



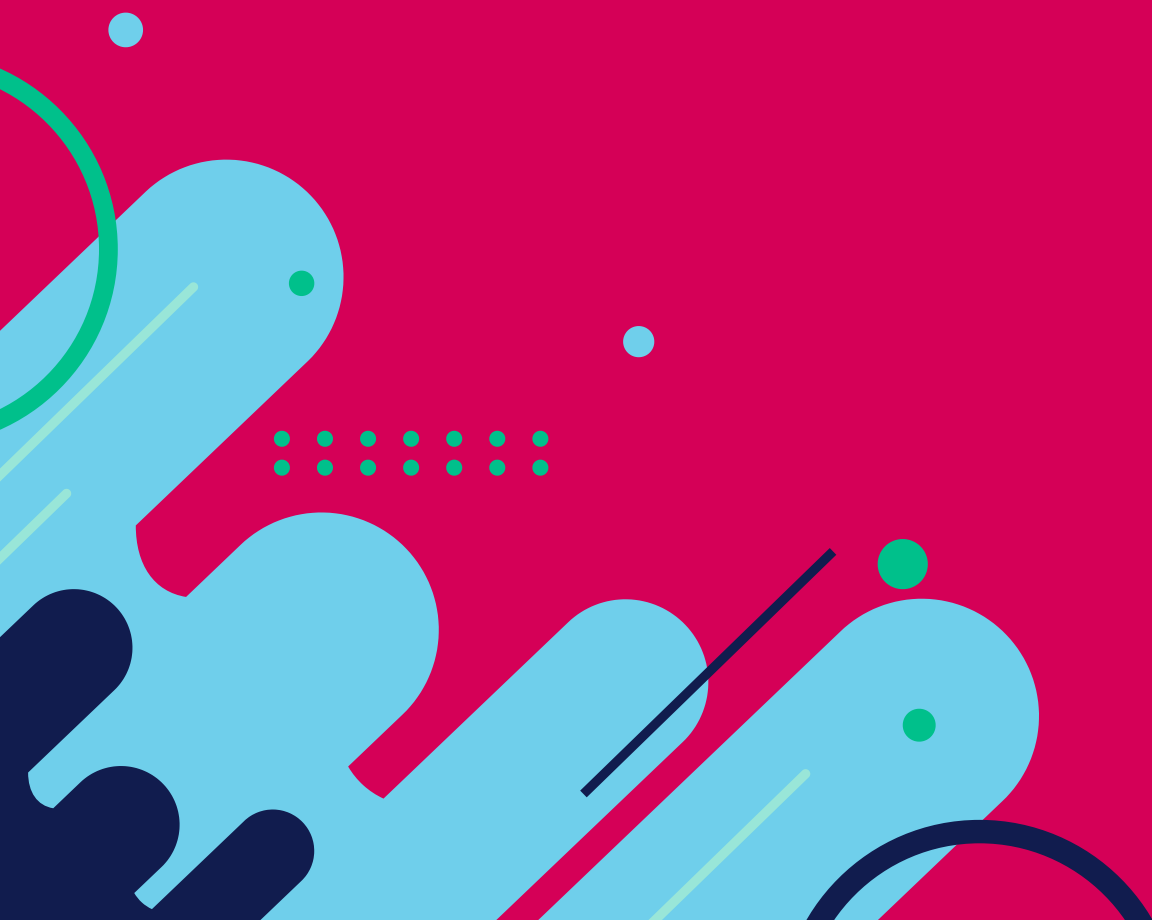
# 2024 ELECTION MANIFESTO



**Volunteer  
Ireland**  
Obair Dheonach Éireann

# Harnessing the power of volunteering for a stronger Ireland.

We call on Government to support, value and invest in volunteering by committing to three key actions.





# OUR ASKS

**1.** Fund and develop the national Community Volunteers programme, ensuring that communities are better prepared to respond to emergencies and public health crises.

Develop a successor to the National Volunteering Strategy, focusing on increasing participation, providing training, and creating sustainable and inclusive structures for volunteers across all sectors.

**2.**

**3.** Recognise the value of volunteering to all corners of society through continued investment in volunteering support structures.



