



Reporting on the volunteering question in Ireland's 2022 Census

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of civic engagement and social responsibility, volunteering holds a prominent place. The 2022 Census in Ireland delves into this phenomenon, seeking to understand the prevalence and patterns of voluntary activity across the 26 counties of Ireland. This report aims to shed light on the rich tapestry of volunteering across the country by examining data collected in the census. The report is based on the first data released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in May 2023, and as such focuses on administrative counties, sex, age, and the volunteer activity types specified in the census. i.e. volunteering with a social or charitable organisation; a religious group or church; a sporting organisation; a political organisation; or in your community. The second half of this report engages the Census 2022 Spotlight Series data released in February 2024.

Further analysis will be undertaken if and when more relevant data is released from the 2022 census.

Volunteering is not only a sign of a vibrant civil society but also a reflection of the values, aspirations, and challenges of a nation. By examining the responses to the census question on volunteering, we gain insight into ways in which people actively engage in activities that go beyond their personal and familial interests. This report ventures to answer key questions:

1. How does voluntary activity vary across rural and urban administrative counties?
2. What are the primary sectors that benefit from volunteering?
3. Is there a notable disparity between the sexes in volunteering?

4. How does age impact volunteerism in Ireland?
5. Does employment or other economic status impact one's likelihood to volunteer?
6. As the racial and national demographics of Ireland change, is that similarly reflected in the population of volunteers?
7. Are people with disabilities represented within the population of volunteers?

The census data provides a window into Irish people's commitment to social and charitable organisations; religious groups and churches; sporting organisations; political organisations; and the community.

This exploration of patterns of volunteerism in Ireland invites questions for discussion and further research to uncover the motivations that drive citizens to dedicate their time and skills, and to reflect on the broader implications of this collective spirit.

Overview of the 2022 census question on volunteering

A question on voluntary activity was included on the census in 2022. The exact wording of the question was:

"Do you regularly engage in helping or voluntary work in any of the following activities without pay?"

1. *A social or charitable organisation*
2. *A religious group or church*
3. *A sporting organisation*
4. *A political organisation*
5. *In your community*
6. *No."*

It is very important to note the wording of the question on volunteering, in particular the use of the word "regularly." This word presents two important challenges: (1) Different people will interpret the word "regularly" differently; and (2) people who only volunteered once or sporadically may answer as if they did not volunteer at all, meaning the results do not present a complete picture of volunteering in Ireland. With Irish and international trends indicating an increase in one-off, flexible, and informal volunteering, this means a large cohort of volunteering will not have been captured in the census.

It is also important to note that the respondents self-elected the activity type they felt fit their service, so the interpretation of the distinctions between the five activity types will vary. For example, is my volunteering with the local LGBT club considered activity with a social or charitable organisation, or a political organisation, or in the community?

In April 2022, 711,379 people reported that they regularly engaged in helping or voluntary work without pay in one or more of the five different activity types listed.¹ This includes people of all ages, including those under 15 years of age.

The CSO notes that: “In 2006, there were 553,255 people aged 15 years and over engaged in voluntary work. Bearing in mind changes to the question, the equivalent figure for 2022 was 681,246.” The CSO also notes that “Comparisons between the 2006 and 2022 census results on voluntary working have been omitted from tables due to changes to the format and wording of the question. In particular, the question in 2006² was restricted to people aged 15 years and over.”³

Category 1: Volunteering by administrative county

The first section of this report looks at the number of individuals who engaged in voluntary activity in relation to the 26 county populations in 2022. The total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity for each county was calculated as a percentage of that county’s 2022 population, as recorded by the CSO in the Census 2022 Small Area Population Statistics.⁴ The administrative counties were distributed into rural and urban areas. This section then looks at volunteering by county and volunteering activity type.

(1) Rural versus urban volunteering

The census volunteering data available in terms of geography at the time of analysis for this report was only provided by the CSO against county areas. Therefore, in this report we

¹ CSO Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results, 30 May 2023; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/>.

² The question on volunteering in the 2006 census was: “In the last four weeks have you done any of the following activities without pay: ‘social or charitable organisation’; ‘religious group or church’; ‘sporting organisation’; ‘political or cultural organisation’; ‘any other voluntary activity’ or ‘no voluntary activity’.

³ CSO Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results, 30 May 2023; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/>.

⁴ CSO Press Statement Census 2022 – CSO launches interactive map for Census 2022 Small Areas, 21 September 2023; <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022smallareapopulationstatistics/>.

can only look at rural and urban volunteering by county. This presents a challenge in terms of determining which county is rural and which is urban, since a single county includes both rural and urban areas within it.

The CSO has recently published more detailed analysis of volunteering against Ireland's 3,440 Electoral Divisions, which distinguishes between rural and urban populations. The CSO has also published volunteering data against Small Area Population Statistics, which can be explored further through an interactive map.⁵ Further analysis of urban and rural volunteering based on more detailed geographic data will be provided in future. Until then, the approach we have taken for a county-based view of volunteering is outlined below.

As noted by the OECD: "Ireland does not have a single formal definition of what is rural for policymaking purposes. The Central Statistics Office of Ireland defines rural as settlements with a population of less than 1,500 persons. CEDRA, the precursor to the Action Plan for Rural Development, defines rural as areas outside the administrative boundaries of the five main cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Waterford). The National Planning Framework, published in 2018 by the Irish Government, defines rural as all areas outside towns with a population of less than 10,000."⁶

The County (and City) Councils were split into 'rural' and 'urban' by the CEDRA definition summarised above, because by the other definitions provided every administrative county would be urban. For a general overview of rural versus urban administrative counties, the County Councils for the five cities were included under 'urban.' The counties were therefore distributed alphabetically as rural or urban as per below:

⁵ CSO Census Mapping; <https://visual.cso.ie/?body=entity/ima/cop/2022>.

⁶ OECD Rural Well-being: Geography of opportunities, 2020; <https://www.oecd.org/regional/Rural-WellBeing-Ireland.pdf>.

Administrative Counties	Total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity	2022 CSO Population	% of total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity
Rural	365,810	2,492,193	14.7%
Carlow County	8,389	61,968	13.5%
Cavan County	12,934	81,704	15.8%
Clare County	20,825	127,938	16.3%
Donegal County	22,781	167,084	13.6%
Kerry County	24,751	156,458	15.8%
Kildare County	32,963	247,774	13.3%
Kilkenny County	15,921	104,160	15.3%
Laois County	13,163	91,877	14.3%
Leitrim County	6,177	35,199	17.5%
Longford County	6,832	46,751	14.6%
Louth County	17,851	139,703	12.8%
Mayo County	23,330	137,970	16.9%
Meath County	30,251	220,826	13.7%
Monaghan County	10,243	65,288	15.7%
Offaly County	12,193	83,150	14.7%
Roscommon County	11,562	70,259	16.5%
Sligo County	11,595	70,198	16.5%
Tipperary County	25,936	167,895	15.4%
Westmeath County	13,461	96,221	14.0%
Wexford County	22,708	163,919	13.9%
Wicklow County	21,944	155,851	14.1%

Administrative Counties	Total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity	2022 CSO Population	% of total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity
Urban	345,569	2,656,946	13.0%
Cork City	26,569	222,526	11.9%
Cork County	57,841	361,630	16.0%
Dublin City	64,142	592,713	10.8%
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County	34,040	233,860	14.6%
Fingal County	41,605	330,506	12.6%
Galway City	11,318	85,910	13.2%
Galway County	31,389	191,827	16.4%
Limerick City & County	27,775	209,536	13.3%
South Dublin County	33,134	301,075	11.0%
Waterford City & County	17,756	127,363	13.9%
Ireland	711,379	5,149,139	13.8%

*Note: Since the population of Cork City is included in Cork County, and Galway City is included in Galway County, these two cities were excluded from finding the total population of urban areas in Ireland. Additionally, the total percentage of volunteers in Dublin County was found by calculating the sum of Dublin's four local authority areas (Dublin City, Fingal, South Dublin, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown) and finding that as a percentage of Dublin County's entire population.

*The population of Dublin County in 2022 was 1,458,154.

*Cork County including Cork City is 14.4%.

*Galway County including Galway City is 15.3%.

As 711,379 people out of a population of 5,149,139 individuals in Ireland reported that they regularly engaged in helping or voluntary activity without pay, this means that roughly 14% of the total population of Ireland engaged in voluntary activity.

The tables indicate that, although the combined urban areas exhibit a larger population compared to rural areas, the latter displayed a relatively higher proportion of individuals

Levels of volunteering across each administrative county varies, with County Leitrim showing the highest rate of volunteering and Dublin City showing the lowest rate of volunteering. County Leitrim, with a small population of 35,199, saw 6,177 individuals engage in voluntary activity. This represents a high volunteer rate of 18% relative to its population. In contrast, Dublin City, with a substantially larger population of 592,713, had 64,142 individuals participating in voluntary activity. This equates to a lower volunteer rate of 11% relative to its population.

The data highlights variation in volunteering rates across different counties. These disparities may be influenced by a range of factors including socioeconomic conditions, employment levels, community cohesion, travel distances and the availability of volunteer opportunities.

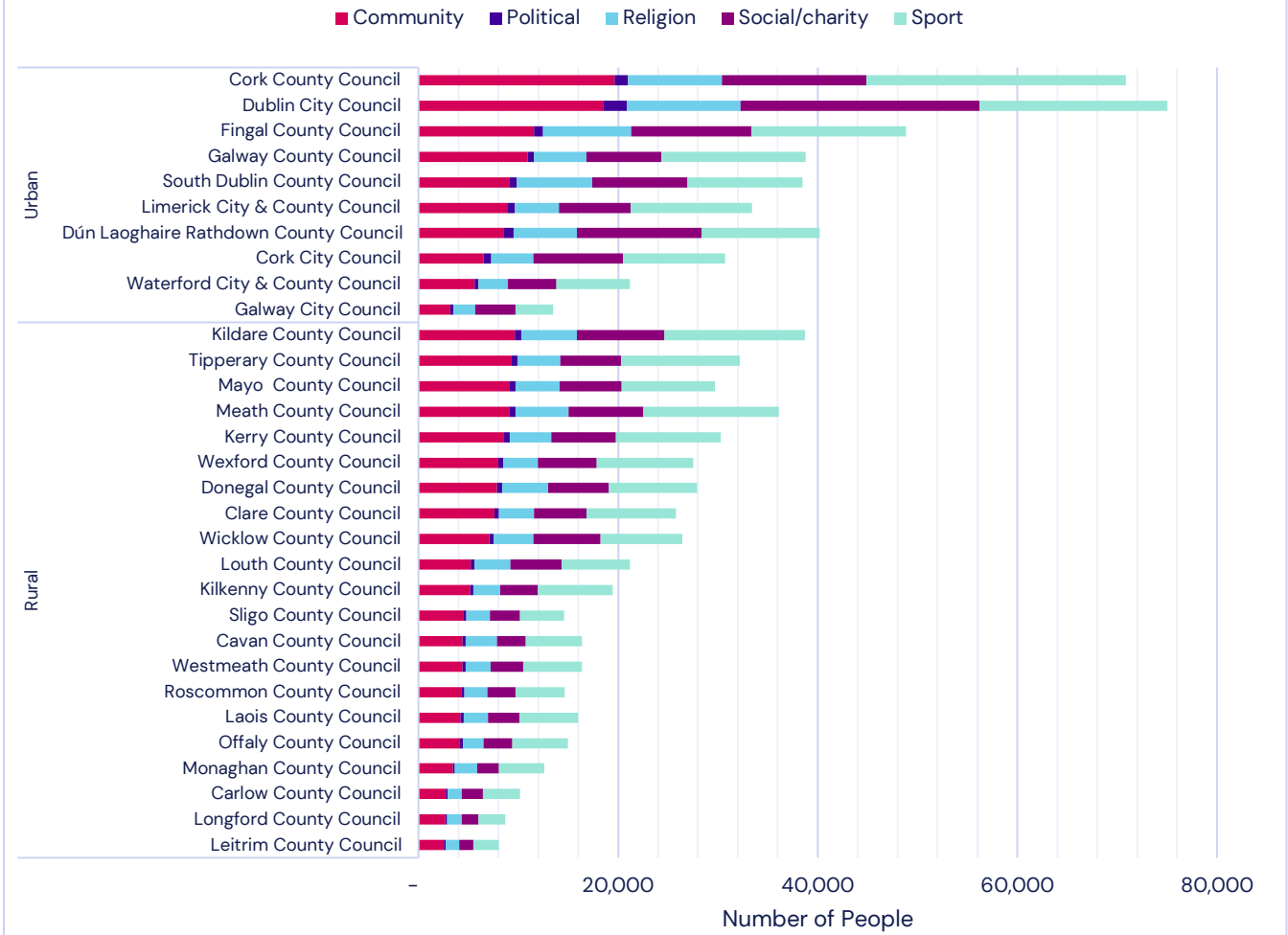
Although this initial analysis suggests that rural areas see slightly higher levels of volunteering than urban areas, a more detailed analysis based on data broken down beyond county level is required.

