the wheel

Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

2024

MEMBERS' POLICY SURVEY

Foreword

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of charities, community groups, and social enterprises. As a representative voice, we advocate on behalf of our growing community of members. As a supportive resource, we offer advice, training and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the charity and community sector. Our membership includes 2,350 charities, community groups, and social enterprises of all sizes and types.

We are guided, above all, by our members. Each year, we do a survey to find out what they need from us as a representative body, and what follows is a snapshot of the community and voluntary (CV) sector's priorities in 2024.

Our sector provides supports and services across almost every aspect of society, and I believe that this role is being increasingly, albeit belatedly, recognised. Over my years in the sector, I have witnessed an increasing recognition in government, business, and the media that we need more of what our sector brings to our communities, to society, and to the economy. The Wheel's advocacy work is focused on making that possible.

Over the years, some of our sector's priorities have stayed steady (funding, for example), others have emerged rapidly (Covid, the Russian war in Ukraine), while others have evolved in response to changing contexts (like inclusion, migration, and governance).

In 2024, funding was once again the policy area that members wanted us to focus on above all else. With the cost of overheads dramatically increasing, our members are concerned about continuing to offer high-quality supports and services, especially as funding is not indexed to inflation and many are therefore being asked to do more with less. Three-quarters of our members who responded to our survey receive funding from the State. They are eager to see more core costs covered, including the costs of complying with regulation, and funding provided on a multiannual basis.

While funding is the most prevalent concern for most organisations, other, more sector-specific issues also emerge. For many State-funded charities, pay parity for their workers with public-sector staff remains a major concern. Other organisations are concerned about resourcing the impact of increased immigration to support both existing and new communities. Others have a specific focus within the areas of housing, disability, children's rights, the environment, older people, or other societal issues. Though their areas of focus are wide-ranging, they are united in their work towards a just and inclusive society.

I cannot end without an enormous thank you to every member organisation that took the time to complete the survey. It's a significant investment of time and energy, and we hope you will consider the following report to be worth the effort.

Sincerely,
Ivan Cooper, CEO, The Wheel

Methodology

Each year since 2019, The Wheel has conducted a policy-focused survey of its members. The primary aim of this survey is to identify the key issues faced by our members, understand the magnitude of these challenges, and collect pertinent data to bolster our advocacy efforts throughout the year.

Survey Population and Sample

The target population for this survey comprises the membership base of The Wheel, which stands at 2,350 organizations at the time of drafting this report. A sample of 313 organisations, representing approximately 13% of the total membership, participated in the survey. This sample was self-selected, with organisations themselves choosing to complete the survey.

Data Collection Period

The survey was open for responses from November 28, 2023, to January 18, 2024.

Survey Instrument

The survey consisted of 61 questions designed to gather comprehensive information across five key areas: organisational profile, funding sources and budgets (including statutory funding, reserves, and running costs), staffing and volunteer engagement, reporting and compliance practices, and the policy landscape as it affects member organisations. The questions were a mix of quantitative and qualitative types, allowing for both statistical and narrative insights. The full list of survey questions is provided in an appendix to this report.

Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of this survey. The data collected represents only those organisations that have chosen to join The Wheel and may not fully encapsulate the broader sector. Additionally, the self-selection of the survey participants could introduce bias, as it is possible that those who responded are not representative of the entire membership base in terms of size, scope, or issues faced. Furthermore, a response rate of 13% may limit the ability to generalise the findings.

Comparative Analysis

In section one of the report, we provide a comparative analysis of our data and other available data concerning the sector, particularly that from the Charities Regulator. This comparison aims to highlight any discrepancies and provide a broader context for our findings, acknowledging the limitations of our dataset.

Through this methodology, The Wheel aims to gather pertinent insights into the challenges and needs of our members, supporting our ongoing advocacy and support efforts within the community and voluntary sector.

This work is partly supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal via the Scheme to Support National Organisations.

An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and Community Development

pobal
government supporting communities

Table Of Contents

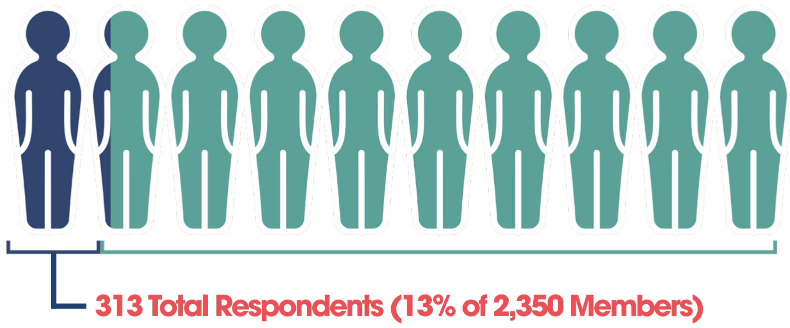
List Of Tables

List Of Figures

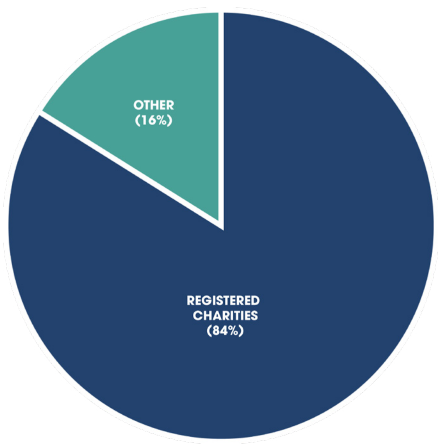
1: Ireland's Community And Voluntary Sector

Who Is Included In This Report?

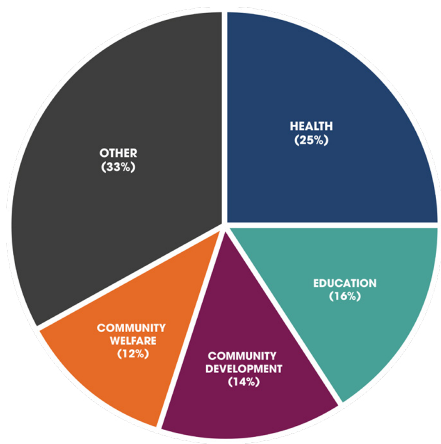
MEMBERSHIP



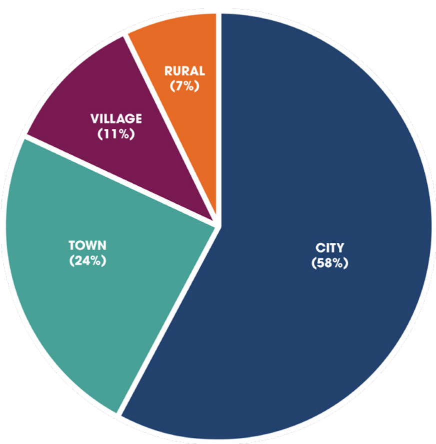
ORGANISATION TYPE



CHARITABLE PURPOSE



LOCATION



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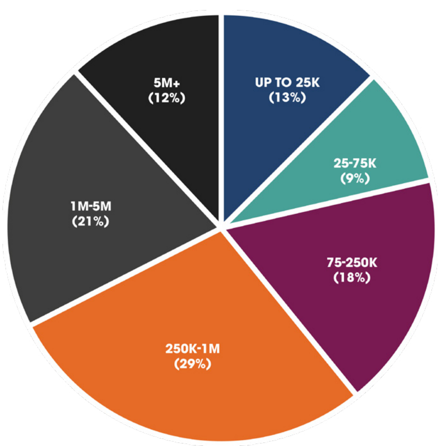

TOP COUNTIES

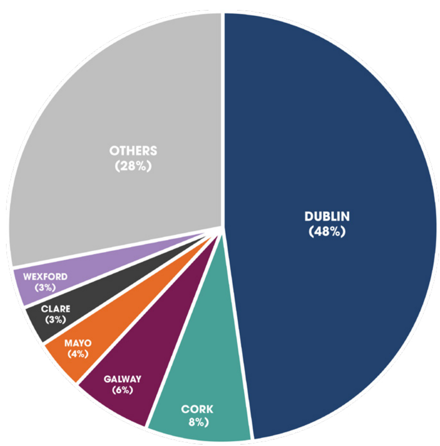

Fig 1: Who Is Included In This Report?

