubs and the ICA. to name a few).
- helping with the delivery of PPE (Bravo, Charlie, Tango) According to an article in the Irish Examiner (26th May 2020) this group was started in response to the “frantic social media appeals” that were popping up. In St James’ Hospital, medics turned the cameras on themselves to explain how critical the situation with PPE was."
- delivery of food and prescription medicine to those cocooning (the GAA, IRFU and numerous other volunteer groups that were started in direct response to the various calls from Government to get involved).
- befriending at a distance – writing cards and letters to those in residential settings who are isolated from their loved ones. (Let them Know You Care)
- Ambulance services (The Irish Red Cross, and Order of Malta). According to the Irish Red Cross web site “The HSE has asked for IRC volunteers who would be willing to lend their services for logistical, clinical and administrative roles in static test centres and at field hospitals, which may be required in the future”

On Tuesday, 24 March: The [Order of Malta Ambulance Corps](#) announced that volunteers were preparing to provide national support to the Health Service Executive (HSE) following the developments caused by COVID-19. The Order of Malta is one of the largest providers of first aid and voluntary ambulance services in Ireland and is listed as a ‘Voluntary Emergency Services’ resource available to the HSE under the Framework for Major Emergency Management. Following a call for support made by the HSE, the Order of Malta mobilised volunteers and equipment to assist in providing healthcare services to people across the country.

## 4.2 Department of Justice and Equality

The mission in the Department of Justice and Equality is: “Working together to advance community and national security, promote justice and equality and safeguard human rights.”

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic the Department launched the “Still Here” campaign on April 16th 2020 which addresses the issue of domestic violence, as the incidence of this is known to increase in times of stress. According to David Stanton, then Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration “This initiative is a partnership between the Department of Justice and Equality, and frontline State services including An Garda Síochána working together with organisations from the V&C sector. We stand together in our support for victims of domestic and sexual violence during this difficult period.’ Volunteer-involving-organisations include Women’s Aid, the Rape Crisis Network and the Male Advice line.

Separately, in June 2020 seven organisations came together to support people emerging from domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic – Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, Safe Ireland, Dublin City Volunteer Centre, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Volunteer Centre, Fingal Volunteer Centre, South Dublin County Volunteer Centre and Wicklow Volunteer Centre. As part of Phase 1 of the partnership and in preparation for increasing demand for supports, the participating Volunteer Centres have announced a list of ways that the public can be involved, which include:

- Donating – purchasing much-needed items and dropping them off in Dublin 8

- Volunteering your [home](#) – volunteer a holiday home or second property as a safe haven
- Writing [letters](#) of courage and hope to those emerging from domestic abuse.

### 4.3 The Department of Defence

The Department of Defence supports and recognises the value of volunteers and the voluntary sector. Its objective is “primarily concerned with ensuring the secure and stable environment necessary for economic growth and development” yet it recognises that it could not deliver this objective without the support of the voluntary sector

On a visit to Dublin Civil Defence Headquarters, former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, T.D, and former Minister with responsibility for Defence Paul Kehoe T.D, paid tribute to the significant contribution of Civil Defence and its volunteers to the national response to COVID-19.

Nationally Civil Defence has over 3,500 volunteer members who are trained in a variety of disciplines including first aid and emergency medical services, search and rescue and communications. These skills are provided on a voluntary basis to support the Principal Response Agencies in both emergency and non-emergency events.

According to the Leo Varadkar “It was a privilege to visit the headquarters of Dublin Civil Defence and meet some of the volunteers. The Civil Defence is an amazing resource, it exists in every county across the country. So far during the emergency it has provided more than 5,000 volunteer hours, helping us out with the national effort; doing everything from providing transport, to meals on wheels, to helping samples get to labs.” (20th April 2020).

Volunteer Ireland has supported the Department for Defence with a series of eight workshops for Civil Defence volunteers.

An update from the Civil Defence on 29th May says that, 91 volunteers were involved in 51 taskings and provided 329 volunteer hours to their communities on that day alone.

