

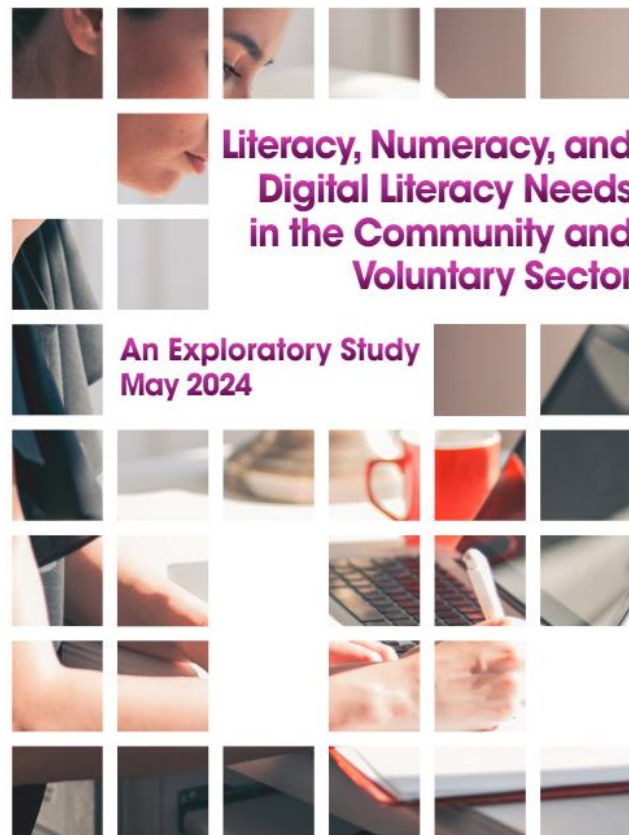


Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

Exploratory Study of Literacy Needs in the Community and Voluntary Sector

Background

This study is part of a joint project between **The Wheel**, Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities, and social enterprises, and **NALA**, the National Adult Literacy Agency. It was funded by the **Adult Literacy for Life Office**.



Literacy affects everyone

In Ireland, **more than 500,000 people** have unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs.

This means they may be unable to fill in a form, vote, read instructions on medicines, add up a bill, help kids with homework or search the web for information.

This can negatively impact their confidence and prevent them from participating fully in society.

Adult Literacy for Life Strategy

Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) is a 10 year, whole-of-government and society strategy which aims to ensure everyone has the literacy to meet their needs, and that literacy is valued and supported at every level of society.



The Wheel is committed to ensuring that Ireland's 700,000+ nonprofit workers, both paid and unpaid, and the organisations they work in, have the skills they need to deliver their varied and important missions across Irish society.

A Literacy Friendly Sector Matters

Community and voluntary organisations are a trusted source of information, advice and support in communities.

Adults with literacy needs may not feel comfortable or confident joining groups and clubs, doing courses, accessing services or applying to be a volunteer.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and The Wheel developed a project to support community and voluntary organisations to take a literacy friendly approach in their work.

THE PROJECT: MAY 2023 – DECEMBER 2023

- Literacy Awareness Webinars
- In-person Literacy Friendly Workshops
- Plain English Training
- Exploratory Study of Literacy Needs among staff & volunteers

1. The Study

Approach

- **Focus:** skills existing within staff and volunteers in the sector
- **Purpose:** to find out what supports individuals need and want, and how organisations could potentially reduce unnecessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy barriers.

Methodology

Mixed-methods approach:

- Focus Groups,
- Interviews
- and Survey of 320 individuals

2. Sector and Workforce Profile

A Vital Sector

- **34,331** community, voluntary and charitable organisations
- **600,000 – 700,000** volunteers, incl. **76,000+** unpaid trustees
- **281,250** employees of registered charities
- **1 in 8 of the labour force** work in a charity.
- income of **€19.7 billion** per year



The Community and Voluntary Sector Workforce

The sector employs more people than, for example, either **Agri-food** or the **Tourism and Hospitality** Sectors.

Arts, Culture, Media 3,027 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts • Museums and libraries • Heritage and visitor attractions • Media, Film 	Health 35,203 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitals • Residential care centres • Residential mental health services • Health services, health promotion • Mental health services • Addiction Support • Hospices 	Development, Housing 27,549 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local development • Job creation • Social enterprise • Sheltered housing • Social housing
Recreation, Sports 3,392 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational clubs, societies • Agricultural fairs • Sports organisations 	Social Services 44,231 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-school childcare • Family support services • Youth services • Services for older people • Services for people with disabilities • Travellers, ethnic minorities • Homelessness services • Emergency relief services 	Advocacy, Law, Politics 2,447 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics • Advocacy • Civil and human rights • Legal services
Education, Research 25,151 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Primary education • Primary education • Secondary education • Vocational, technical education • Third-level education • Research • Education support • Adult and continuing education 	Environment 1,474 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal welfare • Group water schemes • Environmental enhancement • Environmental sustainability 	International 5,431 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International development • International affiliation
Philanthropy, Voluntarism 665 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philanthropy • Fund-raising • Voluntarism 		Religion 1,209 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places of worship • Religious associations • Diocesan, parishes
		Professional, Vocational 4,036 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade unions, employer orgs. • Chambers of commerce • Professional/sector rep. bodies