Respondents by County

Carlow	**1**	**0.33%**
Cavan	**2**	**0.66%**
Clare	**9**	**2.96%**
Cork	**23**	**7.57%**
Derry/Londonderry	**1**	**0.33%**
Donegal	**7**	**2.30%**
Dublin	**146**	**48.03%**
Galway	**17**	**5.59%**
Kerry	**9**	**2.96%**
Kildare	**7**	**2.30%**
Kilkenny	**4**	**1.32%**
Leitrim	**3**	**0.99%**
Limerick	**5**	**1.64%**
Longford	**3**	**0.99%**
Louth	**1**	**0.33%**
Mayo	**13**	**4.28%**
Meath	**9**	**2.96%**
Offaly	**7**	**2.30%**
Roscommon	**4**	**1.32%**
Sligo	**4**	**1.32%**
Tipperary	**4**	**1.32%**
Waterford	**5**	**1.64%**
Westmeath	**3**	**0.99%**
Wexford	**9**	**2.96%**
Wicklow	**8**	**2.63%**

Table 1: Respondents By County (N=304)

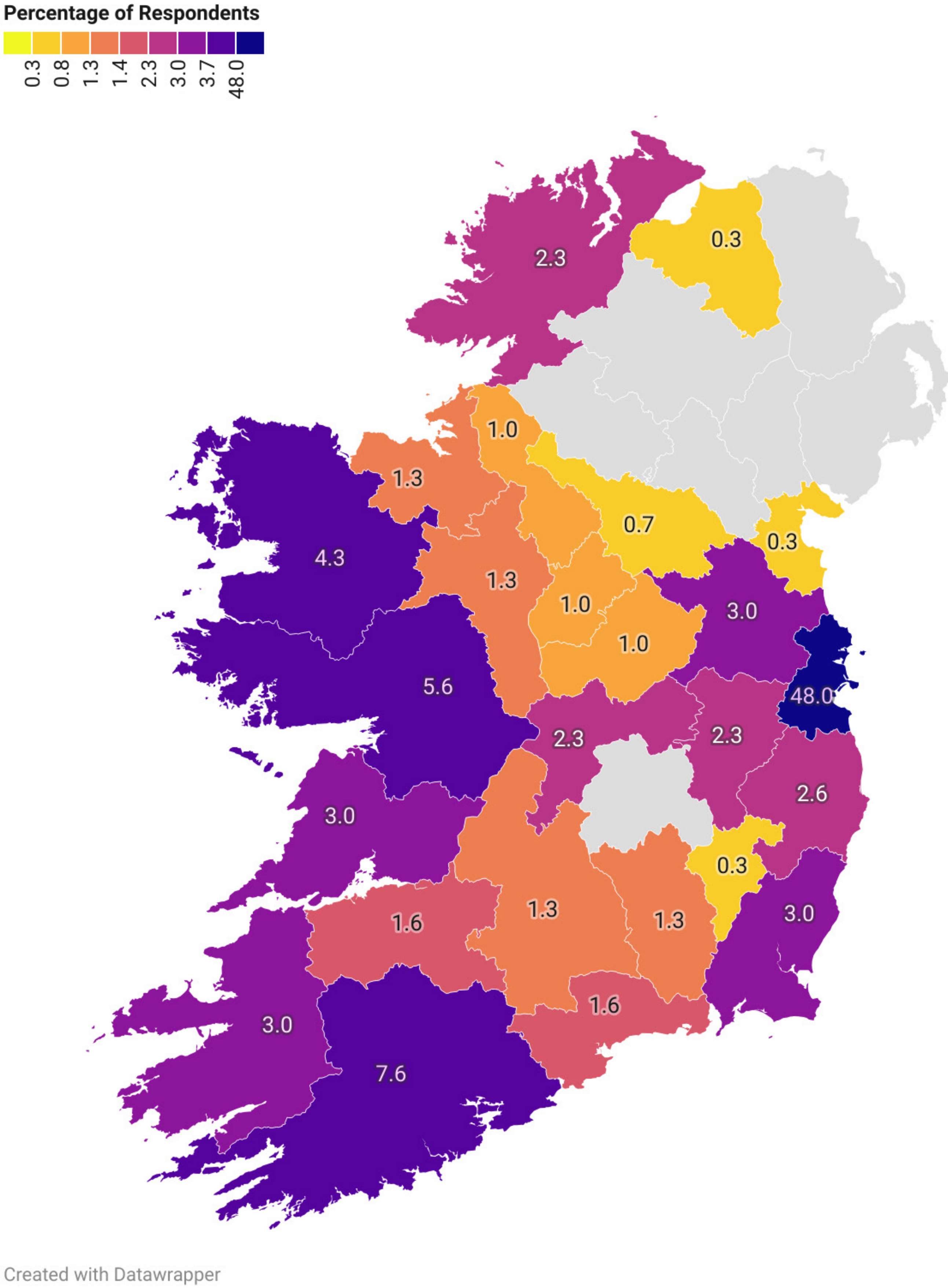

Fig 2: Percentage Of Respondents By County

How do respondents compare to the sector as a whole?

Ireland's community, voluntary, charity, and social enterprise sector operates at a large scale. Each year, almost nine out of ten people in Ireland take part in the social, sporting, cultural, and humanitarian activities provided by the nonprofit sector.[1] Charities, community groups, voluntary organisations, and social enterprises make up this sector, which is distinct from the public and private sectors.

Registered Charities

According to Benefacts Legacy data, there are over 20,000 nonprofit organisations in Ireland,[2] of which 11,506 are registered charities.[3] This would mean that about 57% of nonprofits in Ireland are registered charities, compared to 84% of The Wheel's membership. As a representative body that provides training on charity governance and related topics, it is to be expected that our members are more likely to fall within this category.

Location

The Wheel has members headquartered in 30 counties across Ireland, and many operate nationwide. Members based in 25 counties responded to our survey (Table 1). Compared to the Charities Regulator's data, respondents to our survey were more concentrated in Dublin, at 48% (n =146) compared to 27% of all charities. The percentage of respondents in other counties is comparable for the purposes of this report.[4]

Income level[5]

Compared to the Charities Regulator's data,[6] our report reflects the input of a smaller proportion of small organisations and a larger proportion of larger organisations (Table 2).

