



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

VOLUNTEER

SPORT IRELAND POLICY ON
**VOLUNTEERING
IN SPORT**



Version Control

SIPOL06 Sport Ireland Policy on Volunteering in Sport

VERSION NO.	DATE	STATUS
V1.0	May 2023	Approved by the Board of Sport Ireland.







Sport Ireland is the statutory authority tasked with leading, advocating, and providing directed investment for the development of sport in Ireland. Sport Ireland's vision is for an active Ireland where everyone can enjoy the lifelong benefits of sport and physical activity.

Sport Ireland aims to continue to lead the sector with vision and integrity; further developing, improving, and refining its own and Ireland's sports development processes, systems, and structures. This will mean that diversity and inclusion in sport is paramount. All people irrespective of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, or social circumstance will have a visible, affordable, and easily adopted opportunity to start to take part in sport – and will do so – thus meeting the Government's National Sport Policy targets.

With the National Sports Policy participation targets in mind; the number of people actively involved in sport will have risen. The range of opportunities available to people to take part in sport, the number taking up sport, and the ease of access that all people have to sport will be improved. Once engaged in sport, participants will have every incentive to stay involved whether as players or in one or more of the many highly valued voluntary support roles such as management, leadership, coaching and officiating that are available, invested in, and appreciated.

INTRODUCTION

Sport Ireland has developed this Policy on Volunteering in Sport to be a coherent and compelling narrative for volunteering in sport in Ireland and to identify initiatives and policies to empower the sport sector to tackle the challenges faced through clear, evidence-based and data-driven solutions. This policy will champion a culture of celebration, recognising the important and significant contribution volunteers make to sport as well as integrating volunteering as a habitual part of everyday life in Ireland.

Sport Ireland aims to continue to lead the sector with vision and integrity; further developing, improving, and refining its own and Ireland's sports development processes, systems, and structures.

It is vital that Sport Ireland works collectively to support development of the sustainability and effectiveness of NGBs, LSPs and other partner bodies so that the wider sport system continues to grow. Volunteering plays a significant role in a strong and thriving sport sector.

This Policy on Volunteering in Sport will be underpinned by Sport Ireland's strong ethos of inclusion and diversity, and will

ensure that everyone in society feels that they have something to contribute as a volunteer in sport and that they will be welcomed and facilitated in making that contribution. According to the 2022 Irish Sports Monitor (ISM), 370,000 regular volunteers help to keep the 12,000 sports clubs around the country functioning and their 1.26 million members engaged and active.

In line with the National Volunteering Strategy¹, and through the consultation phase, it was found that volunteering is very personal and if one has a positive experience, it creates an increased sense of well-being. Lifelong volunteering can help to involve and hone the skillsets of the ageing population, as well as addressing loneliness amongst older people by connecting them to their community.

Volunteering provides an opportunity for young people to develop a skillset that can create a pathway to employment opportunities. Furthermore, volunteering provides an avenue to create and foster a sense of belonging within communities, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, disabilities, age, sexual orientation or race, connecting them to the areas they live.

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/100239/8e18fb45-6e72-47f9-a1fb-7dcd59105c1a.pdf#page=null>



OUR VISION

Sport Ireland's vision is for a sport sector with the best volunteering culture in the world.





OUR MISSION

To create a culture where volunteering is valued, respected, championed, and supported, allowing people from all backgrounds and stages of life to play their part in unlocking the potential for volunteering, leading to a better, more vibrant, inclusive and diverse community.

INTENDED OUTCOME

This policy document will drive and guide the future and ongoing development of volunteering in sport in Ireland and enable people to become involved as volunteers in sport regardless of age, background, ethnicity or disability, contributing their skills and expertise to help others fulfil their potential through sport.





POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In 2021 Sport Ireland began the process to better understand the opportunities and issues facing volunteering in sport in Ireland. In 2022, Sport Ireland engaged with a range of stakeholders and produced a comprehensive report to support the development of this policy.

The policy development process included:

- A broad and systematic policy review, including consideration and analysis of evidence on volunteer characteristics, motivations, activities, benefits, outcomes, challenges and barriers.
- A series of roundtables and workshop discussions with key strategic and delivery partners.