Skills Profile

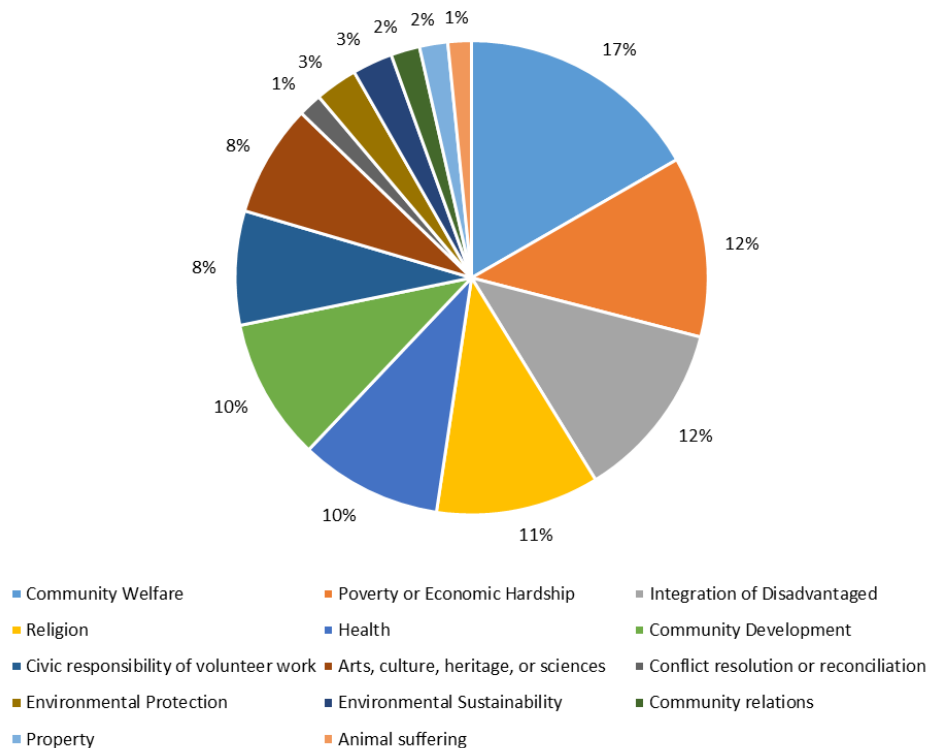
Category of CV organisation	Number of workers	Classification using Eurostat NACE Rev 2 manual
Arts, culture, media	3,027	R – Arts, entertainment and recreation
Recreation, Sports	3,392	R – Arts, entertainment and recreation
Education, Research	25,151	P – Education
Health	35,203	Q – Human health and social work
Social Services	44,231	Q – Human health and social work
Local Development, Housing	27,549	C – Construction O – Public administration and defence L – Real Estate Q – Human health and social work
Environment	1,474	E – Water supply, waste management and remediation activities
Advocacy, Law, Politics	2,447	S – Other service activities
Philanthropy, Voluntarism	665	S – Other service activities
International	5,431	S – Other service activities
Religion	1,209	S – Other service activities
Professional, Vocational	4,036	S – Other service activities

The CV sector has a similar workforce to the public sector (“Q” and “P” NACE classifications)

It is very different from commercial SMEs (“B” to “M”)

The CV sector also has unique features, incl. Governance, Regulation, Reporting, Impact Measurement, Income diversification, Working with Volunteers and “Scheme” Workers, Involving Communities, Cooperation with Public Agencies...