Since 17 March 2020,

- A daily average of 65 Civil Defence volunteers have provided a daily average of 271 volunteer hours.
- A total of 20,036 volunteer hours have been provided by 822 different Civil Defence volunteers.
- A total of 2,477 individual taskings have been undertaken in support to the Principal Response Agencies.

These volunteers are supported by a fleet of Civil Defence Vehicles including 91 four-wheel drive jeeps, 38 vans, 30 ambulances, 26 minibuses, 3 operational support vehicles, 2 trucks & 1 welfare trailer.

### 4.4 Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

COVID-19 restrictions meant that schools and universities were physically closed, people were working from home, furloughed or suddenly unemployed and services were closed or restricted. In response to this the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht started a number of initiatives that would give people a chance to volunteer from their own homes. These included:

- **Meitheal Dúchas.ie:** Dúchas.ie are inviting users of the site to transcribe, on a voluntary basis, the stories that were collected as part of the Schools’ Collection. Dúchas.ie hopes that this work will increase community participation in the project and make the material more accessible.
- **Forgotten heritage:** The department is asking the public to share images of buildings now no longer standing, for example churches, houses, even old villages/towns, and so on.

This Department relies on volunteers in the community across a range of initiatives and could not operate without its close relationships with voluntary organisations such as Local Historical Societies, Medieval Ireland, Gael Linn and many more.

#### 4.5 Department of Children and Youth Affairs

“It must be recognised by government that children and young people are the future of the state”. *World Future Council 2020*. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs’ objective it to focus “on harmonizing policy issues that affect children in areas such as early childhood care and education, youth justice, child welfare and protection, children and young people's participation, research on children and young people, youth work and cross-cutting initiatives for children.” A wide range of voluntary and community groups offer help, advice and services to children and their parents including but not limited to ISPC, Barnardos, and Onefamily. Recognizing the impact of COVID-19 on children and their parents, the Department launched a number of new initiatives in partnership with the volunteer involving organisations funded by Tusla, including CARI, Children’s Rights Alliance and others.

Parents Centre is an example of one such initiative. According to their web-site “All parents need support at different times. Support can come in many forms, such as informal support from family and friends, information, group-based or one to one support. Some supports for parents cannot operate as normal at this time. However, many services have adapted and are providing telephone/video support and organising online seminars, groups and courses.” Recognizing this, then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone stated that she was “pleased that so many organisations, funded by Tusla, are adapting the way they provide their support services for parents. This is allowing them to continue to provide support through their phone and online services, as well as providing support and information through online groups and seminars.” *Minister Zappone launches suite of resources for children and parents, Pres Release April 2020*. It is interesting to note that most of these services are supported by volunteers.

#### 4.6 Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

The mission of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is the sustainable and efficient delivery of well-planned homes and effective local government. On May 27th 2020, the then Minister of State with special responsibility for Local Government and Electoral Reform, John Paul Phelan made the following statement to the Dail. There is no introduction or explanation needed; the extracts speak for themselves!

“Our local authorities have been in the frontline of Ireland’s response to the COVID-19 crisis and they have provided leadership and support to communities all across the country. The provision of support and care to vulnerable sectors of society, whether those in emergency accommodation or those in our communities forced to remain at home in cocooned isolation, has been at the heart of the local authority response to COVID-19. The local authority system has played a pivotal role in protecting those most vulnerable communities in emergency accommodation and has worked very closely with NGOs, the HSE, An Garda Síochána and other key stakeholders to put really strong supports in place for those in emergency accommodation”.

From the very beginning of the COVID-19 emergency, it was recognised that people who were cocooning would need extra help, particularly if their usual networks of support were not able to reach them at this time. For that reason, and to put in place a safety net for such people, National Government came together with Local Government and the voluntary sector to launch the “Community Call” initiative. The Community Call initiative recognised that