WHO WE SPOKE TO



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



Focus Group Discussion

Conducted in small groups
Moderated discussion with key stakeholders to provide qualitative data

- Current volunteers
- Former volunteers
- Potential volunteers
 - Volunteer leads
- Coaches, athletes and sports administrators



In-depth Interviews

One-to-one
Provides rich, qualitative data

- Active Disability Ireland
- Age & Opportunity
- Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media
- Department of Rural and Community Development
- Federation of Irish Sport
 - Foróige
- Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs)
- National Governing Bodies (NGBs)
 - Sport Ireland
 - Volunteer Ireland



Survey/Questionnaire

Online, phone, face-to-face
Yields invaluable quantitative data

- National Governing Bodies
- Local Sports Partnerships
 - Other funded bodies
- Higher Education Institutions
- Sporting Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION FINDINGS

To gain a complete picture of the volunteering landscape in sport in Ireland, extensive consultation was conducted. This research involved in-depth one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and a survey that received 522 responses from across the sport sector. Those consulted included NGBs, LSPs, leaders in sport, current and past volunteers, athletes, coaches, administrators, Government departments, and national and local agencies involved in volunteering in areas outside of sport.

This consultation process showed that:

- Volunteers and volunteering are often undervalued.
- Barriers to recruitment and retention are complex and varied.
- Volunteering enables people to give back to a sport.
- Clubs rely heavily on a long-serving central cohort of volunteers.
- Volunteering gives people a sense of pride within their club and community.
- A diverse volunteer base is desirable but seen as hard to achieve.

THE VOICES OF VOLUNTEERING

"A diverse club is a sustainable club, but sometimes this is hard to achieve"

"It's easy to thank people - but it has to be meaningful. It's about recognising people."

"It's about finding the right volunteer for the right role and supporting them properly."

"I volunteer so my children can have the opportunities I had."

"The bridge between recruitment and retention is education, training, and support."

"I enjoy giving back to my sport."

"People from some backgrounds or communities don't feel that they have a stake in society and to volunteer, you need to feel you have a stake in society or the community you live in."

"I love volunteering, I feel part of something, and I have made so many connections."

"Volunteering gives me a sense of pride within my club and community."

"Clubs rely too heavily on the long-serving central cohort."

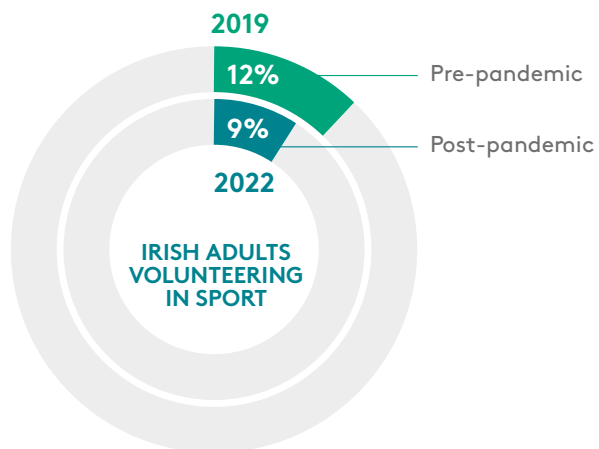
"No one does one thing in a sports club; they do ten things. That's great, but when the time comes to replace them, when they step away, who is going to fill their shoes?"

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

The Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) 2019, 2021, 2022 provided statistics and perspectives into the current status of volunteering levels in sport.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 12% of adults in Ireland volunteered in sport (2019 ISM). This rate dropped to as low as 2% in the first quarter of 2021 when the necessary Covid-19 social restrictions were at their peak.

While those numbers have slowly built back up, volunteering in 2022 remained significantly below pre-pandemic levels, standing at 9% in 2022 (ISM 2022). Effectively 1 in every 4 adults who were volunteering within a club prior to the pandemic may not have returned since.



Covid-19 also shifted the age demographic of those volunteering. Prior to the pandemic, those aged 45-54 were consistently most likely to volunteer (20% based on 2019 ISM). This rate dropped to 11% during the pandemic (2021 ISM). Thankfully the rate of volunteering in this age group has bounced back to 16% in 2022. Volunteering rates in those aged 35-44 also saw a similar drop during the pandemic from 16% in 2019 to 11% in 2021. Unfortunately, this age group have not recovered to the same extent (13% in 2022), and remain some way off reaching their pre-pandemic level of volunteering.