The Sector is Working on the Big Issues

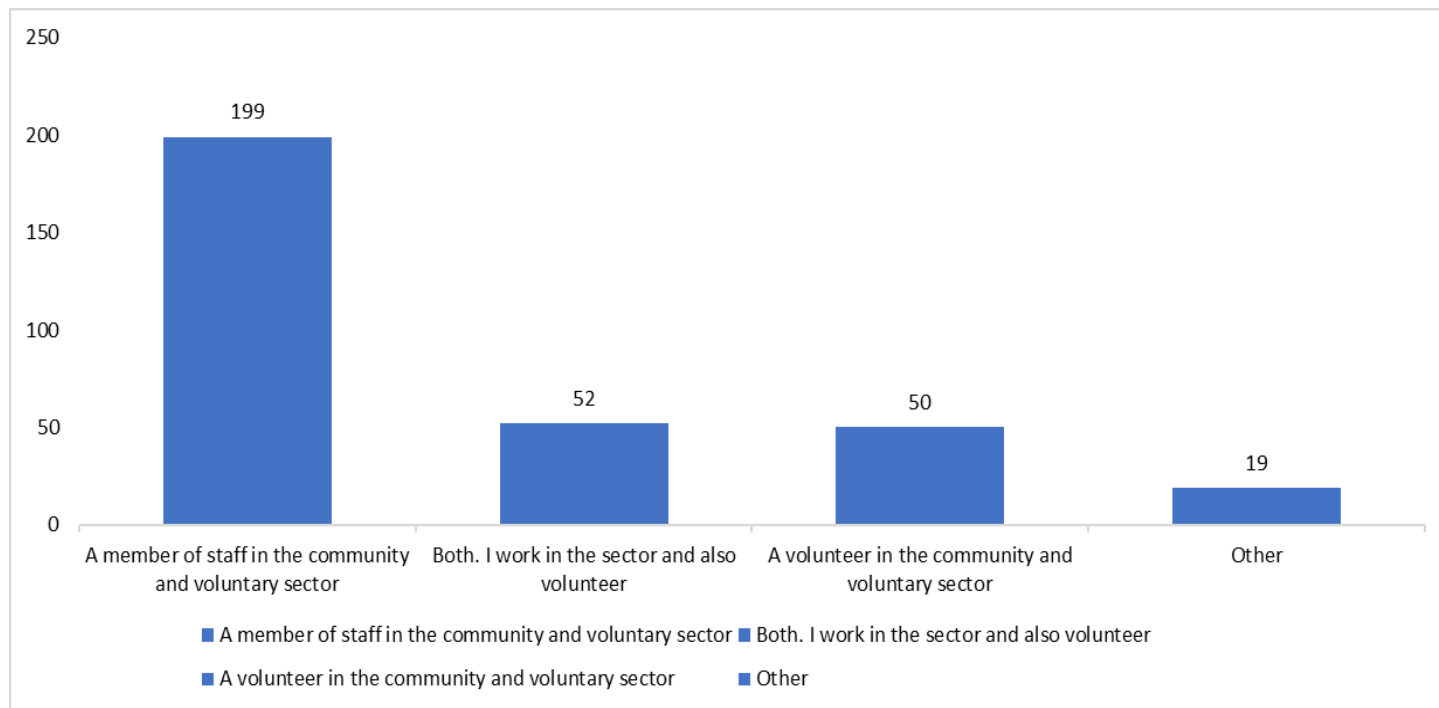


- 17% concerned with Community Welfare
- 12% concerned with Poverty or Economic Hardship, and Integration of Disadvantaged
- 11% concerned with Religion
- 10% concerned with Health
- 10% concerned with Community Development