local authorities are at the heart of every community in Ireland, with a unique democratic mandate and a capacity to bring together all the principal response agencies in the public sector, as well as the huge number of community and voluntary groups active locally. On Friday 27 March, immediately following the announcement by An Taoiseach of strict measures to control the spread of COVID-19, then Minister Eoghan Murphy directed all local authority chief executives to establish a dedicated forum to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in their communities. Forums, dedicated helplines and support systems were put in place in all 31 local authority areas over the weekend of 28/29 March. The Community Call initiative brought together key local bodies with national organisations, such as ALONE, An Post and Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres. It helped to ensure that everyone who needed support was identified, the support required carefully assessed and the appropriate support provided. To further support the work of the forums, the Government, through Minister Ring’s DRCD Department, launched a €2.5 million fund to support local authority “Community Call” Forums and the community and voluntary groups they are working with, such as Meals on Wheels, in delivering the local COVID-19 community response efforts. Each Community Call Forum is providing practical supports like the collection and delivery of food, meals, fuel, medication, pensions and other essential items, in strict accordance with public health advice.

Since the 31st March, the 31 Community Call Forums around the country have met 310 times and handled over 41,000 calls – some 750 calls per day on average - of which

- 24% related to the delivery of food, etc.
- 20% to social isolation or engagement
- 8% to the delivery of meals
- 6% to medical matters
- 42% to other matters, such as volunteering. (31<sup>st</sup> May 2020)

According to the Minister Phelan “The service provided by the Community Call Forums will continue to operate as long as it is needed. Important links and working relationships have been built among service providers and users at local level through the Forums. A key consideration of a review of the Initiative, which will commence shortly, will be about sustaining those links into the future. Importantly, given the breadth and reach of the bodies involved some vulnerable and isolated people in our communities have been identified as part of the work of the forums. They have now been brought under the wing of their local communities and support organisations, which should allow them to continue to live independently in their homes for longer. Community Call Forums are also playing an important role in the “In This Together” initiative which aims to help everyone in Ireland to Stay Connected, Stay Active, and look after their Mental Wellbeing throughout the Covid-19 Emergency.” The Minister concludes by saying “In this time of challenge for our country we remember all those who have died and who left behind grieving families.... We have seen the best of our people in this time, a modern-day meitheal spirit as our communities have rallied around each other and supported those most in need of help. While we have made good progress in dealing with this crisis, the road ahead will be difficult. However, I firmly believe that local communities and local government working together will be an essential part of our successful recovery.” *Statement to the Dail on Covid-19 as it relates to Local Government, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020*

## 5.0 The role of Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland

As mentioned above the Department of Community and Rural Development has recognised the role played by Volunteer Ireland and the network of Volunteer Centres. Volunteer Centres across the country have been members

of their local Forums, while Volunteer Ireland has liaised closely with the DRCD, the CCMA, LGMA, Alone, and many others. Many Volunteer Centres proactively developed new initiatives to address gaps in services that appeared. In addition, Centres provided leadership and support where groups were under resourced or in danger of being overwhelmed.

Key issues addressed by Volunteer Ireland the network of volunteer centres include

### 5.1 For local authorities

- VCs were the guardian and promoters of best practice in volunteering and volunteering management
- Advice on Garda Vetting, GDPR and other issues concerning volunteers
- Volunteer Management and Leadership
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Management of all volunteers that registered with the Community Response Forums Helplines.
- Involvement in working groups that emerged such as, food poverty and the digital divide.
- Help with creating a database of active VIOs in each county.
- Dissemination of good news stories about the Community Alert Forums, volunteers and VIOs.
- Provision of vetted volunteers to assist helplines. (This did not happen in every LA).
- Mental Health Support for helpline staff off-loading difficult calls

### 5.2 For volunteers

- Registering over 17,000 (as of June 2020) new volunteers who responded to the COVID-19 crisis
- Keeping these volunteers informed of new initiatives in their counties.
- Providing protocols and guidance to these volunteers so that they would know how to volunteer safely.
- Referring volunteers to organisations
- Thank you email and social media posts
- Delivery of the #VolunteerFromHome campaign