(2) Volunteering by county and activity type

The second section of the administrative county analysis undertakes a comparative assessment between rural and urban regions based on the collective count of individuals involved in voluntary activities with the following five volunteering activity types:

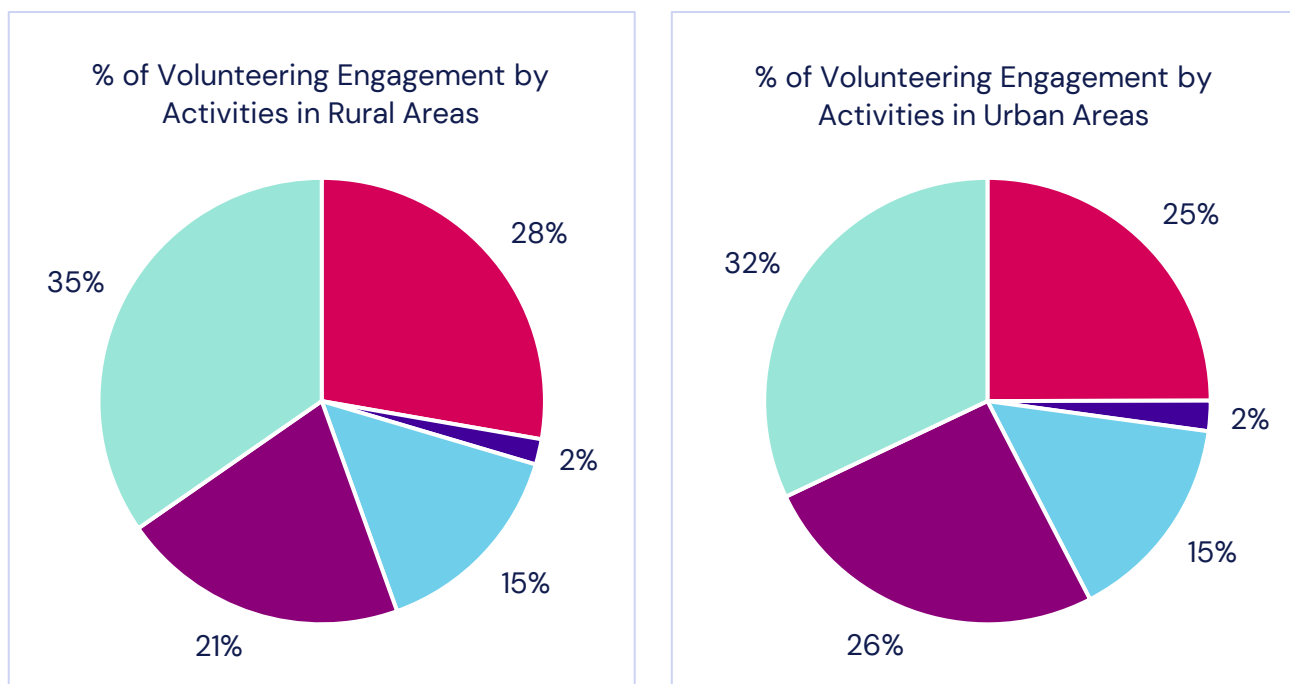
1. A social or charitable organisation
2. A religious group or church
3. A sporting organisation
4. A political organisation
5. In your community

Volunteers by Administrative County and Volunteering Activities in Rural & Urban Areas, 2022



Sport-related activities tend to attract a greater number of volunteers, whereas engagements with political organisations tend to elicit a comparatively lower level of participation in both rural and urban administrative counties.

The following pie charts illustrate the variation in activity participation percentages between rural and urban settings.



Both rural and urban areas follow a similar pattern in engagement with the activity types.

Rural:⁷

- At 35%, **sporting activities** make up the highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 28%, **volunteering in their community** makes up the second highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 21%, **social or charitable activities** make up the third highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 15%, **religious activities** make up the fourth highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 2%, **political activities** make up the smallest percentage of volunteers.

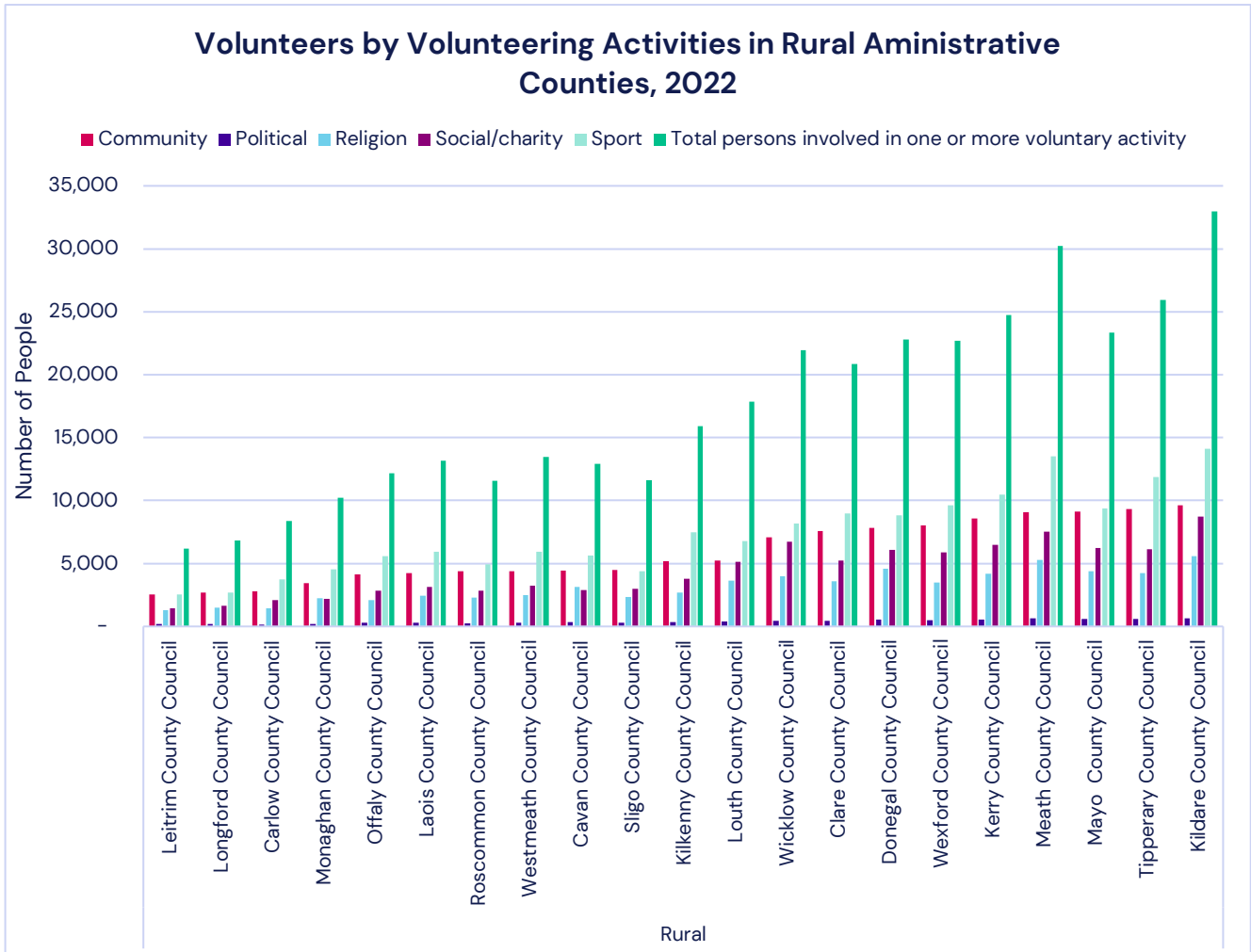
Urban:

- At 32%, **sporting activities** make up the highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 26%, **social or charitable activities** make up the second highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 25%, **volunteering in their community** makes up the third highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 15%, **religious activities** make up the fourth highest percentage of volunteers.

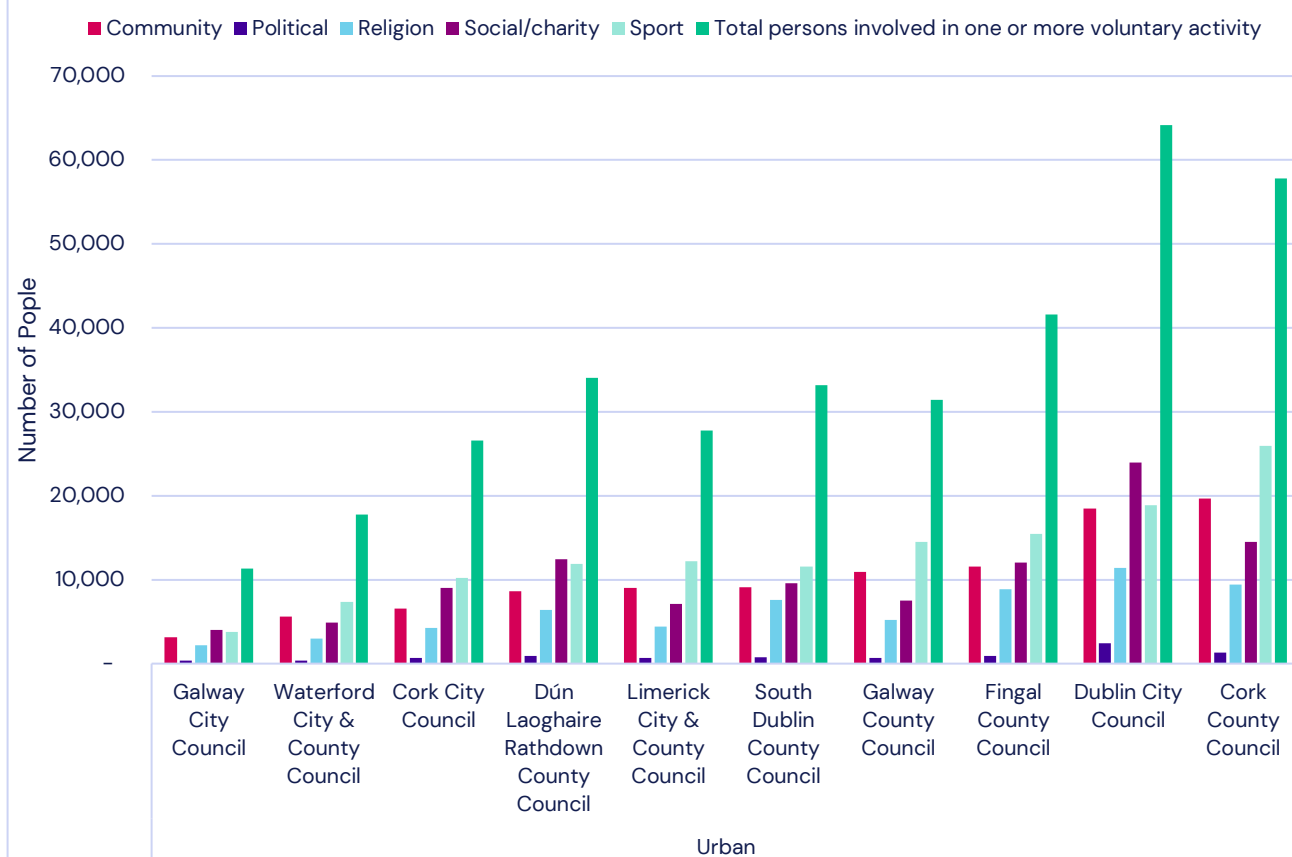
⁷ Please note that the percentage points for “% of Volunteering Engagement by Activities in Rural Areas” add up to 101%, due to decimal points and rounding up/down in the raw data.

- At 2%, **political activities** make up the smallest percentage of volunteers.

The following graph provides an insight into the extent of volunteer involvement in the five activity types, as measured by the total number of participating individuals.