	Charities Regulator	The Wheel Policy Survey
Up to €250k	**63%**	**40%**
€250k-€1m	**21%**	**29%**
€1m-€5m	**11%**	**21%**
€5m+	**5%**	**10%**

Table 2: Income Level Charities Regulator V The Wheel's Survey (N=313)

1 p.10 https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4675/public-survey-report-2022.pdf
2 Benefacts, "Irish Nonprofits in 2022", p.3. https://benefactslegacy.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Irish-Nonprofits-in-2022-May23-report.pdf
3 Charities Regulator, 2023. Figure correct as of December 2022.
4 Within three percent of each other, based on rounded figures.
5 The Wheel and the Charities Regulator use different income categories. In order to compare them, we have combined some categories in order to create comparable cohorts.
6 "Report on the Social and Economic Impact of Registered Charities in Ireland", 2023, p.10. https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4767/scoeco.pdf

Charitable Purpose

Some clear differences emerge in the proportion of charities engaging in specific charitable purposes when comparing The Wheel's data with the Charities Regulator's (Table 3). Most notably, health charities are a larger percentage in our sample, while education and religion are smaller. However, the Charities Regulator includes charities with multiple stated purposes in the count for each one, while our survey asked respondents to select a single primary purpose. This impacts the comparability of the figures.

Charitable Purpose	Respondents (all)	Respondents (registered charities only)	Charities Regulator
Health	**25%**	**27%**	**7%**
Education	**16%**	**16%**	**32%**
Community Development	**14%**	**13%**	**7%**
Community welfare	**12%**	**12%**	**11%**
Poverty or economic hardship	**8%**	**9%**	**8%**
Integration of disadvantaged	**8%**	**8%**	**8%**
Arts, culture, heritage, or science	**7%**	**6%**	**5%**
Civic responsibility or voluntary work	**4%**	**3%**	**5%**
Environment	**3%**	**3%**	**3%**
Religion	**1%**	**1%**	**8%**
Conflict resolution and reconciliation	**1%**	**0%**	**1%**
Community relations	**1%**	**0%**	**1%**
Property	**1%**	**1%**	**1%**
Animal suffering	**1%**	**1%**	**1%**

Table 3: Charitable Purpose, Charities Regulator V The Wheel Policy Survey (N=313)

2: Funding

Nationwide, charities manage a combined income of €19.7 billion annually,[7] but individual organisations operate on very disparate budgets. Some are multi-million-euro endeavours, but most are much smaller.

According to the Charities Regulator, 3% of charities have an annual income of €10m or more, and account for 70% of the sector's income (as well as employing 70% of the sector's staff).[8] These very large organisations are in the minority, but their scale and impact are significant.

On the other end of the scale, more than a third of charities have annual income of less than €50k, and almost two-thirds have income of less than €250k.[9] Nearly half (49%) of charities have no paid staff, and more than half of charities that do have employees have fewer than ten.[10]

A similar pattern appears when social enterprises are examined. The sector's total reported income is €2.34bn (much of which is already accounted for by the figure reported for charities, as 88% of social enterprises are also registered charities),[11] but 40% of social enterprises have income of under €100k. Only 1.4% have an income above €5m.[12]

Survey Respondents

Funding models vary significantly across the sector, according to our data. For example, 66% (n=177) of respondents to the question receive donations, with just 16% (n=28) of those receive between 75% and 100% of their income from this funding source (Table 4). Just 54% of respondents had earned income (i.e. money made from selling goods or services), with 8% of those reporting that it accounted for between 75% and 100% of total income. The sector is hugely diverse, and individual organisations have many different approaches to funding their work (Table 4).

	Less than 5%	5-10%	10-25%	25-50%	50-75%	75-100%	Total Respondants
Statutory funding	3%	2%	10%	18%	19%	48%	211
Donations	40%	15%	12%	10%	7%	16%	177
Earned income	21%	25%	17%	21%	8%	8%	145
Philanthropic grants	39%	29%	18%	10%	3%	3%	114
Membership subscriptions	49%	17%	13%	10%	5%	6%	63

*Table 4: Funding Source By Proportion Of Overall Income (N=268); *Note: Figure Excludes "Not Applicable" Responses*

7 Charities Regulator.
8 Charities Regulator, "Report on the Social and Economic Impact of Registered Charities in Ireland 2023," p.10. https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4767/scoeco.pdf
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. p.23.
11 Department of Rural and Community Development, "Social Enterprises in Ireland: A Baseline Data Collection Exercise", p.17. https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b30e5-social-enterprises-in-ireland-a-baseline-data-collection-exercise/
12 Ibid. p.35.

2.1: Budgets and Reserves

2.1.1 Budgets

Adequate budgets are a significant concern for the sector. The Charities Regulator notes that, as of its most recent Irish Charity Survey, "Income/securing funding and meeting increasing running costs remain the greatest challenges facing charities."[13] This aligns with our findings, in which 41% (n=104) of respondents to this question reported that they are not confident that they will have sufficient funding to provide 2023 service levels in 2024. Of those, 70% (n=71) are concerned about the sustainability of at least half of their budget in the coming year (Table 5).

	N	%
Less than 10%	**8**	**8%**
10–25%	**10**	**10%**
25–50%	**12**	**12%**
50–75%	**34**	**34%**
More than 75 but less than 100%	**37**	**37%**

Table 5: What Proportion Of Your Budget Are You Confident About? (N=101)

When broken down by income levels, some clear differences emerge. Larger organisations appear to be more confident about a larger proportion of their budget, while a bigger proportion of small groups and organisations are more uncertain about how they will achieve their goals.

None of the very small organisations (<€25k) surveyed were confident about more than 75% of their budget, and almost two in five (38%, n=6) are confident about ≤10% of their budget for the year. For respondents with turnover between €25k and €75k, almost half (44%, n=4) are uncertain about 50% or more of their budget. For the next three categories (€75k-€250k, €250k-€1 million, and €1 million-€5 million), roughly four in five are confident about more than half of their budget; 80% (n=16), 79% (n=23), and 82% (n=14) respectively. Finally, in organisations with income of €5 million or above, 70% (n=7) are confident about three-quarters or more of their budget.

Asked how concerns about budget shortfall might be addressed, the securing of grants and fundraising are the main strategies for tackling anticipated deficits, along with increasing income-earning activity. 58% (n=59) of respondents plan to cover any outstanding costs through increased grant applications, 41% (n=41) through increased fundraising activity, and 32% (n=32) through an increase in earned income from the provision of goods or services.

13 p.15 https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4767/scoeco.pdf

2.1.2 Reserves

Reserves are a portion of an organisation's budget set aside for unforeseen circumstances. 78% (n=193) of survey respondents had reserves at the end of 2023/beginning of 2024. 86% (n=178) of registered charities had reserves at this time and 64% (n=27) of organisations who were not registered did not have reserves. 35% (n=72) of registered charities used their reserves in part in 2023 and 48% (n=99) did not use any reserves last year (Table 6).

However, organisations are generally discouraged from accumulating significant reserves. The Charities Regulator's Guidance for Charity Reserves says, "Generally, a charity is expected to spend its income on advancing its charitable purposes, unless there is a specific reason for keeping it."[14]

Accordingly, for most survey respondents, their reserves represent a small proportion of annual turnover. 44% (n=82) of those that do have reserves have less than 10% of their annual turnover set aside. This is the case even for larger organisations; a third of respondents from €5m+ organisations have less than 10% of their annual turnover in reserve (Table 6).