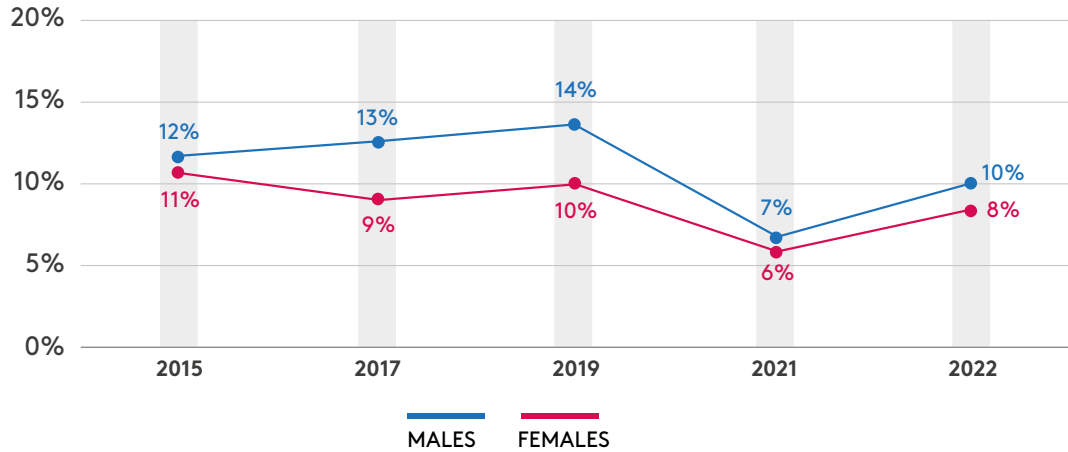
Coaching remains by far the most common role carried out by volunteers with 40% of those volunteering as a coach or manager. Other types of volunteering include providing transport, officiating, acting as a club/NGB official, and organising sporting activities.



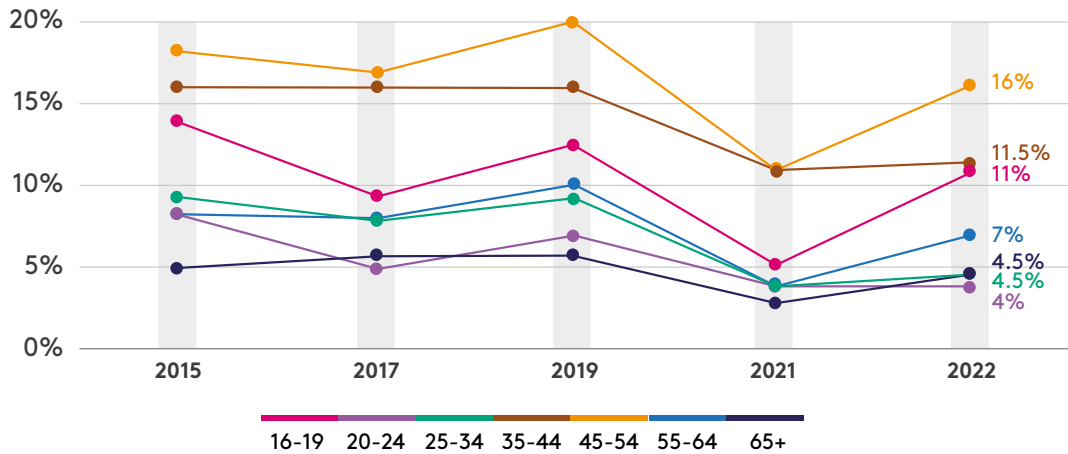
The sport sector in Ireland is run by volunteer boards operating in an ever-more demanding environment; with higher standards of governance required year on year. This must be underpinned through appropriate skill-based supports to enable Boards, management groups and committees to build capacity and fully realise the potential of the sector.

There are challenges in doing this, including the time-poor society and the current lack of diversity in the volunteering base acting as a deterrent to people from diverse and under-represented backgrounds putting themselves forward as volunteers.

VOLUNTEERING BY GENDER



VOLUNTEERING BY AGE



Despite the challenges faced, the opportunities are numerous, with Ireland's 12,000 sport clubs, NGBs and network of LSPs ideally placed to recruit, recognise, and retain volunteers, while increasing the numbers of volunteers from under-represented groups with a particular focus on engaging teenagers and older adults. This has the potential to re-energise the entire volunteering base.