Data from Charities Regulator Annual Report 2022. *Chart excludes Education

3. Exploratory Literacy Research Findings

Respondents by Role



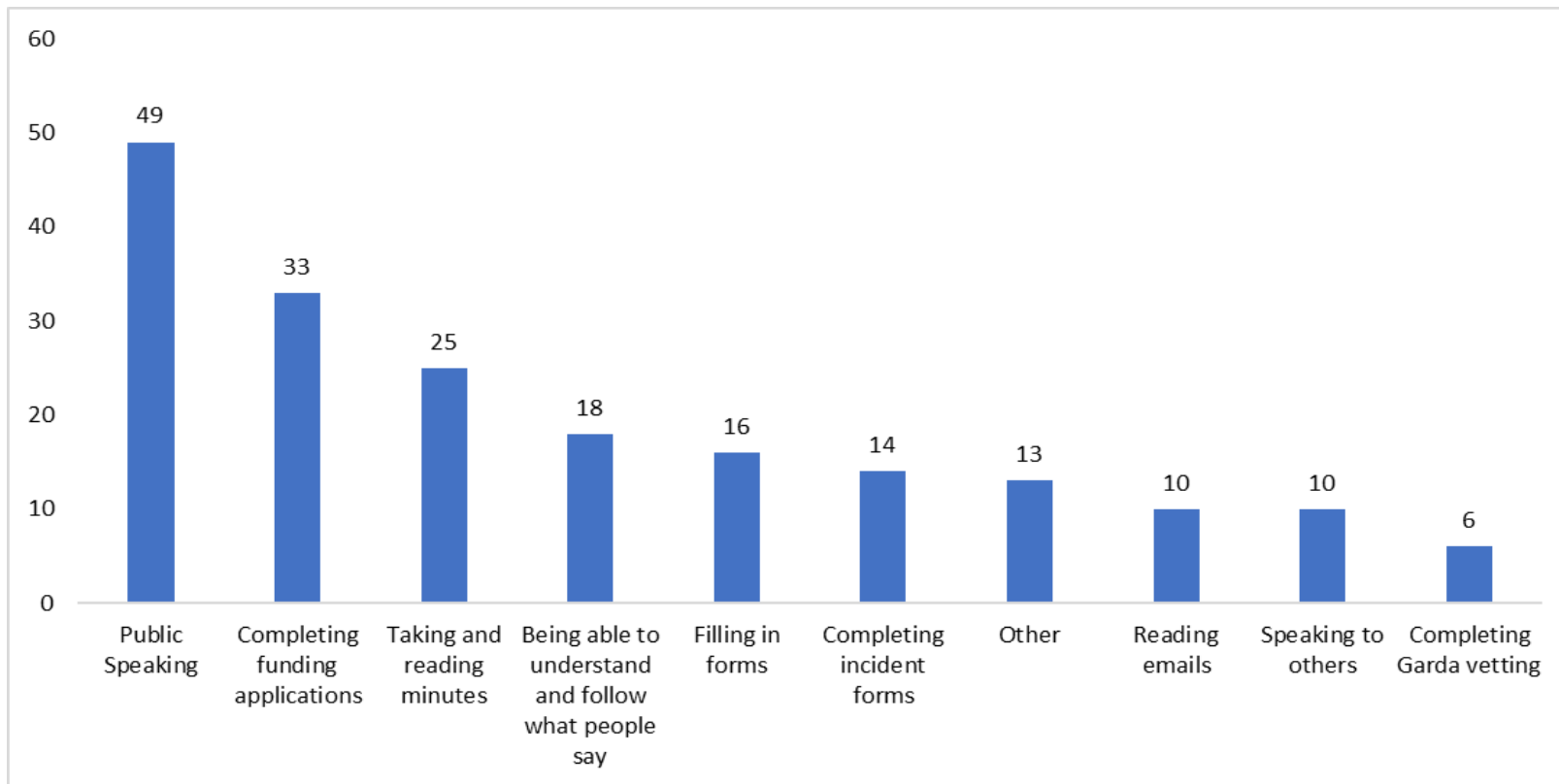
Profile of Respondents

- 74% had attended a higher education institution
- 91% completed a course since leaving school and joining the CV sector as staff or volunteer
- Of the 9% who did not undertake learning after school, the following reasons were given:
 - 57% not interested
 - 24% did not know where to go
 - 24% could not afford it

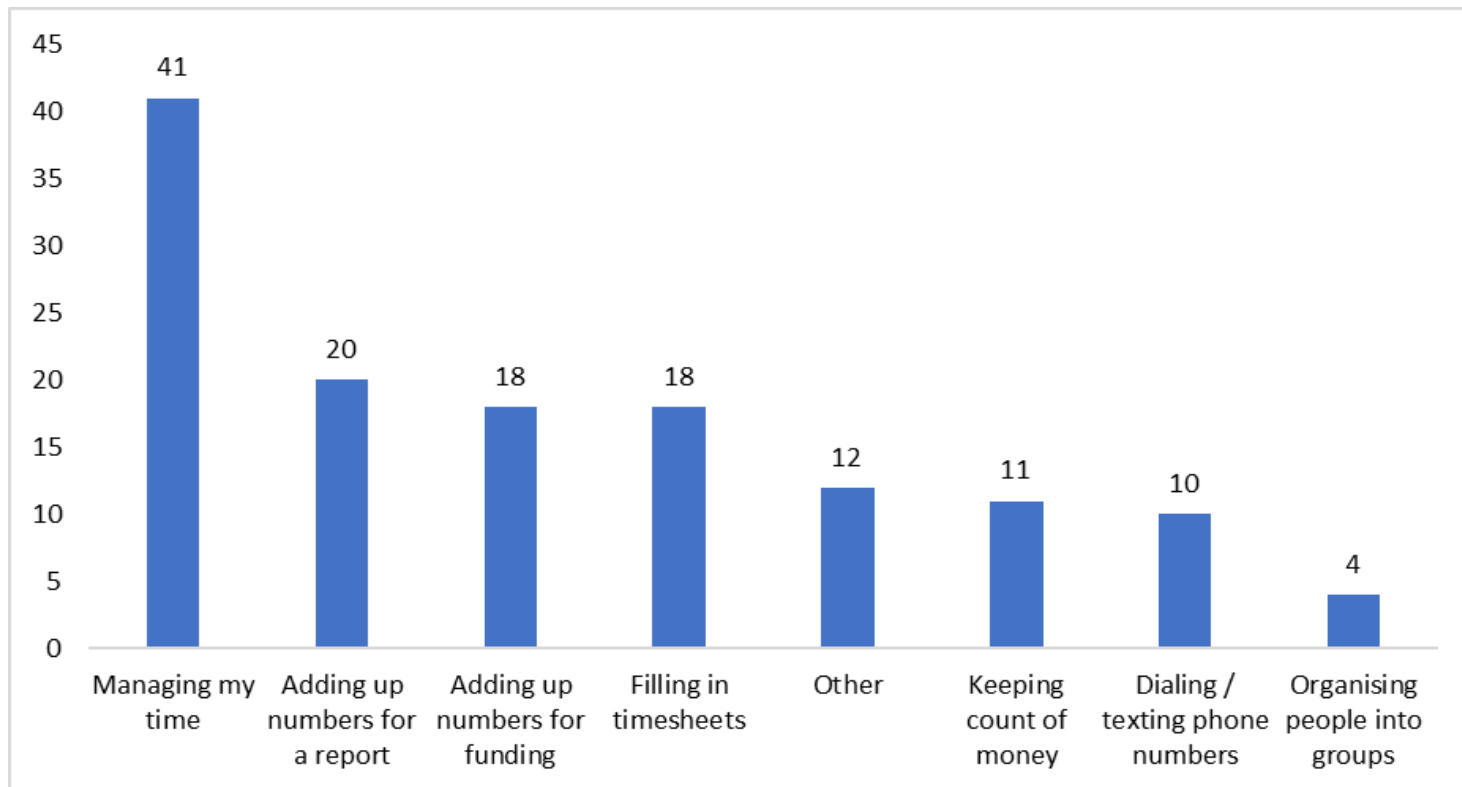
Broad Spectrum of Literacy Needs

- 30% indicated meeting a challenge with **at least one literacy skill**.
- 27% indicated meeting challenges with **numeracy skills**
- 28% indicated meeting challenges with **digital literacy skills**