Proportion of Reserves	N	%
Less than 5%	**37**	**20%**
5–10%	**45**	**24%**
10–50%	**72**	**39%**
50–75%	**14**	**8%**
More than 75%	**18**	**10%**

Table 6: Reserves As % Of Total Income (N=186)

More than two in five (43%, n=79) respondent organisations had to use some or all of their reserves in 2023. More than a fifth (22%, n=55) of respondent organisations reported having no reserves at all to fall back on. While this represents an improvement on 2022, when 30% of organisations had no reserves, it is still a concern, particularly in the current inflationary context resulting in increased demand on existing resources.

2.2 Statutory Funding

Government funding supports many groups and organisations in the sector, with more than three quarters (79%, n=211) of survey respondents in receipt of statutory funding. Statutory funding can take a variety of forms, but the most prevalent form funds service-delivery and staff costs. Organisations can also have more than one statutory funder, with more than 1 in 4 respondents indicating that they had 2, and 3 in 10 indicating that they had 3 or more (Table 7).

14 Charities Regulator, "Guidance for Charity Reserves", p.6. https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/1i2n-wk0y/guidance-on-charity-reserves-final.pdf

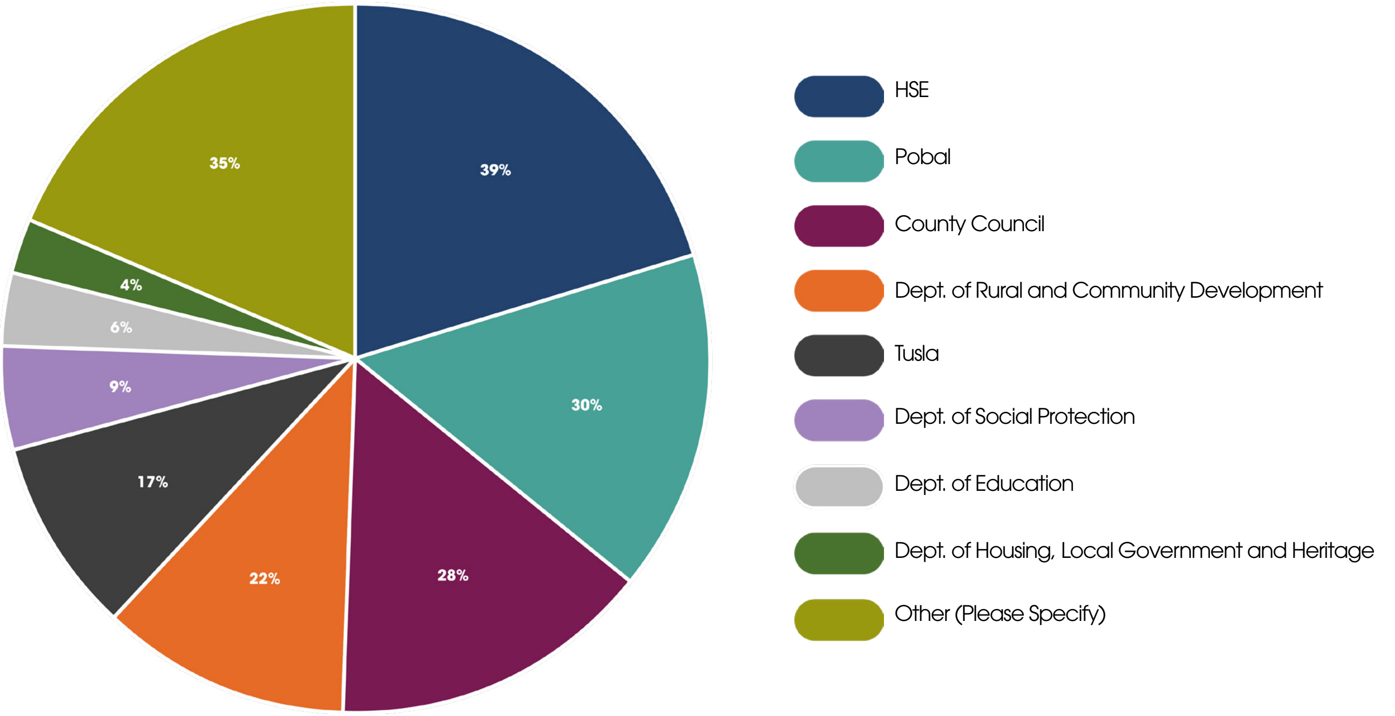

Fig 3: Main Funders

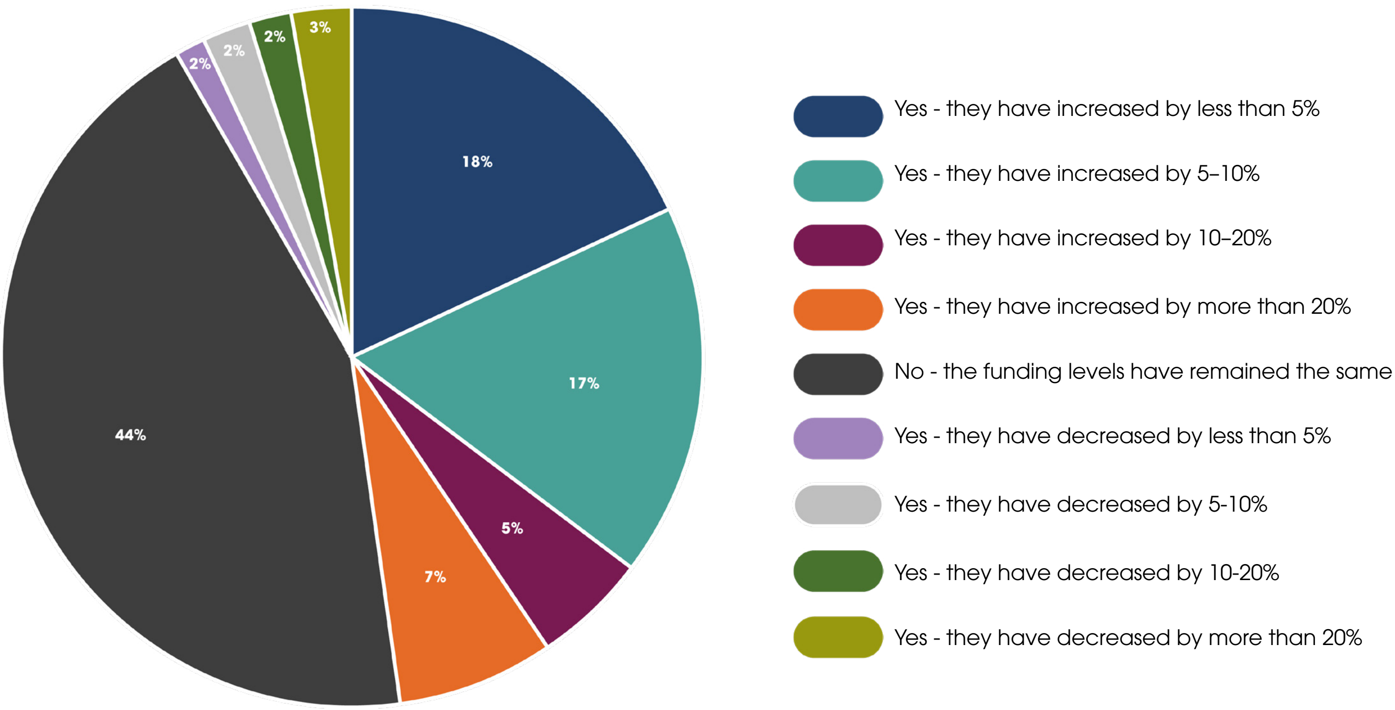

Fig 4: Increase / Decrease In Statutory Funding

	N	%
One	**83**	**43%**
Two	**50**	**26%**
Three	**25**	**13%**
More than three	**33**	**17%**

Table 7: No. Of Statutory Funders (N=191)

Respondents were asked to select up to three main funders. Almost 2 in 5 (39%, n=75) respondents were funded by the HSE, 3 in 10 were funded by Pobal, and almost 3 in 10 were funded by a County Council (Table 8).