Volunteers by Volunteering Activities in Urban Administrative Counties, 2022



On 1st February 2024, the CSO released the statistical publication ‘Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland’. Below are some key findings on volunteering by county and activity:

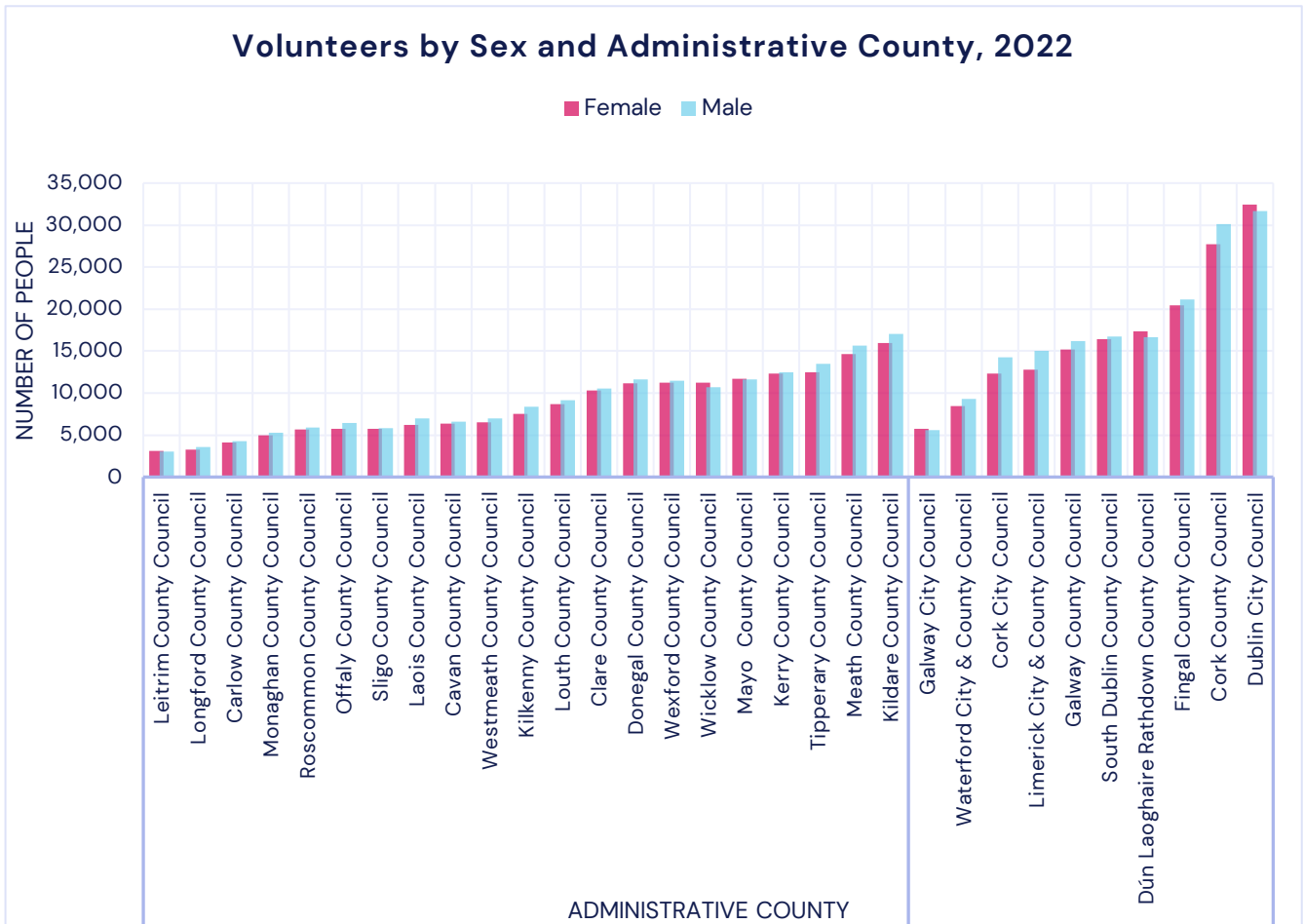
- “The rates of volunteering with sporting organisations ranged from 3% of Dublin City’s population to 7% of Galway County’s.
- At 4%, Cavan had the highest proportion of any county’s population volunteering in a religious organisation.
- Volunteering for a social or charitable organisation was highest in Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown (5%).
- Volunteering in a sporting organisation was the most popular type of voluntary activity in 26 of the 31 administrative counties.”⁸

⁸ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering by City and County, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/volunteeringinireland/>.

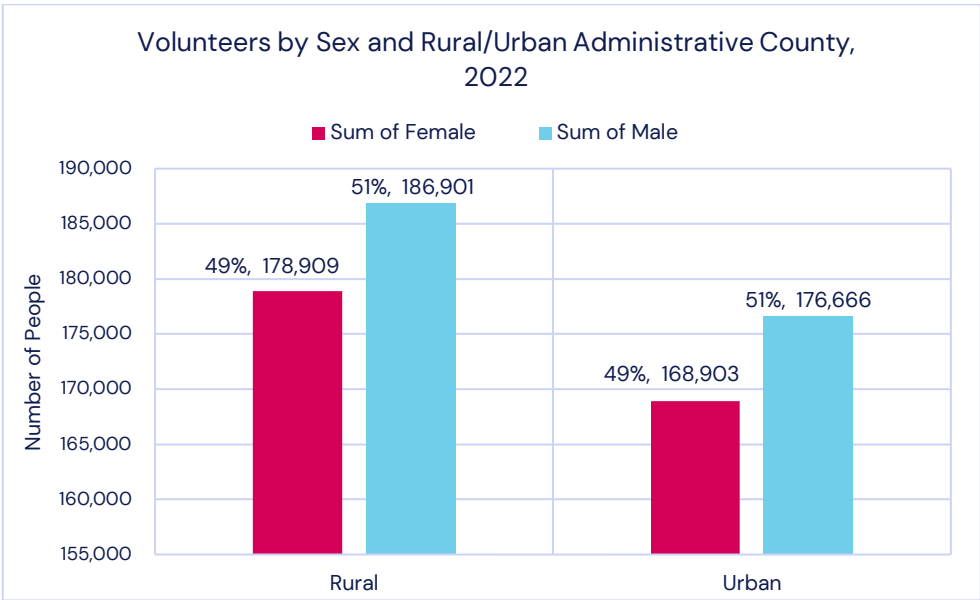
Category 2: Volunteering by sex

(1) Volunteering by sex and administrative county

The first part of this section on sex analysis offers a comprehensive depiction of volunteering levels within each administrative county, categorised by 'sex'. The 2022 census only asked about sex as assigned at birth and gave only two options: male or female. Gender identity was not included in the census questions.



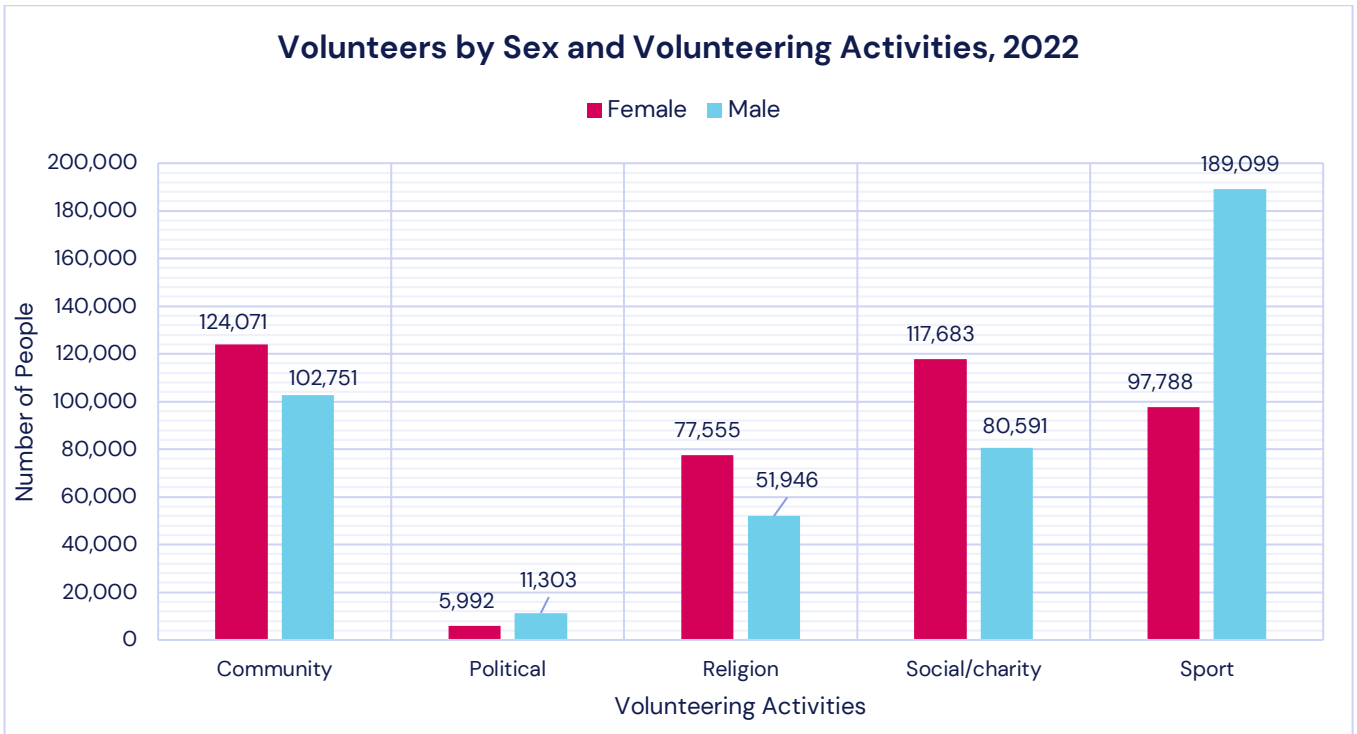
Male and female participation in volunteering exhibits a comparatively equitable distribution, although women display a slightly lower engagement rate than men. Females volunteer more than males in only five of the 26 counties. These counties include Wicklow County Council, Mayo County Council, Galway City Council, Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council, and Dublin City Council.



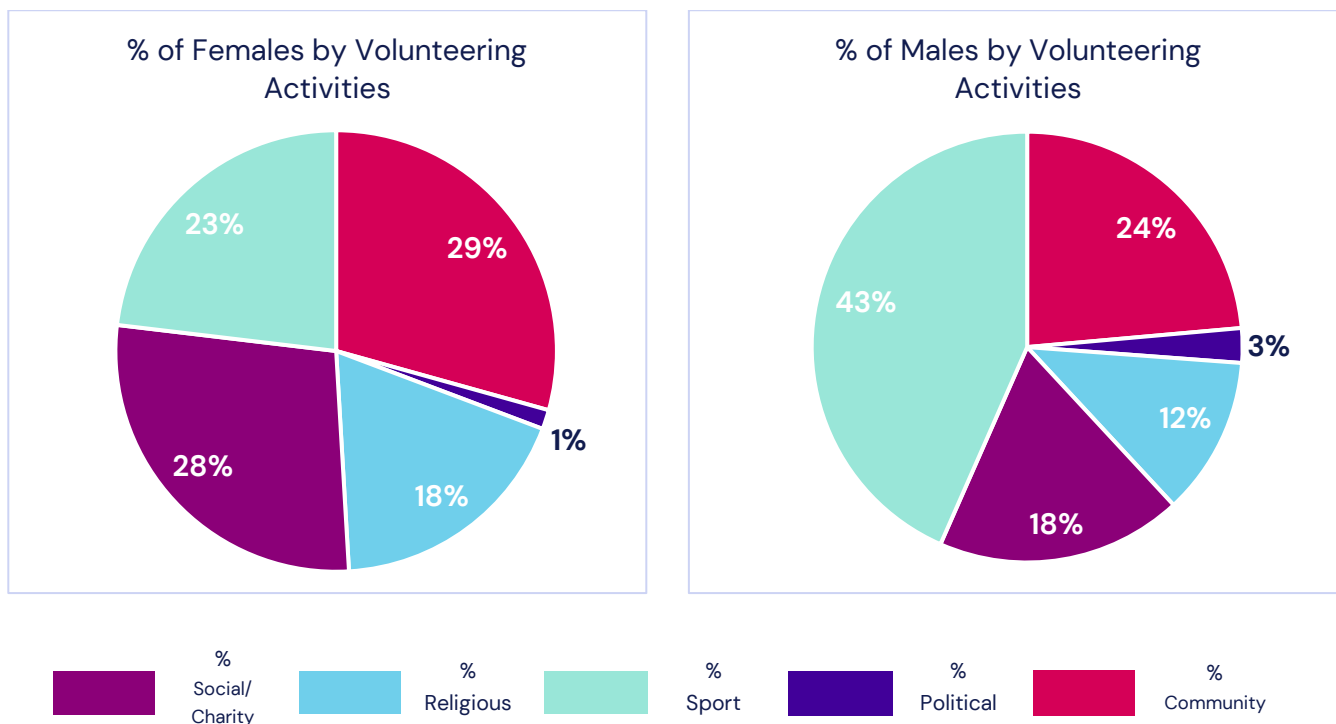
This graph shows the difference between the volunteering patterns of males and females in rural and urban settings. In both instances, males exhibit higher volunteering rates in comparison to females – this is for total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity.

(2) Volunteering by sex and activity type

The subsequent section of the sex-based analysis examines the volunteering frequencies of both males and females in each of the five activity categories, as demonstrated in the graph and pie charts presented below.



These visual representations reveal pronounced disparities between the sexes in involvement levels across each of the five volunteering activities.



Females:⁹

- At 29%, **volunteering in their community** makes up the highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 28%, **social or charitable activities** make up the second highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 23%, **sporting activities** make up the third highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 18%, **religious activities** make up the fourth highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 1%, **political activities** make up the smallest percentage of volunteers.

Males:

- At 43%, **sporting activities** make up the highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 24%, **volunteering in their community** makes up the second highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 18%, **social or charitable activities** make up the third highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 12%, **religious activities** make up the fourth highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 3%, **political activities** make up the smallest percentage of volunteers.