# OUR ASKS IN DEPTH

## **1. Fund and develop the national Community Volunteers programme, ensuring that communities are better prepared to respond to emergencies and public health crises.**


The Community Volunteers programme, funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and delivered by Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Centres, supports urgent needs in our communities, like the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, along with supporting local community events and festivals. The Community Volunteers programme also plays a huge role in supporting social inclusion in our communities, for example, over 44% of Community Volunteers list their nationality as other than Irish, highlighting the critical role volunteering plays in increasing diversity and inclusion in Ireland.

## **2. Develop a successor to the National Volunteering Strategy, focusing on increasing participation, providing training, and creating sustainable and inclusive structures for volunteers across all sectors.**

The National Volunteering Strategy (NVS) was published in December 2020 and was a milestone for volunteering in Ireland. We welcome the investment in the strategy to date and the progress that has been made, however there is need for continued investment building on the groundwork that has been laid by the current NVS in addressing key challenges that face volunteering today like building capacity in organisations to adapt to new ways of volunteering.

## **3. Recognise the value of volunteering to all corners of society through continued investment in volunteering support structures.**

Government must fully recognise, celebrate, and continue to invest in the power of volunteering to unlock its full potential for the benefit of all. Volunteering doesn't happen in a vacuum and it is critical that Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland are funded to continue to provide much needed support to local organisations and volunteers that deliver vital services in our communities.





# THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is at the heart of Irish life. It fosters community spirit, supports those in need and strengthens the fabric of our society. We believe it holds the key to a brighter, and more inclusive future. Each year, over 1 million volunteers contribute their time, skills, and energy to causes across Ireland, creating an economic value estimated at €1.5 billion. These volunteers are not only the driving force behind local sports clubs, health initiatives, educational support, and community development but also contribute to a more cohesive, inclusive, and healthier Ireland.

The economic and social impact of volunteering in Ireland is undeniable, but many organisations report increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers. By recognizing and investing in the economic value of volunteering, we can ensure that volunteering continues to thrive and amplify its benefits across sectors and regions. This manifesto is a call to action for government leaders to place volunteering at the centre of their policy agenda, ensuring that the transformative impact of volunteers is supported and sustained in the years to come.



# THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING

## Building stronger communities and fostering social cohesion through volunteering

Volunteering is fundamental to building stronger, more cohesive communities in Ireland. Volunteers organise local events, clean up public spaces, support refugees and marginalised communities, and contribute to social cohesion. Over 400,000 community development volunteers provide €300 million in annual value, working to build more connected, inclusive, and vibrant towns and villages across the country.

### Key Impacts

**Strengthening Local Ties:** Volunteers are the backbone of local community organisations, festivals, and cultural events. Initiatives like the Tidy Towns competitions and local arts festivals are driven by volunteers, helping to beautify and maintain the cultural vibrancy of our towns and villages.

**Enhancing Social Inclusion:** Volunteers work with marginalised communities, including immigrants, asylum seekers, and individuals with disabilities, helping them integrate into society. Programmes like the Direct Provision Advocacy Network rely on volunteers to provide support and advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers.

**Disaster and Crisis Response:** Volunteer networks, such as the Community Volunteers Programme, play a critical role in responding to natural disasters and public health crises, exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukraine crisis, when volunteers delivered essential services to vulnerable populations.

**Economic Impact:** The economic value of volunteer work in community development is estimated to be around €300 million annually. This includes both direct community services and the long-term benefits of increased social cohesion and community resilience. This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the economic impact of volunteering across all sectors.

# THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING

## Enhancing health and wellbeing through volunteering

Volunteers play a vital role in delivering essential health services, from providing support to individuals and communities, particularly in the area of mental health, elderly care, and disability services. There are over 150,000 health volunteers in Ireland, delivering an estimated €220 million in value to the health and social care sectors. Volunteers play a crucial role in alleviating isolation, providing companionship, and supporting healthcare delivery. They help alleviate the pressure on public services, fill gaps in care, and foster greater wellbeing in communities. Volunteering is a powerful force for social good. It helps build trust, fosters collaboration, and creates opportunities for people from all walks of life to contribute to the greater good. To ensure that volunteering continues to thrive in Ireland, we must build a culture that celebrates and supports volunteers at every level.