	N	%
HSE	**75**	**39%**
Pobal	**57**	**30%**
County Council	**54**	**28%**
Department of Rural and Community Development	**42**	**22%**
Tusla	**32**	**17%**
Department of Social Protection	**18**	**9%**
Department of Education	**12**	**6%**
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	**9**	**4%**
Other (please specify)	**68**	**35%**

Table 8: Main Funders (N=193). Note: Respondents Could Select More Than One Option.

Other funders included the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Justice; Department of Foreign Affairs; and Erasmus+.

Statutory funding to deliver essential public services is an important component of the sector's funding landscape. As we saw in Table 4, almost half of respondent organisations in receipt of statutory funding indicated that this funding accounted for between 75-100% of their total income. Asked if the level of statutory funding had changed, almost half (47%, =92) indicated that it had, while more than 2 in 5 (44%, n=84) said it had not (Table 9).

	N	%
Yes - they have increased by less than 5%	**35**	**18%**
Yes - they have increased by 5–10%	**33**	**17%**
Yes - they have increased by 10–20%	**10**	**5%**
Yes - they have increased by more than 20%	**14**	**7%**
No - the funding levels have remained the same	**84**	**44%**
Yes - they have decreased by less than 5%	**3**	**2%**
Yes - they have decreased by 5-10%	**4**	**2%**
Yes - they have decreased by 10-20%	**4**	**2%**
Yes - they have decreased by more than 20%	**5**	**3%**

Table 9: Increase / Decrease In Statutory Funding, (N=192)

2.2.1 Service Delivery

Statutory funding is often ring-fenced and targeted for specific programmes or the delivery of specified services. However, almost half (46%, n=89) of respondents indicated that statutory funding only met 75-100% of delivery costs. A further 1 in 4 (n=49) indicated that between 50% and 75% was met, and 28% indicated that it was less than half (Table 10).

	N	%
Less than 25%	**26**	**13%**
25–50%	**29**	**15%**
50%–75%	**49**	**25%**
75%–100%	**89**	**46%**

Table 10: Proportion Of The Costs For The Specific Services/Supports Met By Statutory Funding (N=193)

2.2.2 Core Costs

The above contrasts starkly with the availability of funding for core, or operational, costs. For more than half of respondents (58%, n=110), it represents between 50% and 100% of their core funding, while for almost 1 in 5, it represents less than a quarter (Table 11).

	N	%
Less than 25%	**18%**	**35**
25–50%	**15%**	**29**
50%–75%	**19%**	**36**
75%–100%	**39%**	**74**
None	**8%**	**16**

Table 11: Core Costs Met By Statutory Funding (N=190)

2.2.3 Multiannual Funding

More than 2 in 5 respondent organisations (41%, n=79) indicated that they received multiannual statutory funding, with 59% (n=47) of those having their funding reassessed each year, and 29% (n=23) reassessed every two to three years.[15]

2.2.4 Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

Almost three quarters (72%, n=137) of respondent organisations in receipt of statutory funding do so pursuant to a Service Level Agreement/Arrangement (SLA). Of these, over half (57% (n=78) were satisfied or very satisfied with the process, while 23% (n=31) were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied". Asked if the experience of agreeing the SLA had changed in the 12 months preceding the survey, 71% (n=76) reported that it had not, 15% (n=20) experienced an improvement, and 9% found it had worsened.

15 The nature of multi-annual funding contracts vary depending on the source. Some service delivery funding may be approved on a multi-annual basis, but assessed each year to ensure compliance with legislation re deficits etc., while other types of multi-annual funding, for example for the payment of salary costs over a defined period, are not subject to annual assessment.

When taken as a proportion of the total number of respondent organisations per funder, almost four in five (79%, n=22) organisations funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience, followed by 61% (n=19) of organisations funded through their County Council, 54% (n=21) funded by Pobal, and 50% (n=5) funded by the Department of Education (Table 12).

Funder	Total N	N "Satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their experience	% "Satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their experience
Department of Rural and Community Development	**42**	**22**	**79%**
County Council	**54**	**19**	**61%**
Pobal	**57**	**21**	**54%**
Department of Education	**12**	**5**	**50%**
HSE	**76**	**31**	**47%**
Tusla	**32**	**15**	**46%**
Department of Social Protection	**18**	**7**	**46%**

Table 12: Satisfaction With SLA Process By Main Funder Type (N=193). Note: Respondents Could Select Up To 3 Main Funders. The Department Of Housing, Local Government And Heritage Were Excluded Due To Sample Size.

There are many ways in which an organisation might receive statutory funding, including grant agreements for specified projects or staff, tender arrangements, and Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Organisations funded pursuant to an SLA are more likely to receive a higher proportion of their funding from statutory sources. More than half (56%, n=77) have three-quarters or more of their service/support costs met by statutory funding (compared to 46% of all state-funded organisations), while only 7% (n=10) have less than a quarter met by the same source (compared to 14% of all state-funded organisations).

Statutory funding levels have remained the same over the last year for 41% (n=57) of respondents funded under an SLA. 45% (n=70) of organisations have seen an increase in statutory funding levels and 7% (n=10) have experienced a decrease in statutory funding levels. This is broadly in line with the overall picture for state-funded organisations.

2.2.5 Section 39/56/10 Funding and the 2023 Pay Deal

In 2023, a large number of state-funded CV organisations called for urgent government intervention to address under-resourcing of the sector, in order to avoid potential indefinite strike action on pay issues by staff delivering vital public services. These organsiations are referred to as "Section 39/56/10 organisations", referencing the Acts under which they are funded.

Health and social care professionals employed in these organisations have, for many years, been paid significantly less than staff employed directly by the state to do identical work. As outlined in The Wheel and TASC's 2023 report, "The Future of Public Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector",

> Similar to public sector employees, Sections 39, 56, and 10 organisations suffered a decline in public funding after the financial crisis in 2008, which affected pay and staffing levels. However, whereas pay restoration has been given to public sector employees through the 2017 Public Service Pay and Pensions Act and the Public Service Agreement "Building Momentum - A New Public Service Agreement 2021-2022", there has been no equivalent for the community and voluntary sector.[16]

Since the publication of the report, an agreement was reached in October 2023 to increase funding for pay for Section 39/56/10 organisations by 8% over three installments. The agreement was reached in discussions between trade unions and government departments as funders, but without participation of the funded organisations. However, at the time our survey was conducted, significant delays were being experienced in implementation of the funding increases.