Below are some key findings on volunteering by sex and volunteering activities as stated in the CSO statistical publication ‘Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland’:

⁹ Please note that the percentage points for “% of Females by Volunteering Activities” add up to 99%, due to decimal points and rounding up/down in the raw data.

- “Almost 290,000 people volunteered in a sporting organisation, making it the most popular voluntary activity. This accounted for 6% of the population and 40% of all volunteers.
- Almost twice as many males (189,099) as females (97,788) volunteered in a sporting organisation.
- The second most common activity was volunteering in the community (226,822 people), followed by a social or charity related activity (198,274 people).
- Volunteering in a political organisation was the least popular, with just 17,295 people in this group, or 2% of all volunteers.
- When compared with males, higher numbers of females engaged in volunteering in the community, in social or charitable organisations and in religious groups.
- Almost two-thirds of volunteers in political organisations were male.”¹⁰

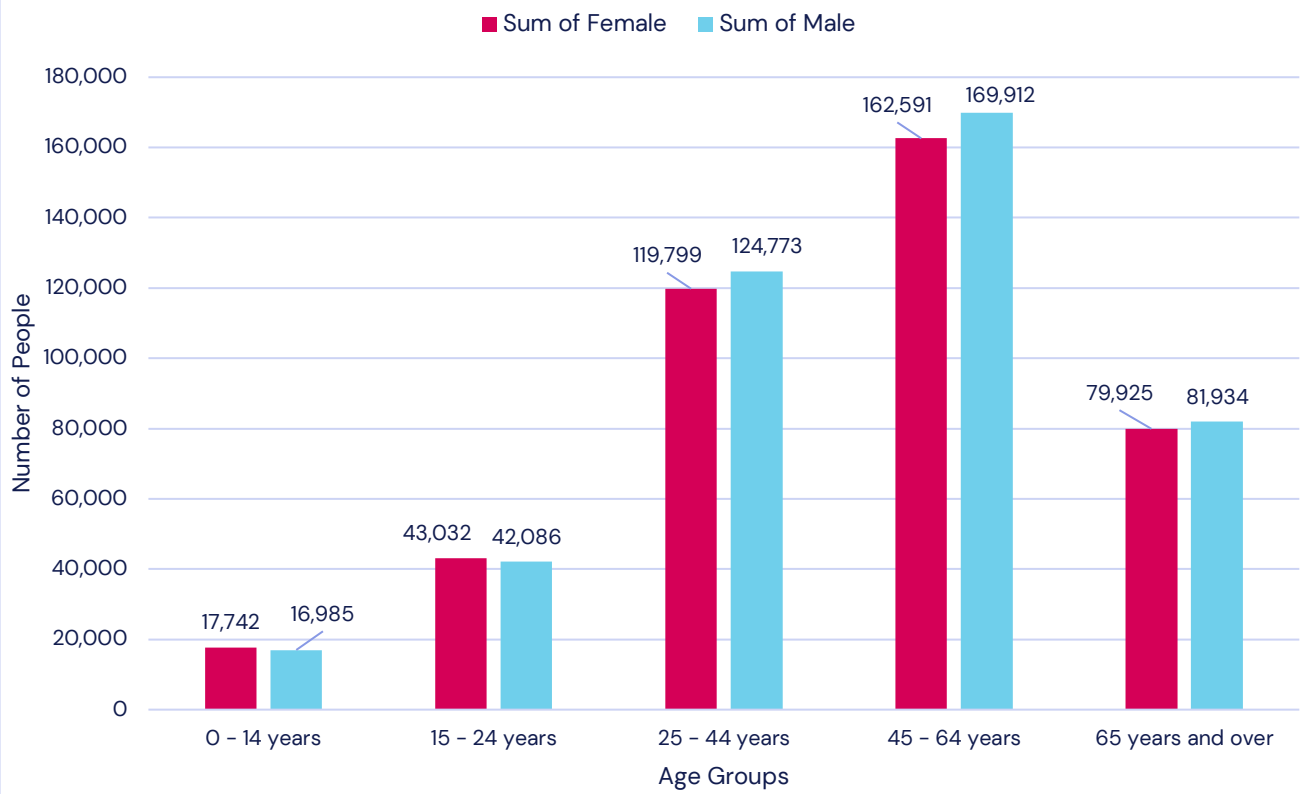
(3) Volunteering by sex and age group

This section of the report on sex examines the total number, as opposed to percentage, that females and males engaged in voluntary activity by the following age groups:

- 0 to 14 years
- 15 to 24 years
- 25 to 44 years
- 45 to 64 years
- 65 years and over.

¹⁰ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering by Category and Sex, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/volunteeringinireland/>.

Volunteers by Sex and Age Groups, 2022



The graph illustrates that males constitute the majority of volunteers within the three most prominent age brackets, namely 25 to 44 years, 45 to 64 years, and 65 years and older. In contrast, there are more females than males in the two smallest age brackets, namely 0 to 14 years and 15 to 24 years.

Category 3: Volunteering by age

Below are some key findings on volunteering by age, as stated in the CSO statistical publication 'Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland':

- "The proportion of people engaged in helping or voluntary work increased with age.
- Over one-third (38%) of all volunteers were aged between 45 and 64 years.
- A further 29% were aged 25 to 44 years."¹¹

(1) Volunteering by age and administrative county

The CSO Spotlight Series publication included data on volunteering by *average age* and administrative county:

- "Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown had the oldest average age for volunteers (49.6 years).
- Galway City had the youngest average age for volunteers at 44.8 years."¹²

The first part of this section on age gives an overview of the number of volunteers in each administrative county by the five reported age groups below:

- 0 to 14 years
- 15 to 24 years
- 25 to 44 years
- 45 to 64 years
- 65 years and over

¹¹ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering in Ireland, Age Profile of Volunteers, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024;

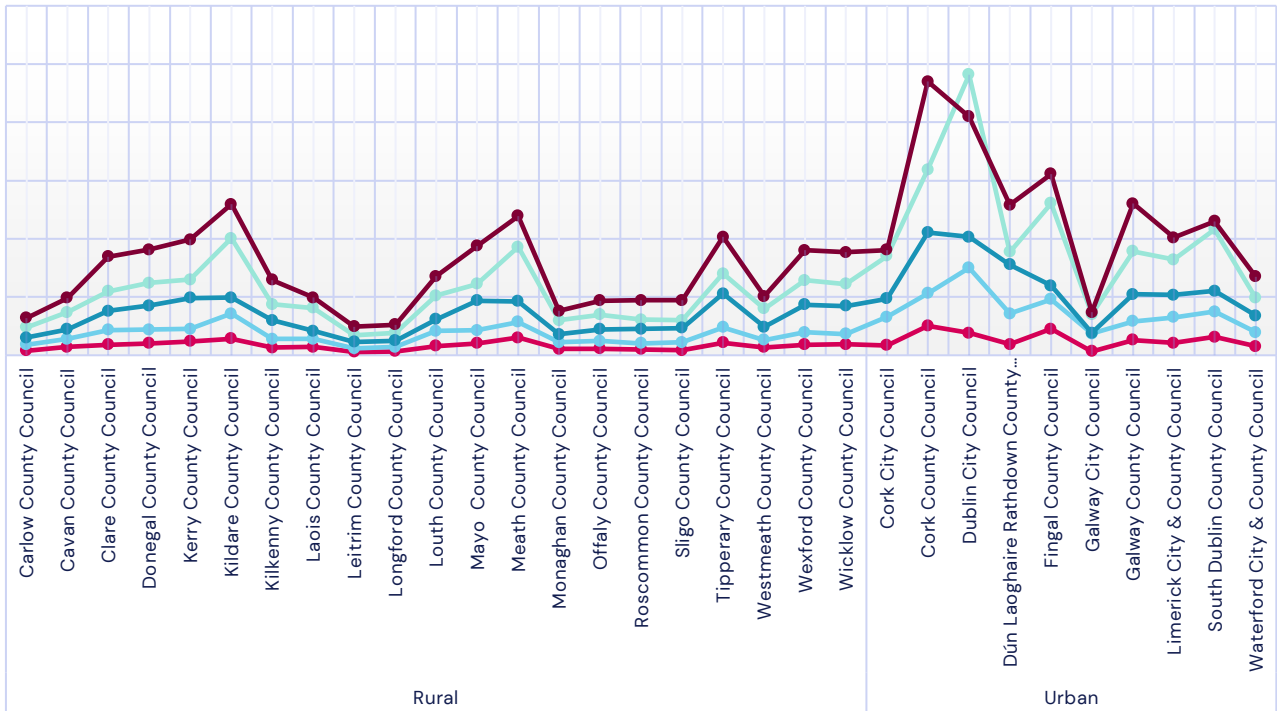
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/volunteeringinireland/>.

¹² Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering in Ireland, Average Age of Volunteers, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024;

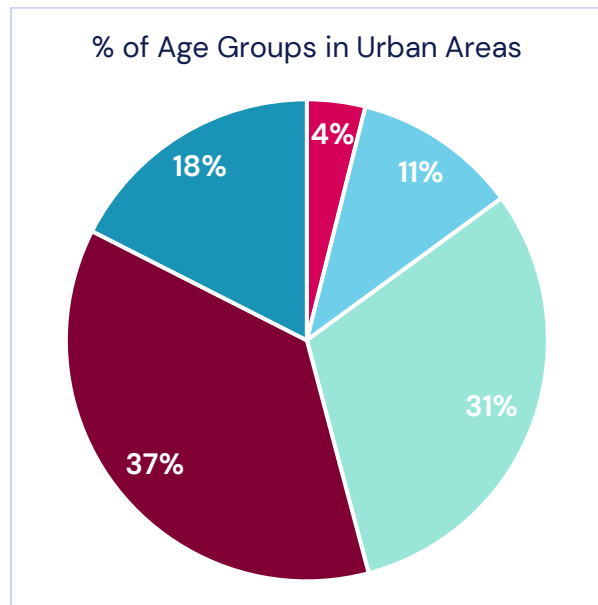
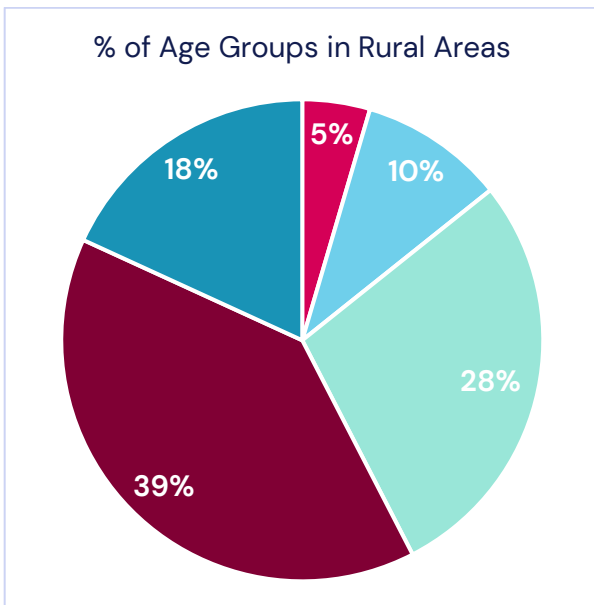
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/volunteeringinireland/>.

Volunteers by Age Groups and Administrative County, 2022

0 - 14 years 15 - 24 years 25 - 44 years 45 - 64 years 65 years and over



Volunteers aged 45-64 years represent the highest number of volunteers in each county, except in Dublin City, where the highest number of volunteers are aged 25-44.



0-14 years 15-24 years 25-44 years 45-64 years 65 years +

Both rural and urban areas tend to follow a similar pattern in age-based voluntary engagement.

Rural:

- At 39%, individuals between the ages of **45 to 64 years** make up the highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 28%, **25 to 44 years** make up the second highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 18%, **65 years and more** make up the third highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 10%, **15 to 24 years** make up the fourth highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 5%, **0 to 14 years** make up the smallest percentage of volunteers.