### 5.3 For VIOs

- Advice on Garda Vetting, GDPR and other issues concerning VIOs, particularly with new VIOs which started in response to the COVID-19 crisis and VIOs which changed their operational focus in a similar response.
- Advice on registering with the Charities Regulatory Authority
- Development of volunteer roles descriptions to ensure that they complied with all necessary health and safety measures
- Toolkits and resources for both volunteers and VIOs.
- Screening to assist VIOs in selecting volunteers, e.g. Irish Cancer Society.
- Advice on the development and delivery of online training and webinars.
- Volunteer Ireland developed a fabulous series of free webinars, including a Peer Support Volunteer Managers Online Coffee Break.
- Biweekly, weekly and bimonthly newsletters to VIOs and volunteers alerting them to the most recent developments from the HSE, DRCD and other government departments and agencies.
- Dissemination of good news stories on traditional and social media.
- Advice on Risk Management and links to appropriate risk management templates.

- Development of the Business Advice Programme, engaging corporate volunteers to provide support and advice to VIOs on topics of interest during COVID-19 and beyond.

## 6.0 Conclusion

*“The time has come, the Walrus said to talk of many things, of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings and why the sea is boiling hot and whether pigs have wings.” The Walrus and the Carpenter, Lewis Carroll.*

COVID-19 has changed our world. It has changed how, where and when we work, play, exercise and socialise. It has changed how we educate children, how we support the older people in our population, how we support those with physical and intellectual disabilities, those suffering with mental health issues, the homeless, the isolated and the alone. Given this, it is not surprising that it has fundamentally changed the voluntary and community sector and will continue to change them as the on-going impacts of this crisis are measured.

So, like the Walrus, it is important that VCs, VI, VIOs, Volunteers and local and national government realise the many things we need to consider, plan for, and adapt to in the future ensuring the voluntary and community sector can continue to support the Irish community through future challenges. According to Robert Watt, Secretary General of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform speaking about the Coronavirus “it would be important to plan for various scenarios, including optimistic ones” *Government may have to re-assess Capital Spending Plans due to COVID-19, The Irish Times, May 3rd 2020.*

According to the Irish Central Bank quarterly report of April 2020 “At home, COVID-19 is having a severe impact on the economy. Activity and employment have dropped sharply and this will continue for some time. Our analysis suggests that the unemployment rate, when adjusted to include all those on temporary income support from the government, could rise to almost 25 per cent over the April-June period. However, when the necessary containment measures are eased, the economy should gradually begin to recover and people will be able to return to work. *Central Bank, Quarterly Bulletin, April 2020.*

In the voluntary and community sector, the impact of COVID-19 (thus far) has demonstrated the following

- The resilience of Irish Communities
- The return on investment made into volunteering and the voluntary sector.
- The willingness of so many people to volunteer
- A switch to online delivery of services, where possible.
- The impossibility of delivering some services online and the need for these to adapt, e.g. Special Olympics, Meals on Wheels, Summer Camps, and many more
- A need for greater IT infrastructure expenditure, followed by a need for more IT training and support.
- Board and management training across a range of subjects including risk management, safe and sustainable transport, design and use of safe spaces, and safe delivery of services.
- The impact of the digital divide on older people, people with physical and intellectual disabilities, disadvantaged families, children and youths, and people living in socially isolated circumstances.

- The need to appreciate the value of carers in the community (parents, siblings, family, relations; local and national governments dependence on these carers and the value they give and the carers huge dependence on the voluntary sector).
- The necessity of recognising that strong communities of involved people improve mental, physical and economic well-being.

“While we have made good progress in dealing with this crisis, the road ahead will be difficult. However, I firmly believe that local communities and local government working together will be an essential part of our successful recovery.” *Minister Phelan, May 27th 2020.* It is estimated by national and international economic bodies, e.g., ESRI, World Bank, IMF, that unemployment will rise significantly. In the last recession, unlike other countries, volunteering in the Irish state rose exponentially demonstrating how volunteering and the voluntary and community sector are pivotal in the recovery process if positioned so that people and communities can gain new skills, build new social networks and improve their environmental and cultural environments.

As stated by Minister Phelan “the close cooperation between local and national government and the C&V sector can be used as a vehicle to lessen the impact of the expected recession and plan for the future development of sustainable communities.” *Statement to the Dail 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020*