37% (n=69) of our survey respondents received funding under Section 39 (HSE), 56 (Tusla), or 10 (Housing Act). Of these, 55% (n=21) indicated that that their pay parity issues remained unresolved, while 37% (n=14) feel that the deal would "fully", "mostly", or "to some extent" resolve these issues (a further 8% answered that this was "not applicable" for them).

When asked about remaining issues, many noted, at the time of the survey, that they had not received confirmation about funding to support newly agreed pay-scales, leading to uncertainty and inability to ensure equitable pay. The lack of a coherent approach to implementing the agreement, and an apparent lack of understanding of the intricacies of the mixed funding model in the sector was evident in responses from organisations.

> We employ approximately 40 youth workers. This pay deal applies to one of our projects, benefiting 12 workers, and adds to challenges for youth work organisations who are bound by different state department SLAs. Youth organisations find themselves in an impossible situation currently in trying to ensure fair and equitable pay scales for our workers.

Some organisations must supplement staff pay from various funding streams due to insufficient increases or lack of funding from statutory sources, with concerns about keeping up with inflation: "Not all staff are Section-39-funded so any change to salaries will need to be applied across the whole team. We have to find this additional funding."

The need for ongoing pay increments and parity with state agencies is emphasised as crucial for retaining staff and boosting morale and compliance, further complicating the financial stability of these bodies.

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16 The Wheel & TASC, "The Future of Public Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector", p5. https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/the_wheel_tasc_report_f_v_080623.pdf

3: The Cost Of Running An Organisation

Sustaining the operational costs of an organisation is a key concern for the sector as a whole as many organisations receive restricted, project-, or service-specific funding. Many of these organisations are delivering essential public services, yet their funding models frequently do not reflect this reality. Statutory funding cuts imposed during the financial crisis in 2008 have not been fully reversed, despite the increase in operational costs in the intervening period. Funding and increased running costs top the list of challenges experienced by charities, according to the Charities Regulator's most recent survey.[17]

Inflation remained a key concern for our members in 2023. While the rate of inflation decreased compared to previous years, prices for goods and services continued to rise. This was particularly the case for the Consumer Price Index Division 4: 'Housing, Water, Electricity, Gas and Other Fuels' which saw an increase of 15.6% in the year to December 2023 and 45.8% between 2019 and 2023.[18] As of September 2023, this puts prices 90% higher than they were five years ago, and for a sector that cannot, in the majority of cases, raise the price of goods or services to meet increased costs, this presents a huge challenge.

These increases were keenly felt by member organisations. The Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme was very welcome to those members who were eligible to apply (that is, CV organisations or charities that do not generate income from trading or commercial activities). However, these supports were not universally available, and the many organisations that do engage in some trading activity, no matter how small, were left out.

Increases in the cost of living also impacted the people to whom our members provide services and supports. In the year to September 2023, households in the bottom 10% of the income distribution experienced inflation in the area of food and non-alcoholic beverages which was two-thirds higher than households in the top 10%. At the same time, inflation in electricity, gas, and other fuels was almost twice as high. This pressure on low-income households is likely to result in an increased demand for the services and supports of charities and other community and voluntary organisations. 46% (n=99) of respondents to our survey anticipate that the increased cost of living will affect demand for their services in 2024,[19] while they are also grappling with the increased costs of service and support provision.

17 https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4710/charity-survey-report.pdf
18 https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/fp-eihc/estimatedinflationbyhouseholdcharacteristicsseptember2023/#:~:text=Key%20Findings,annual%20estimated%20inflation%20of%206.0%25.
19 See section 6.1.

3.1 Operating Costs and Risks to Services/Supports

More than 2 in 5 (41%, n=104) were unsure if they would have sufficient funding to provide their existing supports or services in 2024, with three in ten of those (30%, n=30) confident of attaining 50% or less of their 2023 funding levels. This funding insecurity means organisations must divert resources from frontline service provision to fundraising activity. Unsurprisingly, the cost of running an organisation has increased in the last year for 95% (n=231) of respondents. Almost half (45%, n=104) have seen a rise of between 10% and 50%.

More than half of respondent organisations (55%, n=124) believed that increased costs would impact their capacity to provide services and supports in 2024, with 92% (n=114) of those indicating that this would be significant or very significant, and 13% (n=15) indicating that increased costs put them at risk of closure.

4: Staff, Volunteers, And Trustees

4.1 Staff

1 in 8 people working in Ireland works for a charity.[20] Charities employ an estimated 281,250 people across a wide range of roles[21]—from frontline health workers to finance directors to social media managers. According to the Charities Regulator, 55% of charities have paid staff, and more than half of these employ fewer than ten people. 13% have only part-time staff.[22] As of 2021, The Wheel's membership reflected 35% of all sector employees[23] and the proportion is estimated to have grown since.

4.1.1 Survey Respondents - Paid Staff

The proportion of organisations with paid staff appears higher among The Wheel's members than in the wider sector, with 83% (n=201) of respondents to our survey having paid staff. Three-quarters of these (75%, n=152) have 20 or fewer people working for them full-time (Table 13).

	N	%
0-1	**27**	**13%**
1-5	**62**	**31%**
5–20	**63**	**31%**
20–50	**20**	**10%**
50–100	**13**	**7%**
100–250	**9**	**4%**
More than 250	**7**	**3%**

Table 13: No. Of Full-Time Equivalent Employees (N=201)

4.1.2 Recruitment and Retention of Staff

40% (n=80) of respondent organisations indicated that they had difficulty recruiting and retaining staff, while 60% (n=120) did not.

When asked if the recruitment and retention situation had changed in the previous 12 months, 59% (n=118) indicated that it had, with 29% (n=34) of those indicating that it had improved and 71% (n=84) indicated that it had gotten worse.

The main barriers to recruitment and retention identified by respondent organisations were the inability to offer attractive rates of pay (69%, n=135) and the inability to offer attractive pensions (6%, n=11).

20 Charities Regulator, p22. https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4767/scoeco.pdf This figure and subsequent ones exclude schools and the HSE.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Benefacts, "Report for The Wheel on the profile of its membership", p.10.

4.2 Volunteers

According to Census 2022, a total of 711,379 people (14% of the population) engaged in regular helping or voluntary work.[24] Volunteer Ireland estimates that when more casual forms of volunteering are included, there are over a million volunteers in Ireland.

Using the CSO figures, we can estimate that if each volunteer gave just two hours a week, the value of regular volunteering would range from €900m (National Minimum Wage) to €2bn (average hourly earnings Q2 2023).

4.2.1 Survey Respondents - Volunteering

Not including trustee boards, 70% (n=167) of respondent organisations indicated that they engaged volunteers, with 61% of those (n=103) having 20 or fewer volunteers, and 11% (n=19) have more than 250 (Table 14).

	N	%
1-5 people	**54**	**32%**
5-20	**49**	**29%**
20-50	**22**	**13%**
50-100	**12**	**7%**
100-250	**11**	**7%**
More than 250	**19**	**11%**

Table 14: No. Of Volunteers (N=167)

4.2.2 Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers

Compared to recruiting staff, a smaller proportion of organisations had difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers, with 29% (n=48) of respondents indicating that they were having difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers sufficiently.