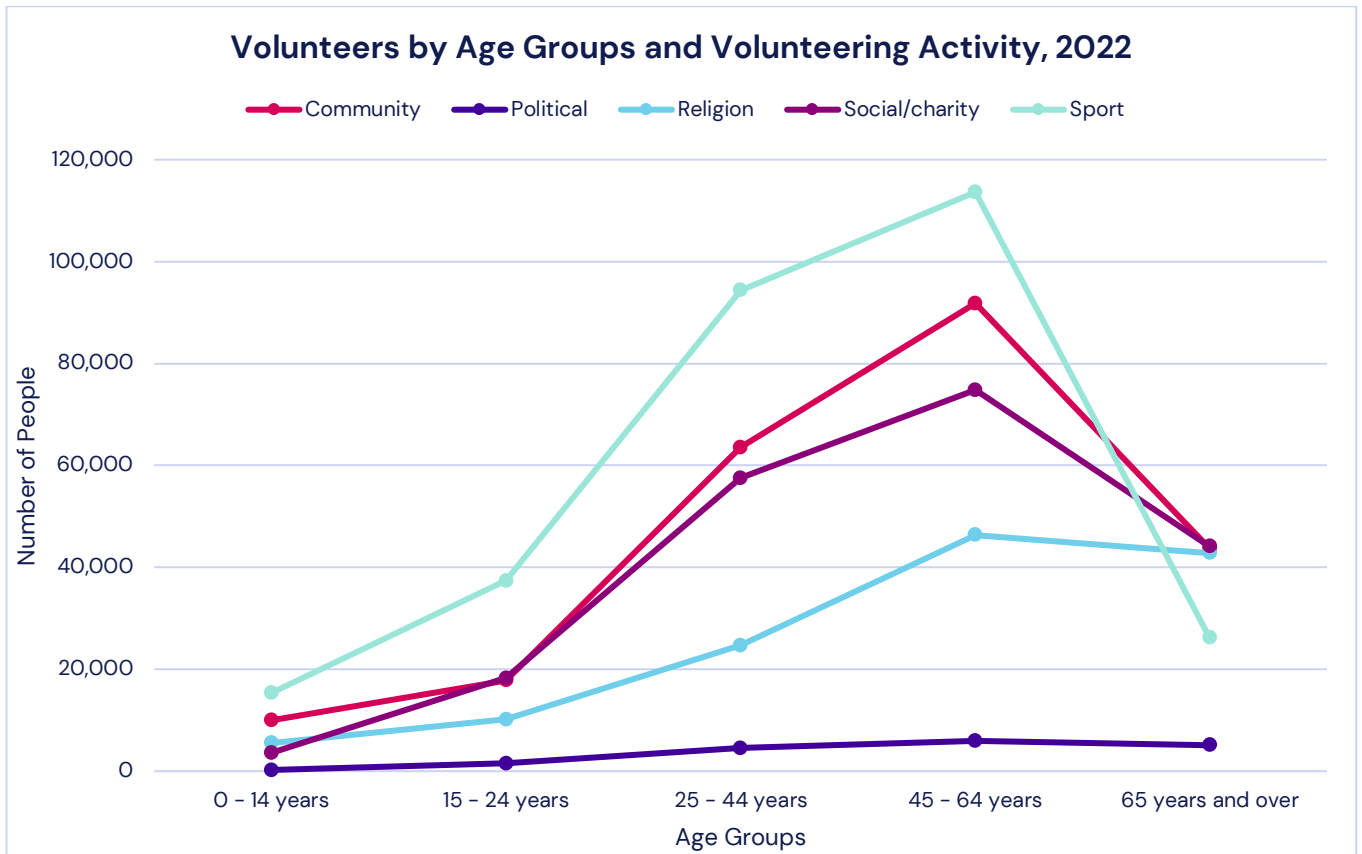
Urban:

- At 37%, individuals between the ages of **45 to 64 years** make up the highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 31%, **25 to 44 years** make up the second highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 18%, **65 years and more** make up the third highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 11%, **15 to 24 years** make up the fourth highest percentage of volunteers.
- At 4%, **0 to 14 years** make up the smallest percentage of volunteers.

(2) Volunteering by age and activity type

The second part of this section on age shows how engagement in the five volunteering activity types differs by age group.

Volunteering Activities	All ages	0 - 14 years	15 - 24 years	25 - 44 years	45 - 64 years	65 years and over
Political	17,295	241	1,515	4,503	5,947	5,089
Religion	129,501	5,524	10,130	24,695	46,313	42,839
Social/charity	198,274	3,611	18,262	57,510	74,808	44,083
Community	226,822	9,989	17,809	63,529	91,810	43,685
Sport	286,887	15,362	37,402	94,335	113,625	26,163
Total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity	711,379	30,133	73,813	209,760	270,688	126,985

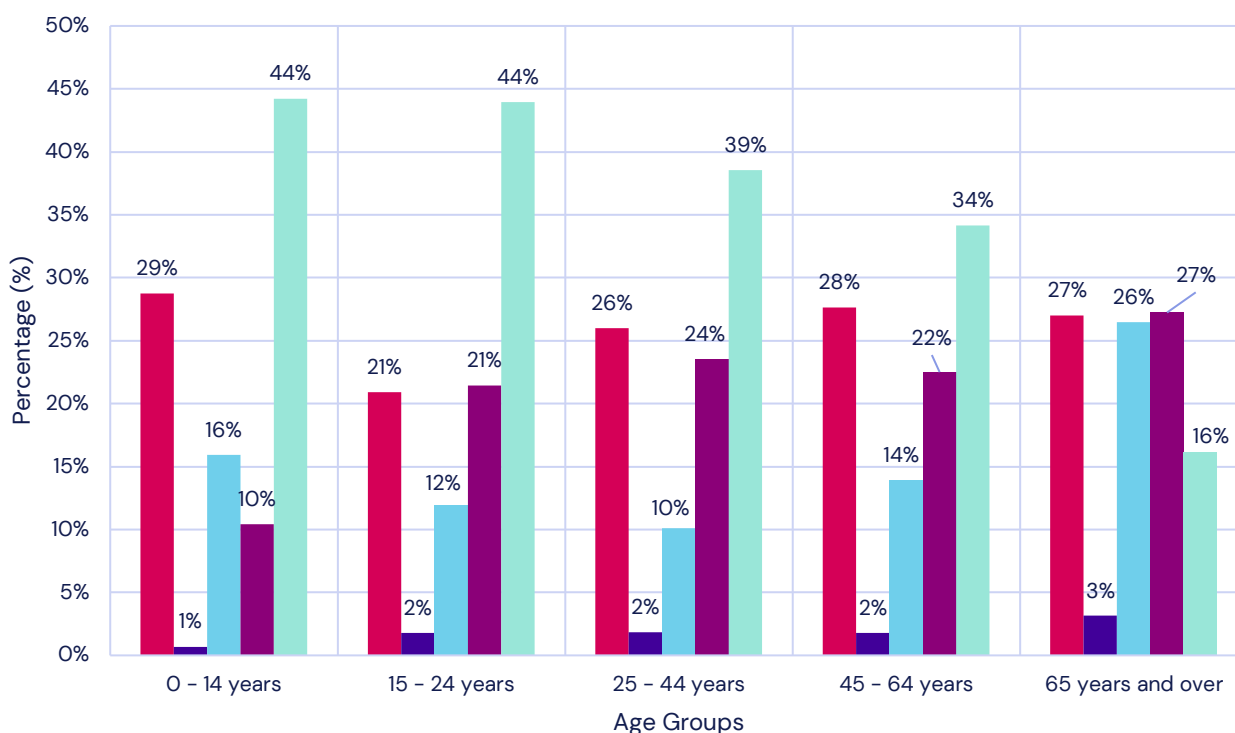


Volunteers aged 45 to 64 not only represent the largest demographic group but also show the highest levels of participation across all five volunteering activities, with particularly notable engagement observed in sporting organizations.

Sport has the highest number of volunteers of all ages, with the exception of those aged 65 years and over.

An additional finding in the data highlights that the proportion of individuals participating in volunteering activities with a political focus is the lowest across all age groups.

Percentage of Age Groups Participating in Volunteering Activities, 2022



Below are some key findings from the age profile of volunteers, as stated in the CSO statistical publication ‘Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland’:

- “With the exception of people aged 65 years and over, volunteering in a sporting organisation was the most popular form of volunteering in all age groups.
- Over half of younger volunteers aged between 15 and 24 years old volunteered in a sporting organisation.
- Older volunteers aged 65 years and over were most likely to volunteer for a social or charitable organisation or in the community.”¹³

Additionally, the CSO Spotlight Series publication included data on volunteering by average age and voluntary activity:

“The average age of the population was 38.8 years in 2022. At 39.4 years, the average age of females was higher than that of males (38.2 years).

¹³ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering in Ireland, Age Profile of Volunteers, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/volunteeringinireland/>.

- The average age of people who volunteered in one or more activity was 47, compared with an average age of 37.5 among people who did not volunteer.
- At 43, people volunteering in a sporting organisation had the lowest average age among all people involved in voluntary activities.
- At 53.4, the average age of volunteers in a religious group was the highest among the volunteering categories.
- Apart from those volunteering with religious groups, female volunteers were generally younger than males across each activity type.¹⁴

Age of volunteers by total population of age groups in Ireland, 2022

In 2022, a total of 711,379 people (14% of the population) engaged in helping or voluntary work in one or more activity.

- 3% of people aged 0–14 years volunteer (there were 1,012,287 people aged between 0 and 14 in 2022, and 30,133 volunteers were of this age group).
- 11% of people aged 15–24 years volunteer (there were 644,771 people aged between 15 and 24 in 2022, and 73,813 volunteers were of this age group).
- 15% of people aged 25–44 years volunteer (there were 1,422,424 people aged between 25 and 44 in 2022, and 209,760 volunteers were of this age group).
- 21% of people aged 45–64 years volunteer (there were 1,293,342 people aged between 45 and 64 in 2022, and 270,688 volunteers were of this age group).
- 16% of people aged 65 and over volunteer (there were 776,315 people aged 65 years and over in 2022, and 126,985 volunteers were of this age group).

¹⁴ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteering in Ireland, Average Age of Volunteers, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/volunteeringinireland/>.

Spotlight Series data

As a follow-up to the data released in May 2023, the CSO released further data on the volunteering question in February 2024, titled the *Census 2022 Spotlight Series*. This more recent data release provides more in-depth information about the demographics of volunteers. In this report, we present the data on the diversity of volunteers, in relation to categories such as principal economic status, country of citizenship, ethnic background and disability.

By exploring who identifies as a volunteer, we can learn more about where gaps exist in making volunteering an activity enjoyable and accessible to all in Ireland.

Commenting on the results, Sheelagh Bonham, Statistician in the Census Division, said:

“Volunteering is integral to a huge range of organisations and activities which people in every town, village, city, and county in Ireland participate in and rely on every day. This publication provides invaluable data and will help us to better understand volunteering in Ireland today.”¹⁵

Category 1: Volunteering by principal economic status

Principal economic status refers to a person’s primary use of time, for which they are often compensated. This status is interesting to consider because we learn about people’s access to free time, which is a major factor in a person’s ability to volunteer. Here options included:

- Persons at work
- Unemployed looking for first regular job
- Unemployed having lost or given up previous job
- Student or pupil
- Looking after home/family
- Retired
- Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability
- Others not in labour force

Of people in employment, 18% (423,612) answered that they volunteered regularly, whereas those who were not in the traditional labour force, for any reason, volunteered at a rate of 15% (234,001). Volunteering in a sporting activity was by far the most popular activity, attracting more than half of the volunteers in the labour force. This rate of

¹⁵ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/keyfindings/>.

participation in volunteering maintained relative consistency in retirement with this group volunteering at 17%.

In consideration of the changing landscape of the labour force, it is interesting to note that people who worked from home at least one day a week volunteered at a rate of 24%, notably higher than those who never worked from home at 17%.

This suggests that the move towards remote and hybrid working in Ireland post pandemic, has given people more free time and more opportunity to volunteer.

CSO key findings

Among people aged 15 years and over who were at work in 2022, 18% (423,612) were involved in at least one voluntary activity.