It is important to recognise that, in the vast majority of instances, those engaged in coaching and officiating are doing so on a voluntary basis. As such, it is necessary that support and training programmes are in place to ensure that volunteering is a worthwhile, rewarding and safe activity for everyone.

Many NGBs have been proactive in this space, with codes of conduct in place, along with sanctions for those found to be perpetrating abuse towards players, officials, or referees.

This is important, as the voluntary construct of sport in Ireland needs to be protected. Volunteering represents both a non-financial input to support sport and physical activity and an outcome in terms of the non-market value generated for sports organisations using volunteers.







THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

There are a number of areas that are critical to ensuring that the volunteer experience is positive and worthwhile for the volunteer themselves, the club, and the community.





POLICY OBJECTIVES

Through the stakeholder consultation, recognised national policies, and national research, Sport Ireland identifies four areas that will deliver on the commitments of this policy.

To address each of these target areas, Sport Ireland is focused on achieving the objectives assigned to each area.





MONKSTOWN
Boxing Club
Centra
Garrons - Monkstown

adidas



Recognise & Value Volunteers

OBJECTIVES:

- Increase the visibility, recognition and profile of volunteers.
- Strengthen the volunteering culture in Ireland.

ACTIONS:

- Create an environment where best practice is shared in a volunteer recognition and rewards framework which can then be individualised by each sporting body as appropriate.
- Strengthen the volunteering culture in Ireland by integrating and embedding the importance of volunteering at every life stage in national sport policy.
- Develop and implement a volunteering in sport communications plan with compelling and engaging content.
- Continue to support and promote the annual Volunteers in Sport Awards.
- Establish a Respect Officials' working group.



Retain Volunteers & Encourage Lifelong Volunteering

OBJECTIVES:

- Increase the awareness and understanding of the value and benefits of volunteering in sport.
- Empower the sport sector to utilise innovative practices to reward volunteers for contribution.

ACTIONS:

- Continue to provide training to the sector which further develops competencies with a particular focus on working with volunteers and establishing good club culture.
- Engage with organisations and groups specifically for older adults to raise awareness and encourage volunteer opportunities.
- Promote the positive impacts of volunteering such as a feeling of belonging, giving back and personal reward.
- Create an innovation volunteer working group, where pilot projects can be established to best retain volunteers.



Recruit & Grow the Volunteer Population

OBJECTIVES:

- Through cross sport collaborations, develop and introduce volunteer pathways.
- Increase participation in volunteering in underrepresented groups such as women, teenagers, and older adults.

ACTIONS:

- Evaluate and share best practice models of adaptable and responsive volunteer opportunities, prioritising initiatives regarding volunteer reengagement and flexible roles.
- Support the sector to develop bespoke volunteer recruitment and management strategies with particular focus on engaging women, teenagers and older adults.
- Champion the sport sector to the corporate world as an attractive option to support volunteering in sport among employees through corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- Create a resource on the Get Ireland Active via the Volunteer Ireland iVol platform where NGBs, LSPs, and clubs will be able to advertise volunteer vacancies as well as search for volunteers within their local centres.



Diversify the Volunteer Base

OBJECTIVES:

- Champion the expansion of the volunteer base so that it accurately reflects the diverse society in Ireland.
- Support the sector to understand equality, diversity & inclusion, what it means, and how to be more inclusive.

ACTIONS:

- Promote volunteering opportunities through channels targeted at women, older adults and individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Engage with organisations and key advocacy groups to raise awareness and encourage volunteering.
- Showcase a diverse and inclusive volunteer base as part of the communications plan.
- Provide the sector with equality, diversity and inclusion training and provide appropriate support materials.



OUR ACTIONS

To address the target areas, and to achieve the identified objectives, there are several actions Sport Ireland will take.





1

Investment in NGBs, LSPs and funded bodies to improve the volunteer experience to make it more enjoyable, attractive and meaningful.

2

Resource professional roles across the sport sector that will specialise in supporting the volunteer journey.

3

Establish a Volunteer in Sport Working Group to act as a leadership group overseeing the implementation of the policy. Sport Ireland will be tasked with the policy activation.

4

Create a Volunteer in Sport Digital Resource which will consolidate learning and development opportunities, as well as provide best practice templates that can be tailored by the sector.