When asked if the position had changed in the previous 12 months, 46% (n=76) indicated that it had, with 38% (n=29) indicating that it had improved and 62% (n=47) indicating it had gotten worse.

The main barriers to recruitment and retention of volunteers identified by respondent organisations were time commitment (51%, n=84); insufficient resources to recruit (15%, n=25); and lack of awareness (10%, n=17).

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

4.3 Trustees / Board Members

Charities are run by boards of unpaid (volunteer) trustees, who provide organisations with vital leadership and governance. These trustees have a responsibility to support and oversee the management, staff, and volunteers involved in the charity. They also must ensure that the organisation meets its legal obligations and that its finances are properly managed. Ultimately, the trustees need to ensure that the charity operates transparently and fairly. Each November, the sector and the Charities Regulator celebrate Trustees' Week, an opportunity to thank the 76,000+ trustees who serve on the boards of Irish charities. In public polling, most of the public is not aware that charity board-members are not paid for their work, with 50% thinking they "probably" or "definitely" are paid and 23% unsure.[25]

According to the Charities Regulator, attracting new trustees is a greater challenge for charities with an income of less than €50k (43%) than for those with an income of more than €500,000 (27%).[26] This is less pronounced in our data, which displays only slightly higher reported levels of difficulty for smaller charities.

4.3.1 Survey Respondents - Trustees

Respondents to The Wheel's survey included charities, community groups, and voluntary organisations. While charities are required to have a board of trustees, this requirement is not mandatory for other types of organisations.[27]

90% (n=217) of respondent organisations indicated that they had a board of trustees. The number of reported trustees ranged from 2 to 27, with both an average and median of 8.

4.3.2 Recruitment and Retention of Trustees

Almost a quarter of organisations (24%, n=52) indicated that they had difficulty recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of trustees.

When asked if the position had changed in the previous 12 months, two in five (43%, n=93) respondents indicated that it had, with 46% (n=43) of those indicating that it had improved, and 54% (n=50) indicating that it had gotten worse. This reflects the finding of a recent survey conducted by the Charities' Regulator,[28] where 2 in 5 charities cited recruitment of trustees as an issue.

As with other volunteers, the main perceived barriers to recruitment for respondents to our own survey are time commitment (43%, n=92) and perceptions of what the role involves (31%, n=65).

25 Research conducted by nfpResearch for the We Act campaign, 2023.
26 https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4710/charity-survey-report.pdf
27 A governance structure should be introduced by all organisations/groups as a matter of best practice.
28 https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/4710/charity-survey-report.pdf

5: Regulation And Compliance

Good governance is vital to the successful running of our sector, and welcome improvements have been made to the regulatory landscape since the establishment of the Charities Regulator in 2014.

In 2018, the Charities Regulator launched the Charities Governance Code. This mandatory Code sets out the governance standard that Irish charities need to adhere to. Charities are now required to report on their compliance with the Code as part of their annual reporting to the Charities Regulator. At the time of surveying, the Charities (Amendment) Bill 2023 was also making its way through the legislative process. The Bill makes amendments to the Charities Act 2009 in respect of accounting, audit and reporting requirements, responsibilities of trustees, and the operation of the Register of Charities.

Challenges may arise for charities, however, in meeting their regulatory obligations within current resourcing. With increased regulation and compliance comes an increased workload, and many funding streams, particularly project- or service-specific funding, prohibit the use of funds for this purpose. In addition, expansion and duplication of reporting information across state bodies and agencies further exacerbates an already difficult situation. Our advocacy work has, for many years, emphasised the need to streamline compliance requirements, introduce proportionate regulation, and provide dedicated funding for compliance costs.

5.1. Regulation and Compliance

Members are required to comply with a range of governance codes and reporting requirements. The survey provided a non-exhaustive list of requirements with which respondents must comply. It is unsurprising, given the high proportion of charities in the overall respondent cohort, that a large proportion are subject to both the Charities' Regulator register updates and annual returns and the Charities Governance Code (81.4%, n=193 for both). Most organisations are also registered with the Companies Registration Office and are required to comply with register updates and annual reports (74%, n=176). Compliance requirements can vary, depending on the nature of the organisation and its funding requirements, as set out in Table 15.

	No.	%
Charities Regulator register updates and annual returns	**193**	**81%**
Charities Governance Code	**193**	**81%**
Companies office register updates and annual reports	**176**	**74%**
Charities Regulator Fundraising Principles	**102**	**43%**
Lobbying register returns	**81**	**34%**
Health Services Executive (HSE) funding reports	**72**	**30%**
HSE Governance Code	**48**	**20%**
Community Services Programme/Community Employment Scheme requirements	**34**	**14%**
Community Employment Scheme funding reports	**33**	**14%**
Education and Training Board (ETB) funding reports	**32**	**14%**
Tusla funding reports	**30**	**13%**
Community Services Programme (CSP) funding reports	**27**	**11%**
European funding programme related reports (eg Interreg, Peace IV, Horizon, Erasmus etc.)	**23**	**10%**
LEADER funding reports	**16**	**7%**
Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) requirements	**13**	**5%**
None of the above	**11**	**5%**
Housing Agency Governance Code	**10**	**4%**
Housing agency funding reports	**8**	**3%**
Dublin Region Homeless Executive standards	**3**	**1%**
Other (please specify)	**43**	**18%**

Table 15: Compliance Requirements (N=237). Note: Respondents Could Select More Than One Option.

Almost half of respondents (46%, n=110) integrate compliance activity into existing roles, while 28% (n=66) have a dedicated full-time member of staff for this purpose. 17% (n=40) assign this activity to a volunteer, and 5% (n=12) have a dedicated part-time staff member responsible for this (Table 16).

	N	%
Dedicated full-time member of staff	**66**	**28%**
Dedicated part-time member of staff	**12**	**5%**
Incorporated into existing roles of one person or multiple people	**110**	**46%**
A volunteer	**40**	**17%**
Other (please specify)	**9**	**4%**

Table 16: Responsibility For Compliance Activity (N=237)

Three in 5 (61%, n=145) respondent organisations indicated that they were required to report the same information to multiple sources, while 39% (n=92) indicated that they were not. Of those who indicated that they were, almost all (97%, n=139) indicated that this requirement related to financial information. 86% (n=124) cited details of trustees, 75% (n=108) cited activity reports, and 74% (n=107) cited proof of compliance with standards.