- The rate of volunteering among people who were retired was 17%.
- Those looking after the home or family had a volunteering rate of 15%, while 13% of students volunteered.
- In total, 9% of all workers volunteered in a sporting organisation and 6% in their community.
- Among those students who volunteered, 49% were involved in a sporting organisation and 26% were active in a social or charitable organisation.
- Female students were more likely to volunteer than male students.
- Among all retired persons, 6% volunteered in social or charitable organisations and another 6% volunteered in their community.¹⁶

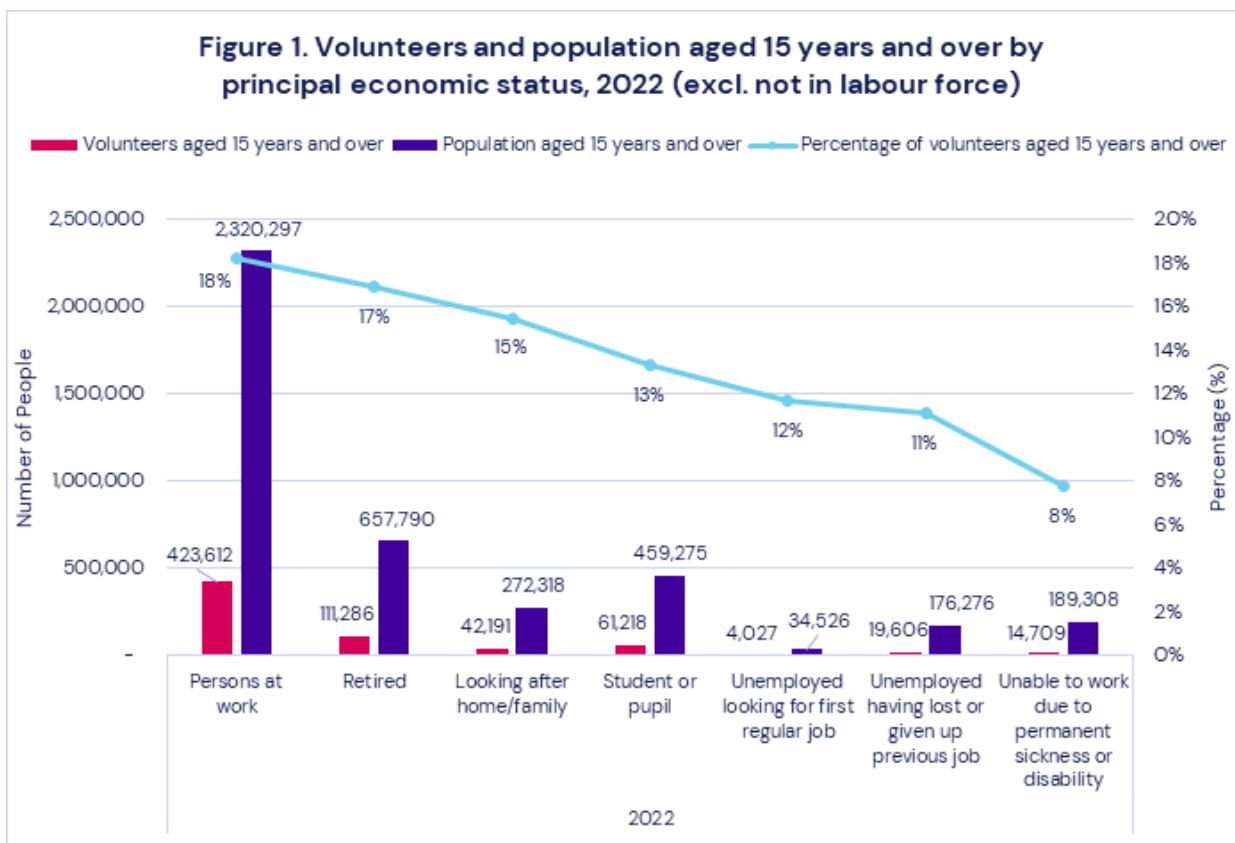
2022 population analysis of volunteering by principal economic status

Among all 4,136,852 persons aged 15 years and over in 2022, 17% (681,246) were involved in one or more voluntary activity.

- As mentioned above, 18% of people at work volunteered regularly (there were 2,320,297 persons at work in 2022, and 423,612 of these individuals volunteered regularly).
- 12% of people who were unemployed looking for their first regular job volunteered regularly (there were 34,526 unemployed persons looking for first regular job in 2022, and 4,027 of these individuals volunteered).

¹⁶ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Volunteers by Principal Economic Status, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/principaleconomicstatus/>

- 11% of people who were unemployed having lost or given up previous job volunteered regularly (there were 176,276 unemployed persons having lost or given up previous job in 2022, and 19,606 of these individuals volunteered).
- 13% of people who were either a student or pupil volunteered regularly (there were 459,275 persons who were either a student or pupil in 2022, and 61,218 of these individuals volunteered).
- 16% of people who were looking after home/family volunteered regularly (there were 272,318 persons who were looking after home/family in 2022, and 42,191 of these individuals volunteered).
- 17% of people who were retired volunteered regularly (there were 657,790 retired persons in 2022, and 111,286 of these individuals volunteered).
- 8% of people who were unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability volunteered regularly (there were 189,308 persons who were unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability in 2022, and 14,709 of these individuals volunteered).
- 17% of people who were not in the labour force (other) volunteered regularly (there were 27,062 persons who were not in the labour force (other) in 2022, and 4,597 of these individuals volunteered).



Category 2: Volunteering by citizenship and ethnicity

Census 2022 collected information about the citizenship status of the population. It also asked about their ethnic background. This information may provide insight into how volunteering plays a role in culture and volunteer engagement is influenced by culture.

Residents were able to select:

- White Irish
- White Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Any other White background
- Black or Black Irish–African
- Black or Black Irish–any other Black background
- Asian or Asian Irish–Chinese
- Asian or Asian Irish–Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian Irish–any other Asian background
- Arab
- Other including mixed background
- Not stated

(1) Volunteering by country of citizenship

The census reported that 15% of people with only Irish citizenship and 11% of non–Irish citizens volunteered.

CSO key findings

Among Irish citizens, 15% of males and 14% of females volunteered in at least one activity.

- Male Irish citizens primarily volunteered in sporting organisations (almost 180,000); a further 90,178 volunteered in their community.
- Almost 109,000 Irish females volunteered in the community, making it the most popular voluntary activity.
- A further 99,825 female Irish citizens volunteered in social or charitable organisations.

Among non–Irish citizens, 11% of males and 12% of females volunteered.

- Over 20% of citizens of African countries (7,442 people) were involved in at least one voluntary activity.

- Approximately half of these were involved in a religious or church group.
- 20% of American citizens volunteered in 2022, primarily in social or charitable organisations and in their community.
- The rate of volunteering among UK citizens was the same as for Irish citizens (15%).
- UK citizens showed similar proportions of volunteering across social or charitable organisations, in the community and in sporting organisations.¹⁷

Highest rates of volunteering by non-Irish citizens

- 20% of (the) United States of America citizens volunteered (there were 13,412 U.S. citizens in Ireland, and 2,663 volunteered).
- 16% of German citizens volunteered (there were 12,390 German citizens in Ireland, and 1,959 volunteered).
- 15% of (the) United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland citizens volunteered (there were 83,347 UK citizens in Ireland, and 12,383 volunteered).
- 13% of Indian citizens volunteered (there were 45,449 Indian citizens in Ireland, and 5,874 volunteered).
- 9% of Ukrainian citizens volunteered (there were 11,791 Ukrainian citizens in Ireland, and 1,079 volunteered).
- 7% of Latvian citizens volunteered (there were 18,300 Latvian citizens in Ireland, and 1,198 volunteered).¹⁸

(2) Volunteering by ethnic group/background

CSO key findings

Nearly 600,000 people who identified their ethnic group/background as White Irish volunteered in at least one activity in 2022.

- There were slightly more male volunteers (307,730) than females (284,531) among the White Irish ethnic group.
- Volunteering in a sporting organisation was the most popular activity among White Irish volunteers.
- More than 176,000 males who identified as White Irish volunteered in a sporting organisation, almost double the number of White Irish females.¹⁹

2022 population analysis of volunteering by ethnic group/background

¹⁷ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Diversity: Volunteering by Country of Citizenship, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/diversity/>.

¹⁸ Volunteering data: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F9025> | Citizenship data: <https://data.cso.ie/table/FY017>.

¹⁹ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Diversity, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/diversity/>.

Among all ethnic or cultural backgrounds (5,084,879) usually resident and present in the State in 2022, 14% (711,379) were involved in one or more voluntary activity.

- 15% of white people volunteered (there were 4.4 million white people in Ireland, and 656,263 White people volunteered).
- 26% of Black and Black Irish people volunteered (there were 76,245 Black and Black Irish people in Ireland, and 19,455 Black and Black Irish people volunteered).
- 14% of Asian and Asian Irish people volunteered (there were 166,206 Asian and Asian Irish people in Ireland, and 22,486 Asian and Asian Irish people volunteered).
- 12% of Other including mixed group/background volunteered (there were 85,107 Other including mixed group/background in Ireland, and 9,751 Other including mixed group/background volunteered).
- 16% of ALL people of ethnic minority background volunteered (there were 327,558 in Ireland, and 51,692 people of ethnic minority backgrounds volunteered).
- 1.1% persons who did not state their ethnic or cultural background volunteered (there were 313,176 individuals who did not state their ethnic or cultural background in 2022, and 3,424 volunteered).

Volunteering activities analysis

The following figures were calculated as a percentage of the total number of people involved in one or more voluntary activity. It is important to note, however, that these figures do not add up to 100% since individuals can choose more than one activity.

Among all 4.4 million **White** persons in 2022, 15% (656,263) were involved in one or more voluntary activity.

- 16% (104,727) of White persons were involved in religious activities.
- 32% (209,845) of White persons were involved in community activities.
- 2.5% (16,415) of White persons were involved in political activities.
- 28% (181,662) of White persons were involved in social/charity activities.
- 43% (279,609) of White persons were involved in sport activities.

Among all 76,245 **Black or Black Irish** persons in 2022, 26% (19,455) were involved in one or more voluntary activity.

- 63% (12,218) of Black or Black Irish persons were involved in religious activities.
- 21% (4,039) of Black or Black Irish persons were involved in community activities.

- 1.2% (226) of Black or Black Irish persons were involved in political activities.
- 27% (5,172) of Black or Black Irish persons were involved in social/charity activities.
- 12% (2,235) of Black or Black Irish persons were involved in sport activities.

Among all 166,206 **Asian or Asian Irish** persons in 2022, 14% (22,486) were involved in one or more voluntary activity.

- 40% (8,937) of Asian or Asian Irish persons were involved in religious activities.
- 36% (8,192) of Asian or Asian Irish persons were involved in community activities.
- 1.2% (260) of Asian or Asian Irish persons were involved in political activities.
- 31% (6,853) of Asian or Asian Irish persons were involved in social/charity activities.
- 12% (2,594) of Asian or Asian Irish persons were involved in sport activities.

Among all 85,107 **Other including mixed background** persons in 2022, 12% (9,751) were involved in one or more voluntary activity.

- 28% (2,713) of Other including mixed background persons were involved in religious activities.
- 36% (3,529) of Other including mixed background persons were involved in community activities.
- 2.5% (239) of Other including mixed background persons were involved in political activities.
- 37% (3,563) of Other including mixed background persons were involved in social/charity activities.
- 17% (1,617) of Other including mixed background persons were involved in sport activities.

Among all 327,558 **Ethnic Minorities** (all ethnic groups except white persons) in 2022, 16% (51,692) were involved in one or more voluntary activity.

- 46% (23,868) of Ethnic Minorities were involved in religious activities.
- 31% (15,760) of Ethnic Minorities were involved in community activities.
- 1.4% (725) of Ethnic Minorities were involved in political activities.
- 30% (15,588) of Ethnic Minorities were involved in social/charity activities.
- 13% (6,446) of Ethnic Minorities were involved in sport activities.

The following graphs look at the figures above; the percentage that each ethnic group/background of volunteers engage in the different volunteering activities – relative to the total persons involved in one or more voluntary activity.