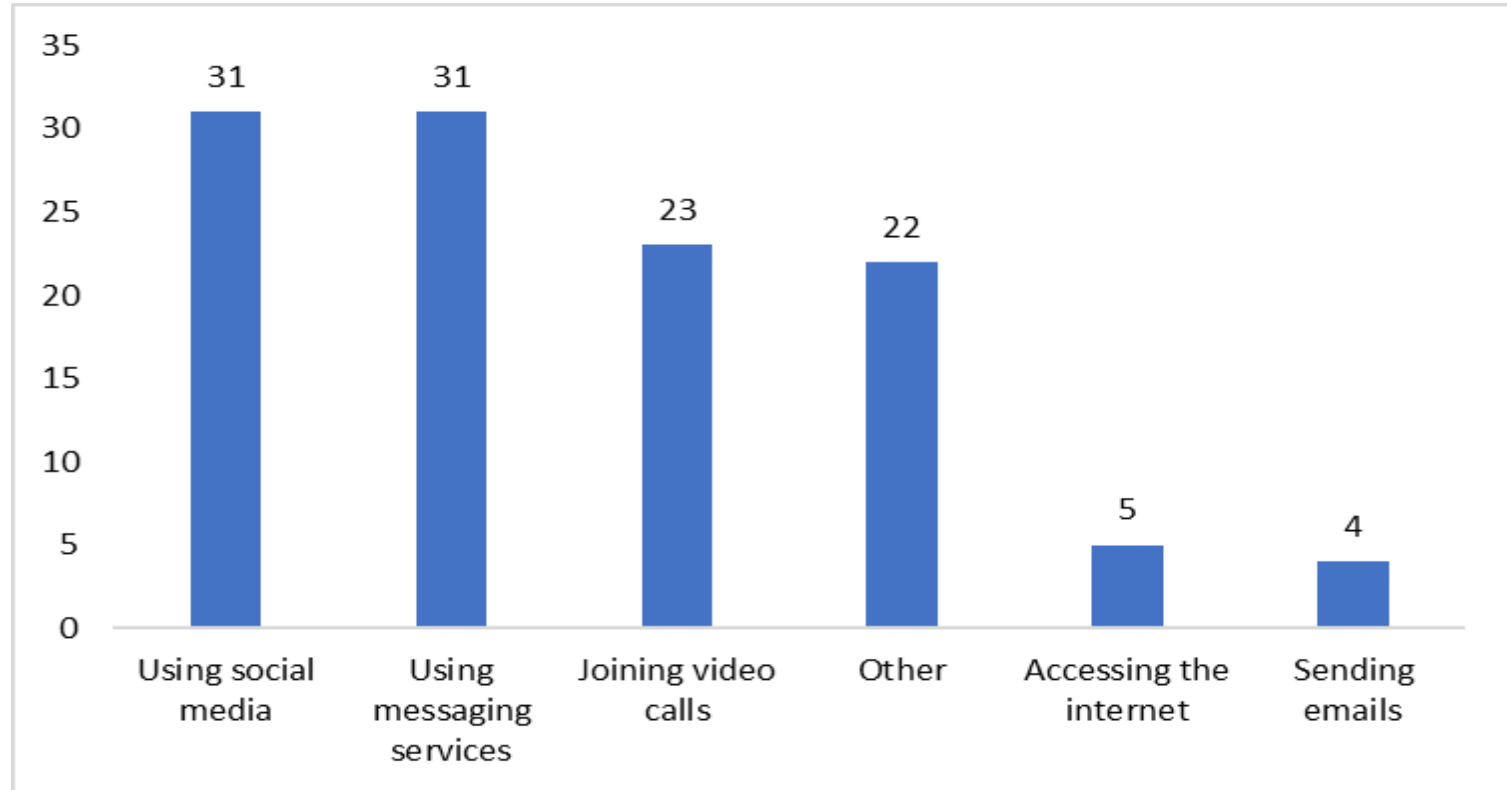
Literacy Challenges



NUMERACY CHALLENGES



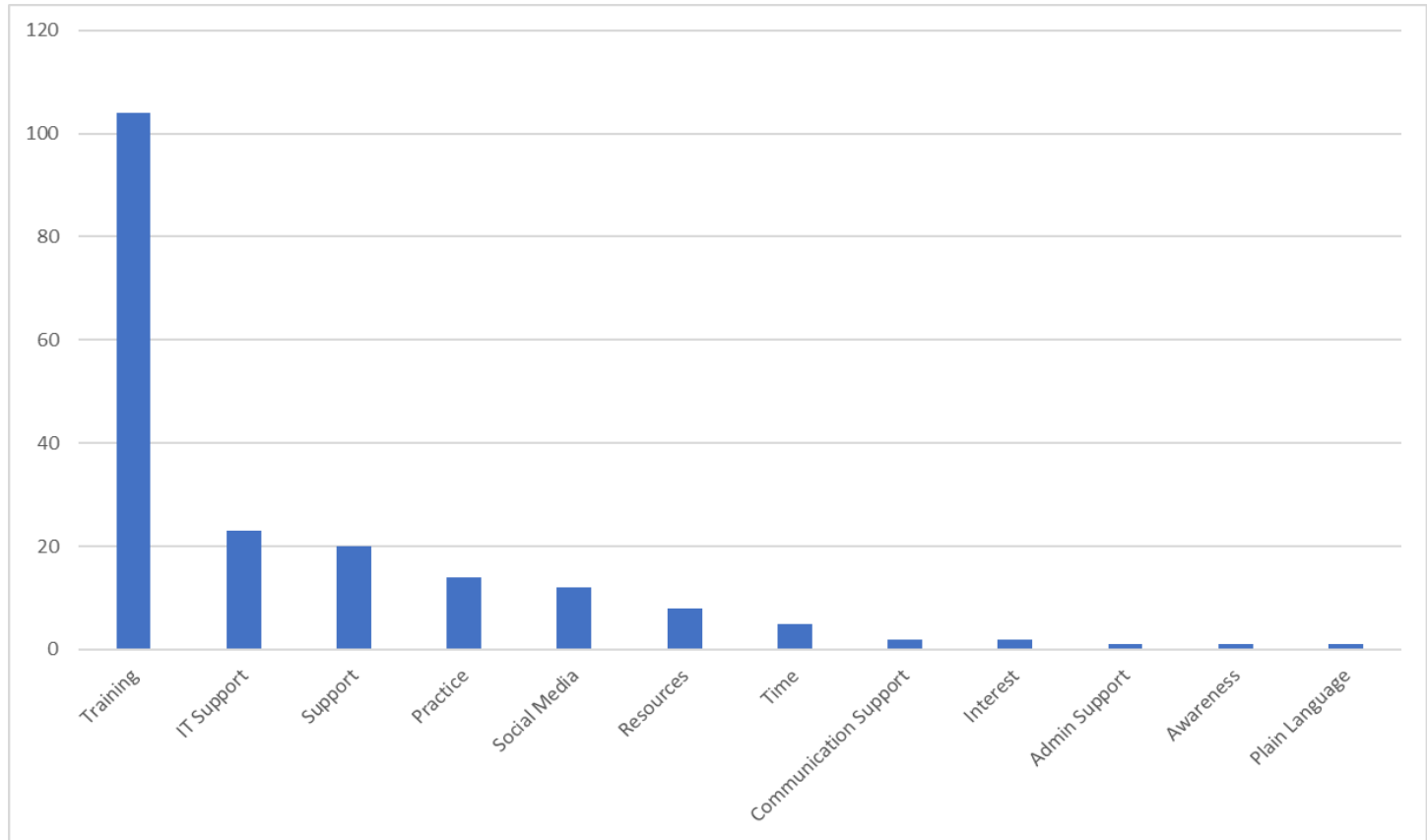
Digital Literacy Challenges



Barriers and Challenges

- lack of funding for tailored training programmes
- limited access to, or awareness of, suitable educational resources
- lack of suitable technical supports
- stigma, stress and anxiety about literacy needs
- complex and inflexible systems for funding, vetting, recruitment and so on
- policy gaps in organisations
- lack of literacy awareness in organisations

How to Improve Skills?



Recommendations

- 1 Skill development should be prioritised among staff and volunteers by creating an organisational culture that supports continuous learning and development.
- 2 Policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders must increase their awareness about the importance of addressing literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs among staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

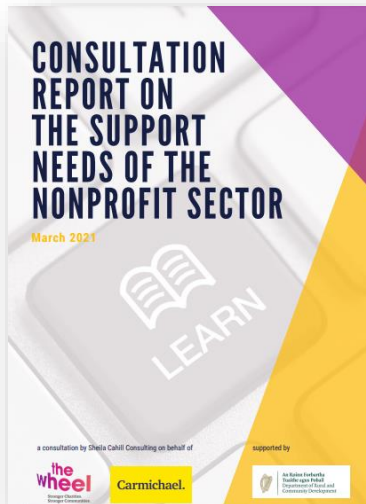
3 Community and voluntary sector organisations need to be resourced and encouraged to reference literacy in their existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies and embed literacy friendly approaches in their work practices.

4 There is a need to undertake a more in-depth study into the literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy needs in the CV sector to support the co-design of key supports.

5 Ensure ease of access to suitable literacy training programmes for CV sector employers and workers.

4. Evidence of wider skill needs in the sector

Indecon: Investment Appraisal of Upskilling Employees in the Nonprofit Sector



Sheila Cahill Consulting: Consultation Report on the Support Needs of the Nonprofit Sector