### Key Impacts

**Improved Mental Health:** Volunteering contributes to both the mental wellbeing of volunteers and those they assist. Research from Mental Health Ireland shows that volunteering reduces feelings of loneliness, increases self-esteem, and promotes a sense of purpose.

**Support for vulnerable populations:** Volunteers working with organisations such as ALONE and the Irish Cancer Society provide crucial services such as companionship for the elderly, transport to medical appointments, and support for those facing illness. These services improve the quality of life for vulnerable populations who might otherwise face isolation or inadequate care.

**Public Health Initiatives:** Volunteers contribute to health campaigns, raising awareness about critical public health issues such as cancer screening, mental health, and addiction recovery.

**Economic Impact:** The Irish Cancer Society estimates that volunteer-led services, such as the Volunteer Driver Service for cancer patients, save the healthcare system substantial resources. The broader impact of health volunteering is estimated to provide an economic value of around €220 million annually.

# THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING

## Empowering education and youth development through volunteering

Volunteers play a critical role in education and youth development. Whether they are tutoring students, mentoring young people, or running extracurricular programmes, they ensure that children and young people have access to the tools and resources they need to succeed.

### Key Impacts

**Mentorship and Support:** Programmes like Big Brother Big Sister Ireland rely on volunteers to provide mentorship to young people, fostering their personal and academic development. Volunteers act as positive role models, helping youth navigate challenges and build life skills.

**Enhancing Educational Opportunities:** Many schools, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, benefit from volunteer support in extracurricular activities, homework clubs, and reading programmes. These efforts help bridge educational gaps and improve academic outcomes for students who might otherwise struggle.

**Youth Empowerment:** Organisations such as Foróige, one of Ireland's largest youth organisations, depend on volunteers to facilitate youth clubs and leadership programmes. Volunteers help young people develop their leadership skills, confidence, and sense of responsibility.

**Economic Impact:** The value of volunteer contributions to education and youth development is substantial. The time donated by volunteers to mentoring and extracurricular activities is valued at approximately €150 million per year. This support also leads to long-term societal benefits by helping to reduce early school dropout rates and promoting higher levels of educational attainment.



# THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING

## Investing in sports through volunteering

Volunteers are the backbone of Irish sports. Across the country, 500,000 sports volunteers contribute their time to grassroots clubs and national events, providing €1.1 billion in annual value. Local sports clubs, teams, and national sporting events are heavily dependent on volunteer support for organising activities, coaching, fundraising, and event management. These volunteers support the physical and mental health of people of all ages, foster community pride, and help develop the next generation of athletes and leaders. Sporting activities across the country simply would not function without the support of volunteers.

### Key Impacts

**Youth and Community Engagement:** Volunteers are vital to running local sports clubs, such as the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), which relies heavily on community volunteers to coach, manage teams, and organise events. Around 500,000 volunteers are involved in sports annually in Ireland, many of whom contribute through the GAA, soccer, rugby, and athletics clubs.

**Skill Development:** Volunteers help develop young athletes' skills, promote healthy lifestyles, and instil values such as teamwork and discipline.

**Major Sports Events:** Volunteers are also essential for the successful hosting of large sports events, such as the Dublin Marathon and international rugby matches. These events, which attract large crowds, would not be possible without the logistical support of volunteers.

**Economic Impact:** According to the Federation of Irish Sport, the value of volunteer contributions to sports in Ireland is estimated to be around €1.1 billion annually. This includes the economic impact of coaching, training, and administrative work performed by volunteers.

# CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION

Volunteering is not just an act of service—it is a powerful tool for building a stronger, more resilient, and more inclusive Ireland. From grassroots sports clubs to community health programmes, from youth mentorship to social inclusion initiatives, volunteers are making a difference in every corner of our country. Volunteer Ireland calls on the government to recognize the immense value of volunteering and to take bold action to support and expand this vital sector. By investing in volunteerism, we can build a future where every citizen has the opportunity to contribute, every community thrives, and Ireland continues to be a beacon of compassion, cooperation, and progress.

Together, let us build a future where volunteering is not just encouraged but celebrated, supported, and sustained as a central pillar of our national identity.