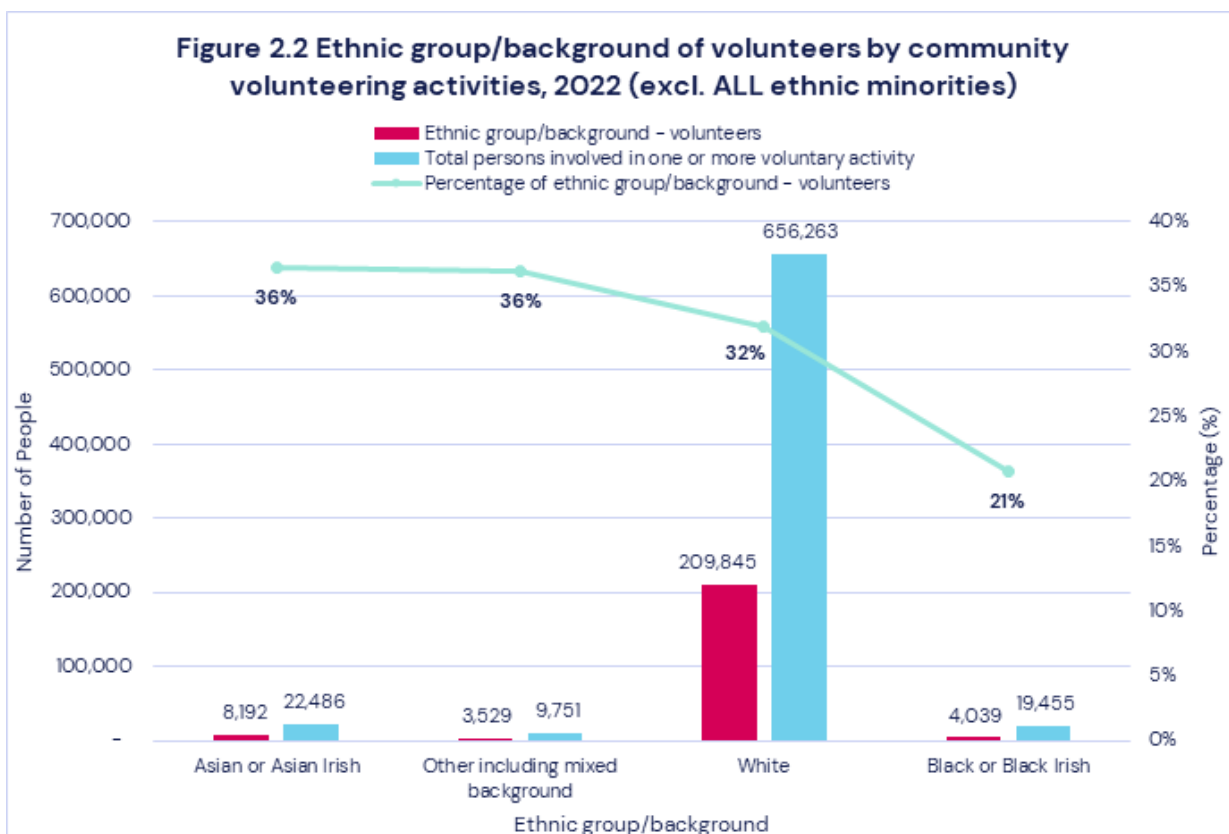
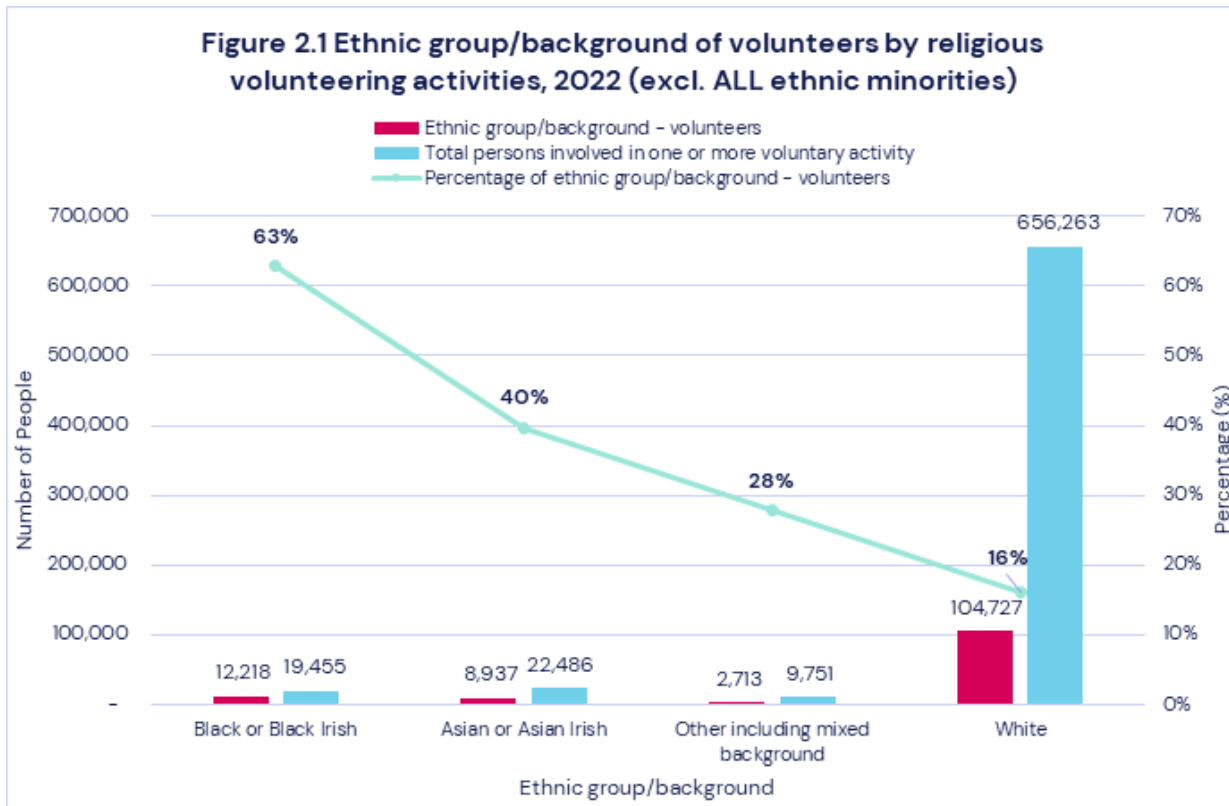


Figure 2.3 Ethnic group/background of volunteers by political volunteering activities, 2022 (excl. ALL ethnic minorities)

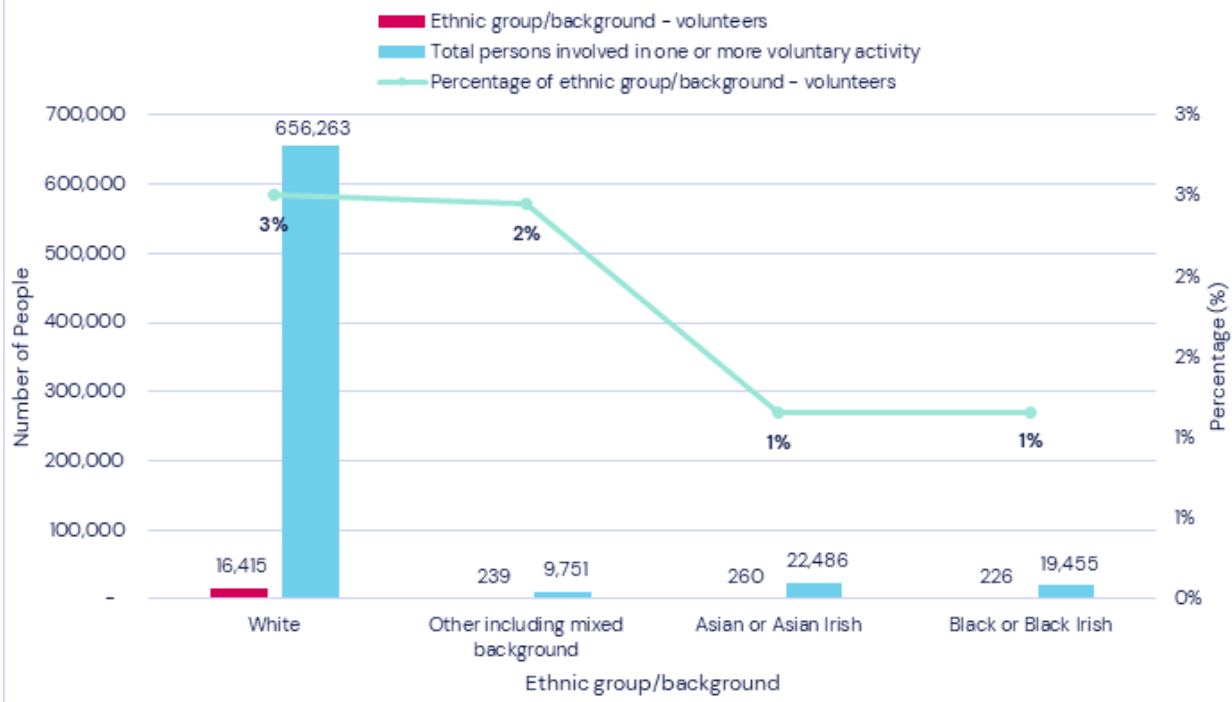
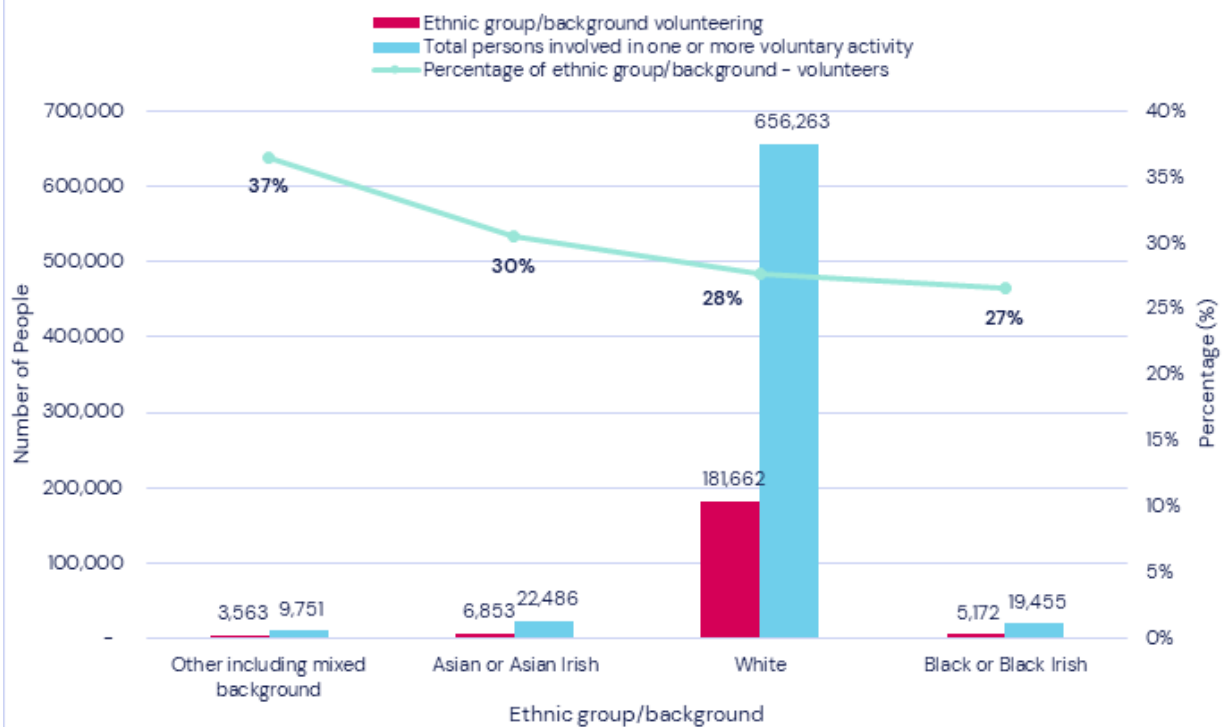
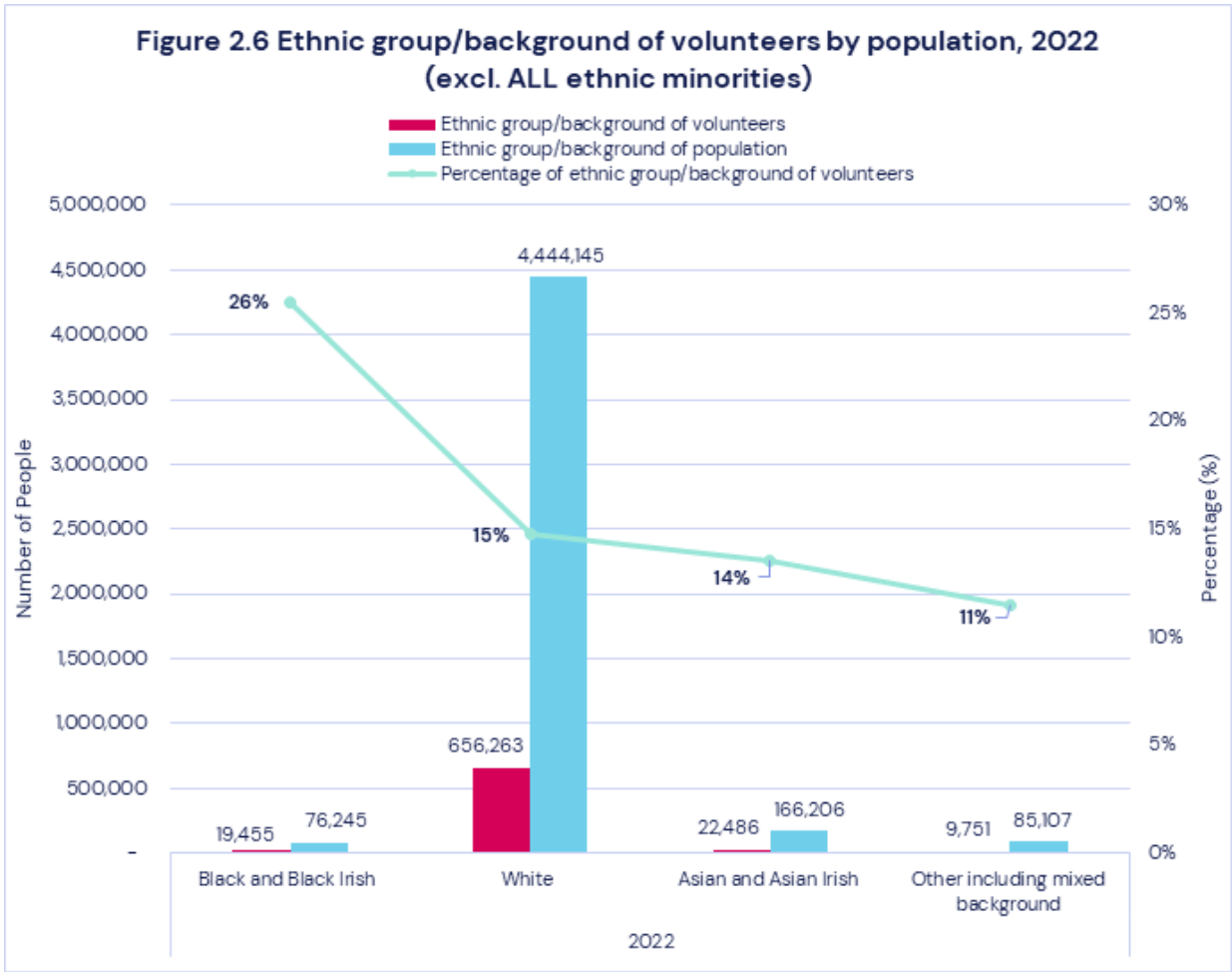
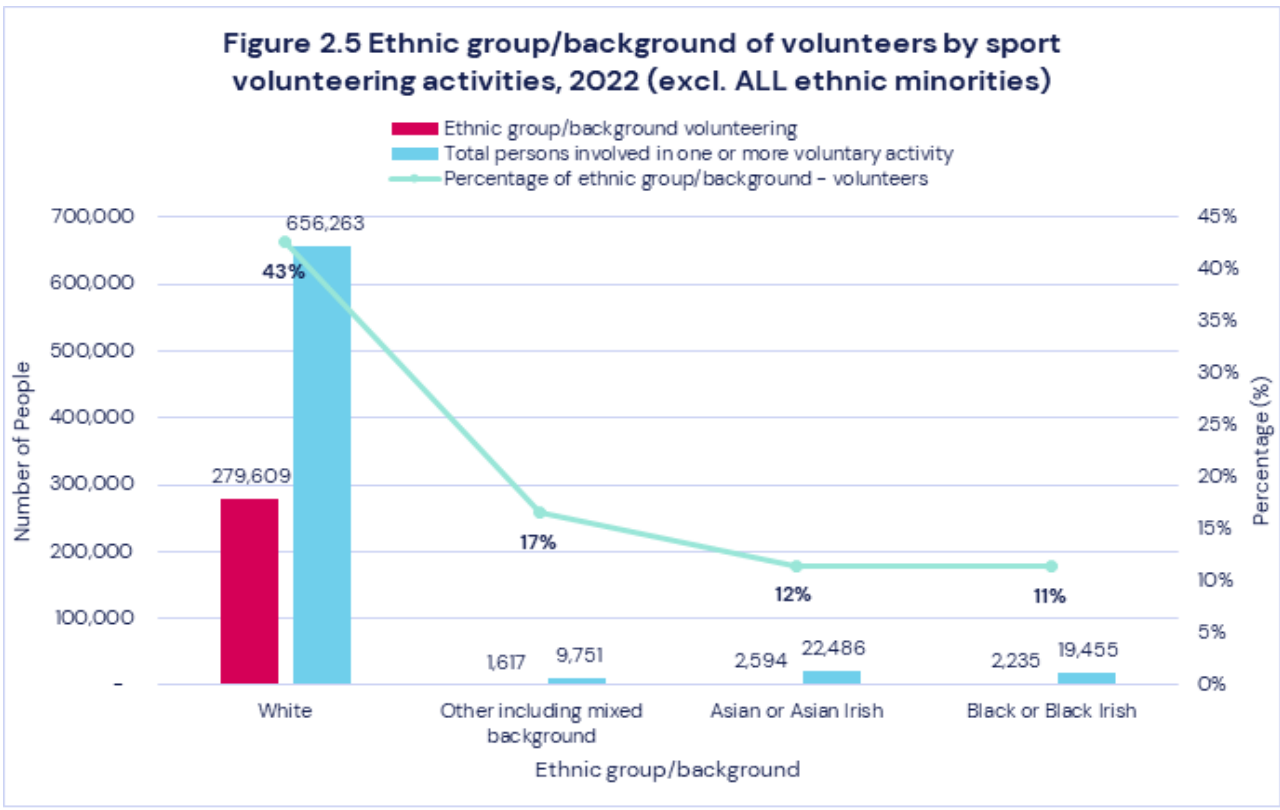