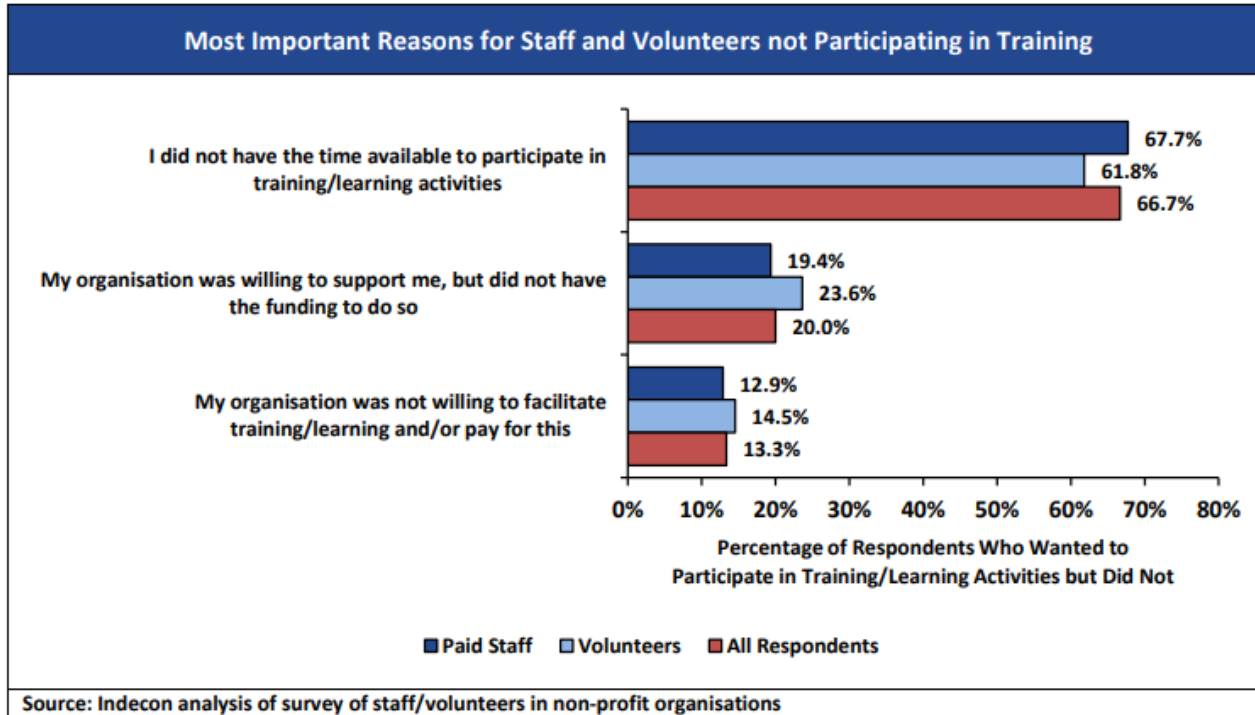
Indecon Findings

1. **Critical skills gaps** exist in the non-profit sector workforce
2. **Levels of training** in the Irish non-profit sector workforce are very low
3. There is a need for **increased investment** in skills enhancement in the non-profit sector
4. Investment in upskilling in the sector is likely to have a **net positive cost-benefit** (avg of 2.86)

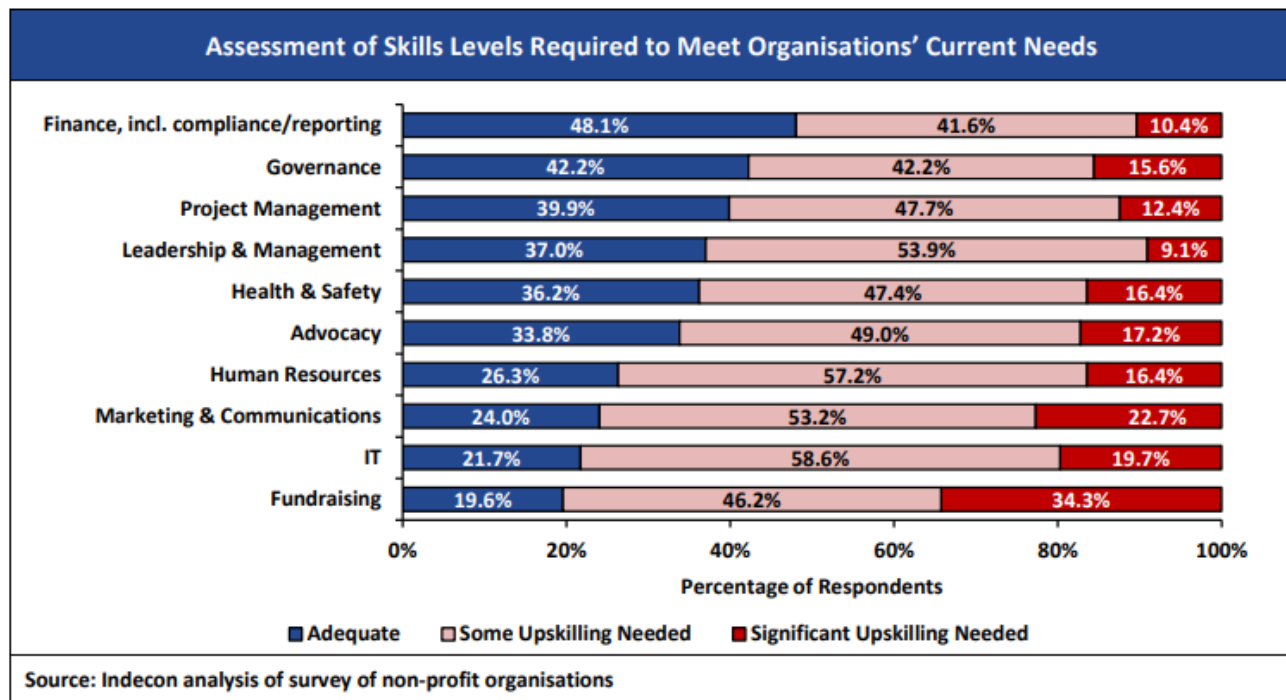
Indecon report presented to Dept Further & Higher Education , Research, Innovation & Science on 18th Sept 2020