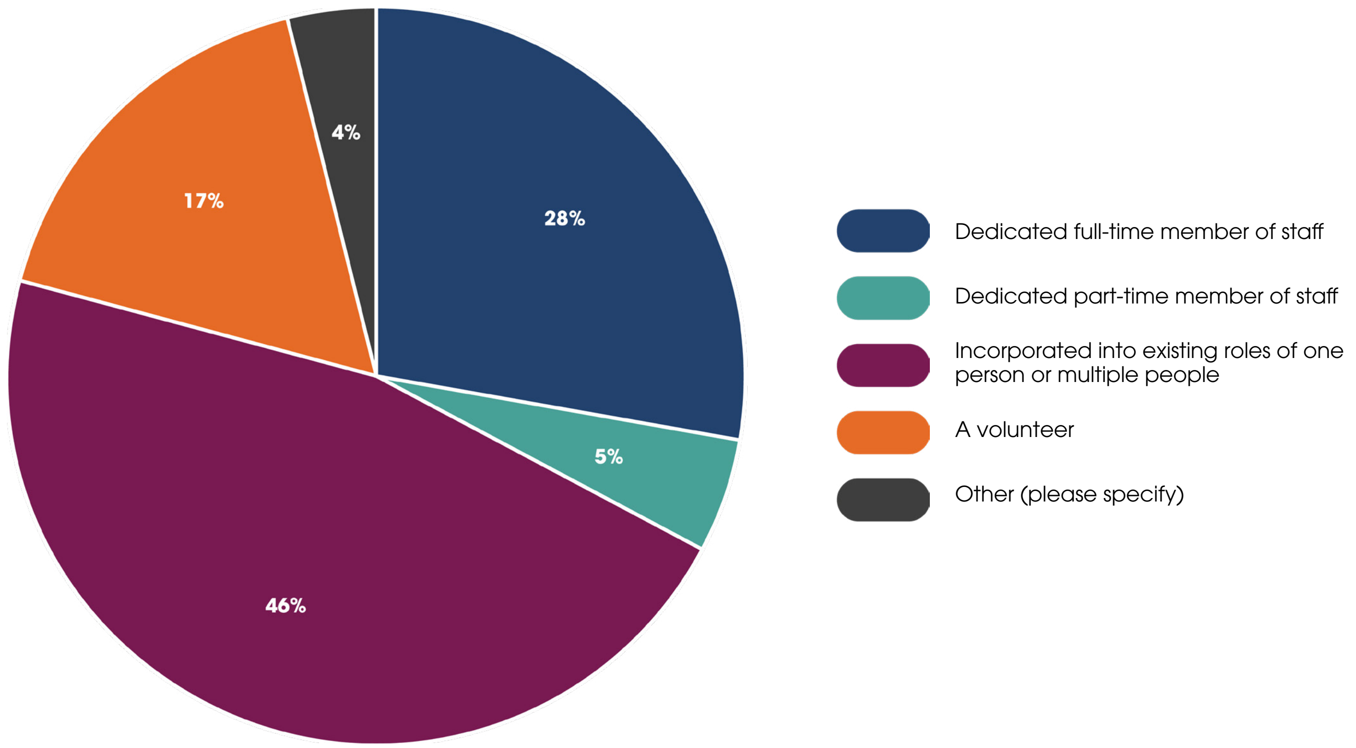

Fig 5: Responsibility For Compliance Activity

6: Policy Priorities

6.1 Policy priorities for members of The Wheel

To guide our work in 2024 and beyond, we asked for members' input on several policy areas.

6.1.1 Sector priorities

Respondents were asked to rank several of The Wheel's ongoing policy areas in priority order. The main priorities identified were mainstreaming multi-annual funding (64%, n=139), funding to address recruitment and retention issues (33%, n=71), increased funding for section 39/56/10 organisations (32%, n=69), and funding for compliance and regulation (29%, n=62).

	N	% Ranked as 1 or 2
Advocating for mainstream multi-annual funding and adequate funding levels for services generally	**139**	**64%**
Advocating for secure funding to address the recruitment and retention crisis and the pay parity issue for statutory-funded organisations	**71**	**33%**
Seeking an increase in funding for HSE-funded (Section 39 Health Act), Tusla-Funded Section 56), Housing Act (Section 10) homeless services and other statutory-funded services	**69**	**32%**
Advocating for funding to provide for the cost of compliance and the streamlining of regulatory and funding-related compliance requirements	**62**	**29%**
Advocating for an investment in a dedicated Workforce Skills and Training Framework for the Community and Voluntary Sector	**49**	**23%**
Dedicating resources to deliver the three strategies for the community and voluntary sector, social enterprise, and volunteering	**47**	**22%**
Seeking continued government action on insurance costs	**45**	**21%**
Addressing the impact of the Ukraine war and other global conflicts	**13**	**6%**

Table 17: Policy Priorities (N=215). Note: Respondents Could Select More Than One Response.

Asked to indicate what issues may have an impact on their ability to provide services in 2024, almost three quarters (72%, n=155) cited inflation as an issue, more than half (57%, n=123) cited increased energy costs, almost 2 in 5 (38%, n=81) felt pay parity issues would impact their services, and 3 in 10 (n=64) cited increased service demand due to increased migration to Ireland (Table 18).

Impact on Ability to Provide Services	N	%
Inflation	**155**	**72%**
Increased energy costs	**123**	**57%**
Pay parity issues	**81**	**38%**
Increased service demand due to increased migration to Ireland	**64**	**30%**
None of the above	**30**	**14%**
Other (please specify)	**5**	**6.3%**

Table 18: Impacts On Supports And Services (N=215). Note: Respondents Could Select More Than One Response.

More than two-thirds (69%, n=148) indicated that demand for services will be impacted by greater awareness of services, almost half (46%, n=99) cited cost of living, 44% (n=94) cited increased service provision, and 12% (n=26) cited international protection.

Impact on Demand	N	%
Greater awareness of services	**148**	**69%**
Cost of living	**99**	**46%**
Increased service provision	**94**	**44%**
International protection	**26**	**12%**
Other	**26**	**12%**
None of the above	**11**	**5%**

Table 19: Impact On Demand For Services (N=215). Note: Respondents Could Select More Than One Response.

Conclusion

The responses to our Members' Policy Survey demonstrate the breadth of areas in which our members engage, and the policy barriers experienced in providing their invaluable supports and services.

Many responses made reference to compliance and regulation, along with insurance costs, and the challenges that these issues pose for under-resourced organsiations. Multiannual funding, which we know is a huge concern among members, is also an area in which The Wheel continues to have a role as a major advocate. Similarly, pay and conditions for staff in the sector, including those working in Section 39/56/10 organisations, was a frequent topic.

Members are also interested in increasing their own capacity for campaigning and advocacy. They would like to see more training on the subject, along with opportunities to meet and engage with political figures at local, national, and EU levels. They see space for fostering alliances between organisations with shared goals. They see an opportunity, too, for The Wheel to produce robust and reliable data as an evidence base for their work.

Here, we see a broad range of social justice issues that members would like to see support in at an umbrella level. This once again reminds us of the interconnectedness of our members' work - although small arts groups may not see an obvious through-line from their work to that of a large health provider, they are all part of building a just, fair, and fulfilling society for everyone.

Areas of work raised by members include disability supports, end-of-life care, youth work, housing, mental health, animal welfare, the need for community spaces, supports for older people, rural communities, services for the Deaf community, addiction supports, health equity, biodiversity and climate change, refugee supports, human rights, rare diseases, and the arts. While we may not be the leading authority in these specific spaces, we welcome the opportunity to support and amplify those who are - as one respondent said: "it's all about people power!!!"

To close, we would like to extend our thanks once again to all who completed the survey and allowed us to get such comprehensive insight into our community's priorities. We are honoured to keep on working on your behalf.

The Wheel is Ireland’s national association of charities, community groups, and social enterprises.

As a representative voice, we provide leadership to the sector and advocate on behalf of our growing community of members.

As a supportive resource, we offer advice, training, and other opportunities to people working or volunteering in the sector.

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