Figure 2.4 Ethnic group/background of volunteers by social-charity volunteering activities, 2022 (excl. ALL ethnic minorities)





Volunteering data: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F9026> | Population data: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F9026>.

Category 3: Volunteering by disability status

Disability is a complex term that spans a spectrum of abilities. This analysis was done in relation to two questions in Census 2022. Both questions were asked of all respondents, no matter how they answered the first.

Question 15 was a seven-part question that asked about the existence of the following long-lasting conditions:

- (a) blindness or a vision impairment,
- (b) deafness or a hearing impairment,
- (c) a difficulty with basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying,
- (d) an intellectual disability,
- (e) a difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating,
- (f) a psychological or emotional condition or a mental health issue and
- (g) a difficulty with pain, breathing or any other chronic illness or condition.

Respondents could either indicate that they did not have any of these conditions, or that they had one or more to some extent or a great extent.

Question 16 was a four-part question that asked whether an individual had a difficulty doing any of the following activities:

- (a) dressing, bathing or getting around inside the home (self-care disability),
- (b) going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's surgery (going outside the home disability),
- (c) working at a job or business or attending school or college (employment disability) and
- (d) participating in other activities, such as leisure or using transport.

Similarly, respondents rated their difficulty with these activities as no difficulty, some difficulty, or a lot of difficulty.

We acknowledge the challenges of people with acute or episodic disabilities that are excluded from the definition used by the CSO: "The term disability refers to people who experienced long-lasting conditions or difficulties... From the questions, it is possible to identify three categories reflecting the extent to which long-lasting conditions or difficulties were experienced.

1. Long-lasting condition or difficulty experienced to any extent.
2. Long-lasting condition or difficulty experienced to a great extent.
3. Long-lasting condition or difficulty experienced to some extent.

Note also that the categories include difficulties experienced due to old age.²⁰

CSO key findings

- There were slightly more female (82,888) than male (78,873) volunteers who reported a long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent.
- Over two-thirds (70%) of all volunteers experiencing at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent volunteered in their community (56,994) or a social or charitable organisation (56,823).
- Volunteering in a sporting organisation was the most common activity among male volunteers who experienced at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent (29,982).
- Female volunteers experiencing at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent were most likely to volunteer in a social or charitable organisation (41%) and in the community (37%).
- Almost 20% of people aged between 45 and 64 years who reported a long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent (58,009) were involved in at least one voluntary activity.
- Some 10% of people who reported experiencing at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to a great extent were involved in voluntary activities.²¹

2022 population analysis of volunteering and disability

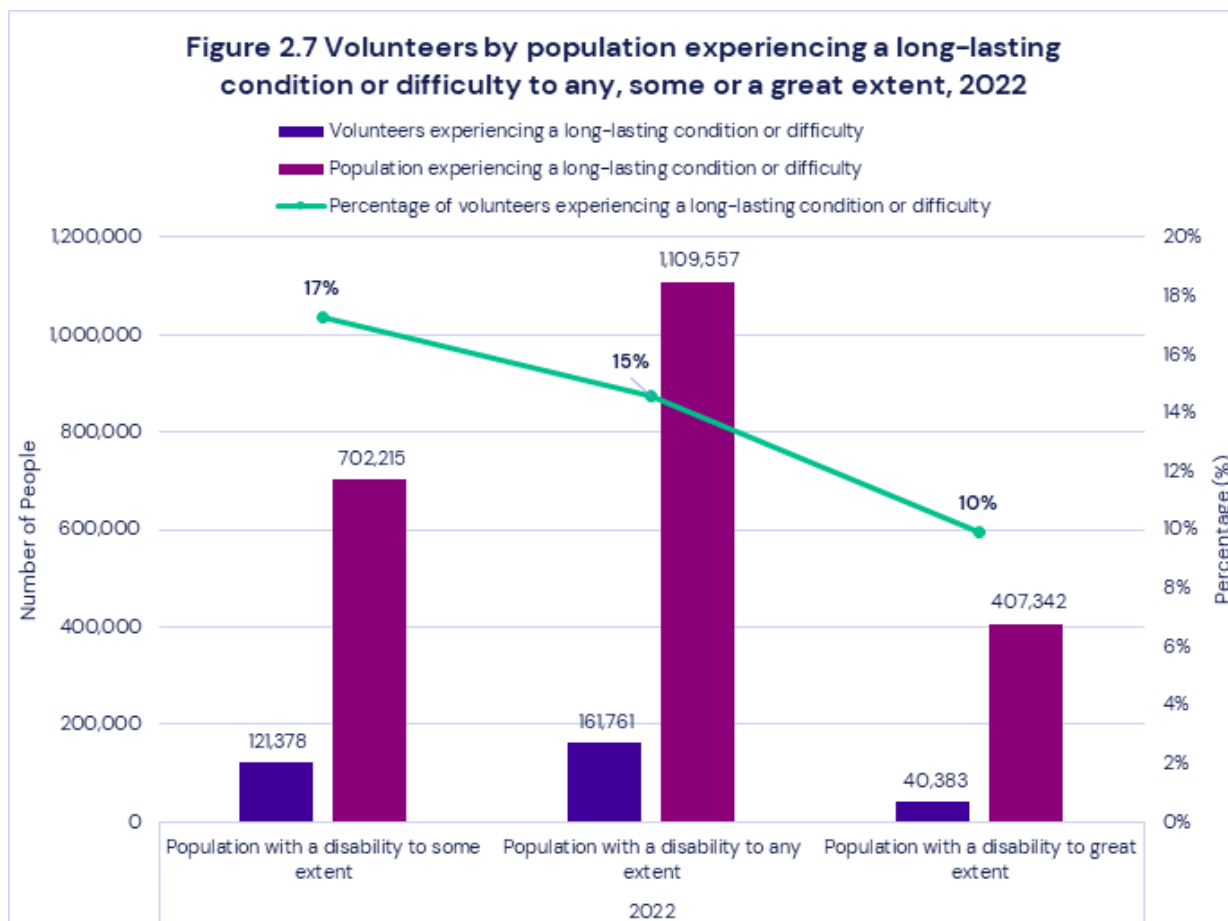
Respondents reporting at least one condition or difficulty...

- To any extent: **15%** (161,761) of this group volunteered.
- To a great extent, a lot: **10%** (40,383) of this group volunteered.
- To some extent, a little: **17%** (121,378) of this group volunteered.²²

²⁰ Press Statement Census 2022 Results Profile 4 – Disability, Health and Carers, Editor's Note, CSO Press Statement, 28 September 2023; <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2023pressreleases/presstatementcensus2022resultsprofile4-disabilityhealthandcarers/#:~:text=Carers%20%E2%80%93%20Some%20Highlights-Disability,difficulty%20to%20a%20great%20extent..>

²¹ Census of Population 2022 Spotlight Series: Volunteering in Ireland, Diversity: Volunteering and Disability, CSO Statistical Publication, 01 February 2024; <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsv/censusofpopulation2022spotlightseriesvolunteeringinireland/diversity/>.

²² Ibid.



Volunteering data: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F9Q28> | Population data: <https://data.cso.ie/table/F4Q44>.

Questions for further discussion

This report raises many interesting questions for discussion, such as:

1. Why do individuals aged 45 to 64 represent the largest demographic group of volunteers in both rural and urban settings? Do these findings challenge or support the notion of this age group as family and work focused?
2. What are the reasons behind the notably lower engagement in political-based volunteering activities across all age groups? Similarly, what are the attributes of sport-based volunteering that attract so many?
3. The preliminary, county-based data suggests that volunteering is higher in rural settings than in urban settings. Why could this be?
4. What might a comparative study of volunteering in County Leitrim, with the highest relative level of volunteering, and County Cork with the lowest level, consider in terms of barriers to volunteering?
5. Why do females volunteer more in their community, and males volunteer more in sport? And what, if anything, could or should be done to encourage more women to volunteer in sport and more men to volunteer in their community?

6. Females volunteer more than males when younger (0-24), and males volunteer more than females when older (24+). Why might this be?
7. How can we use information about higher rates of religious volunteering and lower rates of sport volunteering to better engage with ethnic minority communities?
8. What cultural factors might influence a person new to Ireland to volunteer? How can we make volunteering more accessible to them?
9. What factors might make volunteering more popular with a population that works from home?
10. People who are unemployed volunteer less than people who are working. We know that volunteering can increase employability. How can we engage more unemployed people in volunteering?

Acknowledgments

We wish to express our deep appreciation to the CSO of Ireland for their invaluable contribution to the completion of this report. This study heavily relies on the authoritative data provided by the CSO, which is made available to the public through their website <https://www.cso.ie/>. Without their commitment to data collection, transparency and accessibility, this research would not have been feasible.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to Bernie Casey, the author of the original data set sourced from the CSO. Bernie Casey's work, undertaken on behalf of the CSO, laid the groundwork for this research project, and we are thankful for the meticulousness and dedication demonstrated in producing and maintaining the dataset.

This report is a testament to the collective efforts and expertise of many individuals and organisations, and we are deeply thankful to all who have played a role, directly or indirectly, in making this study possible.

Most importantly, this report and the data analysis behind it was delivered by Holly Janes, who was a Data Scientist Intern with Volunteer Ireland in 2023 and 2024. The data analysis could not have been completed without Holly, and we are very grateful for her contribution and work.



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