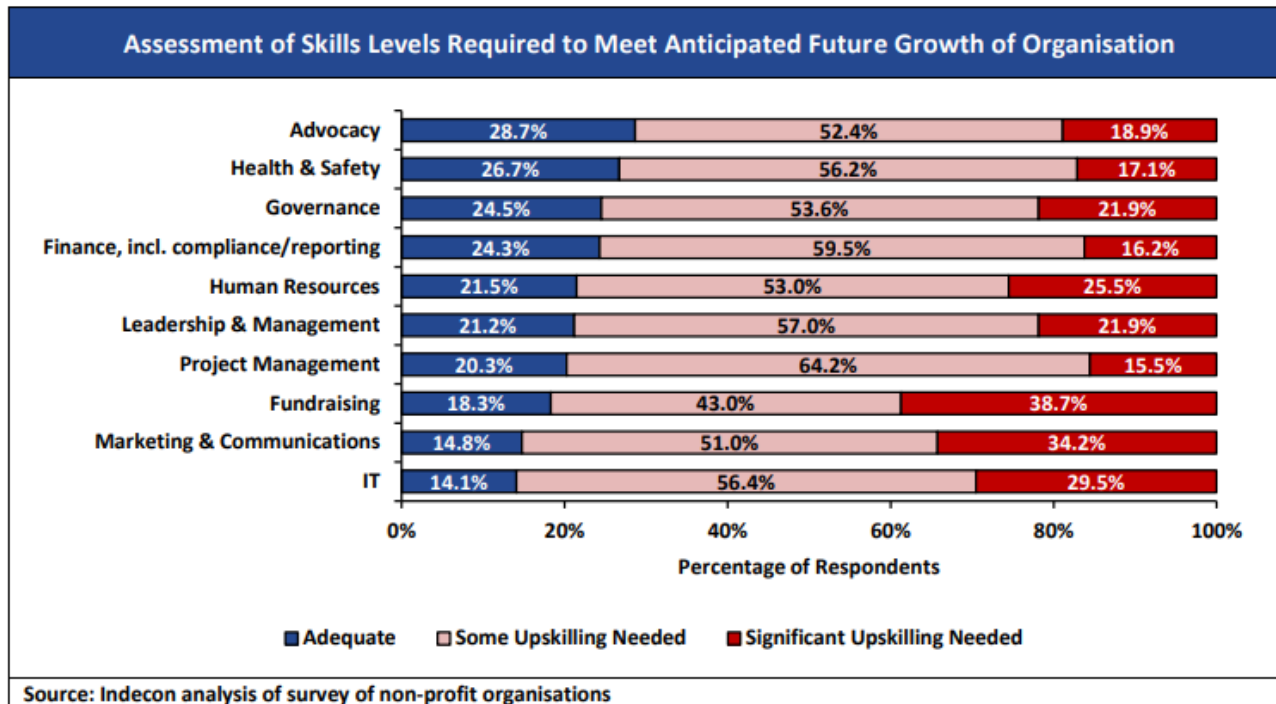
Time Available is the Greatest Barrier



Current Skills Gaps



Emerging Skills Gaps



Priorities for Training and Development Supports

- Start ups
- Strategic & operational planning
- Funding
- Governance
- Financial management
- HR / Staff management
- Volunteer management
- Legal
- Impact Measurement
- Digital skills
- Communications
- Policy and research
- Collaboration
- Sub-Sectoral specific

OECD, 2023:

*“These organisations [in the CVSE sector] are acknowledged as **making a vital contribution to Ireland’s economic and social prosperity** and are increasingly deploying new technologies and creative approaches to address societal and environment challenges. However, many programmes listed [elsewhere in the report] are not available to charities or not-for-profit organisations . . . **Addressing these unmet needs should be considered a priority in Ireland.**”*



OECD Skills Studies

OECD Skills Strategy Ireland

ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS



In most cases, CVSE sector employers:

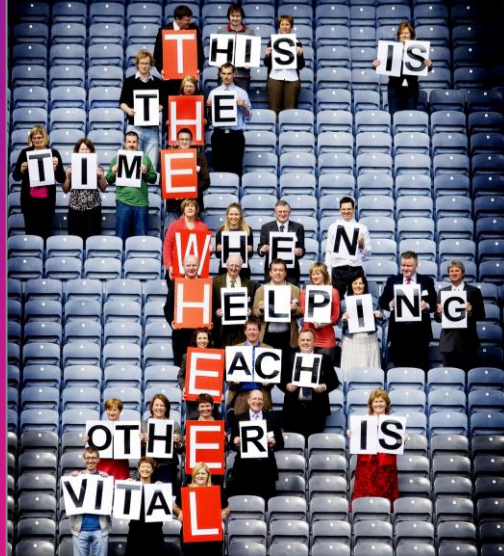
- do not have the freedom to use grant funding for workforce development,
- nor the unrestricted income to finance their own upskilling programmes.

the wheel

**Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.**



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science



48 Fleet Street
Dublin 2, D02 T883

+353 (0) 1 454 8727
info@wheel.ie

www.wheel.ie