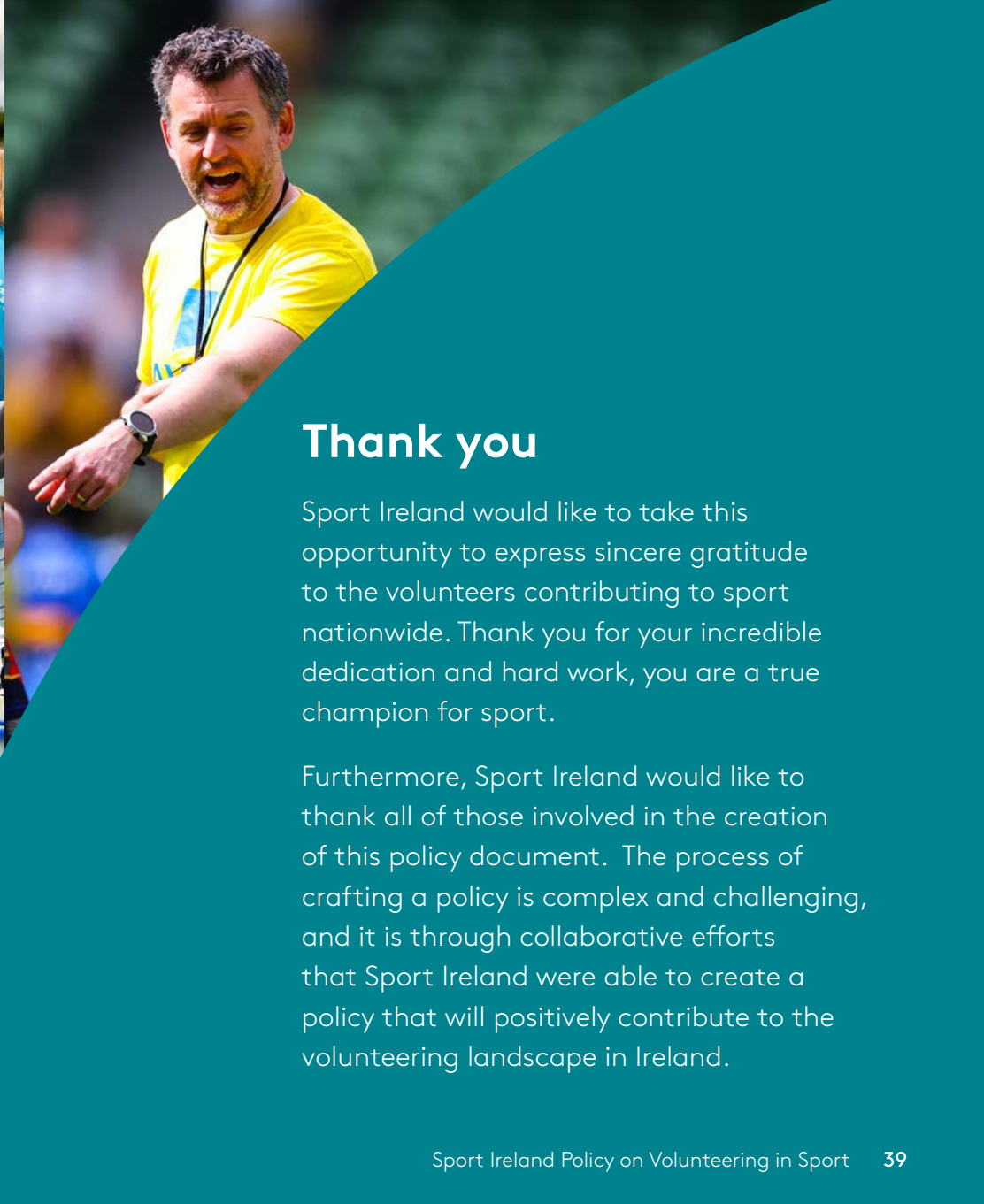












Thank you

Sport Ireland would like to take this opportunity to express sincere gratitude to the volunteers contributing to sport nationwide. Thank you for your incredible dedication and hard work, you are a true champion for sport.

Furthermore, Sport Ireland would like to thank all of those involved in the creation of this policy document. The process of crafting a policy is complex and challenging, and it is through collaborative efforts that Sport Ireland were able to create a policy that will positively contribute to the volunteering landscape in Ireland.



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