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Inclusive Volunteering:

Exploring Migrant Participation in Volunteerism



Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century (ISS21) & School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork.

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UCC
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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

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IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
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CONTENTS

page

2 **SUMMARY**

4 **1. INTRODUCTION**
1.1 Background
1.2 Aims and Objectives
1.3 Research Methodology
1.4 Limitations of the Research
1.5 Report Structure

7 **2: POLICY CONTEXT**
2.1 Volunteering Policy in Ireland
2.2 Definition of Volunteering
2.3 Volunteering Figures
2.4 Volunteering during the COVID-19 Pandemic

9 **3: LITERATURE ON MIGRANT VOLUNTEERING**
3.1 Rates of Migrant Volunteering
3.2 Motivations for Volunteering
3.3 Benefits and Outcomes of Volunteering
3.4 Routes into Volunteering
3.5 Barriers to Volunteering
3.6 Conclusion

12 **4: RESEARCH FINDINGS**
4.1 Profile of Survey Respondents
4.2 Pathways into Volunteering
4.3 Motivations for Volunteering
4.4 Area of Volunteering
4.5 Perceived Benefits of Volunteering
4.6 Challenges Associated with Volunteering & Reasons for Stopping
4.7 Barriers to Volunteering

33 **5: ENHANCING COLLABORATION BETWEEN MIGRANTS, COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS & VOLUNTEER CENTRES**

34 **6: CONCLUSION**

REFERENCES

APPENDIX: PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

SUMMARY

In partnership with Cork Volunteer Centre (CVC), this small-scale study explored migrants' experiences of volunteering in Cork city and county, including their motivations and pathways into volunteering, the benefits and challenges of volunteering, and the factors which facilitate or inhibit volunteering. The findings highlight the contribution which migrants make to local communities and the wide range of skills and experience which they bring to their volunteering roles. In line with international research, the study also indicates that volunteering can be an important aspect of two-way processes of integration.

The research was based on a mixed methods approach, including an online survey with 244 migrants who had registered with CVC and eight semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was designed to include the perspectives of migrants who had volunteered during the previous five years, as well as those who had *not* volunteered during this period. In this way, we hoped to explore migrants' experiences of volunteering, as well as the reasons why some – who had expressed an interest in volunteering by registering with the CVC – had not gone on to volunteer.

The main findings from the research are summarised below.

- **Routes into volunteering**

While participants found out about volunteering opportunities in a number of ways, information was located principally through online searches, social media and the CVC website.

- **Motivations**

Migrants become involved in volunteering principally for altruistic reasons, and to meet people and get involved in the community. Acquiring new skills, learning English and improving their job prospects were other important motivations. Volunteering can also provide opportunities for migrants to get involved in activities that they enjoy, and to use skills and training that might be underutilised in their country of destination.

- **Area of volunteering**

The survey indicates that migrants are involved in a wide range of volunteering activities. Supporting vulnerable groups was the largest single category, followed by volunteering in educational roles, in arts/music/drama, and in youth work. In relation to the type of volunteering, survey respondents were involved principally in working with service-users, fund-raising, organising events, and physical work (for example, gardening). Very few volunteered with school boards, committees, or similar local decision-making bodies.

- **Skills and experience**

The research suggests that migrants bring a range of skills and experiences to their volunteering roles, including administrative and organisational skills, creativity, leadership, communication and listening skills, and IT/computer skills. Furthermore the majority of the migrant volunteers in this study were educated to degree level.

- **Benefits of volunteering**

The findings suggest that participants derived a range of benefits from volunteering including: developing their skills and proficiency in English; increased self-confidence and willingness to get involved; and a sense of satisfaction from having made a difference to others. Volunteering had also facilitated social integration: the majority of volunteers indicated that they had a greater sense of being part of the community (72%); that they had gained a better understanding of Irish society (56%); felt more connected to Ireland (52%) and had widened their circle of friends and contacts (46%).

- **Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering**

This research was conducted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and provides some important insights on migrants' experiences of volunteering during this period. Many respondents described a reduction or cessation of volunteering, following on from the closure of various services and facilities during the pandemic. In some cases activities had moved online, allowing volunteers to continue in their roles.

- **Challenges/barriers to volunteering**

Lack of information on volunteering opportunities and difficulties in finding roles that interested them were two of the principal challenges/barriers to volunteering, identified both by those who had volunteered over the last five years, as well as those who had not. Other challenges/barriers to volunteering included: uncertainty about what they could contribute or whether they would be welcome; concerns in relation to language proficiency; and the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lack of time was the main reason that volunteers left volunteering roles, closely followed by the COVID-19 restrictions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants in the research made the following suggestions on how to promote access to volunteering:

- **Provide more information on volunteering opportunities, including targeted advertising/ promotional activities in English Schools, migration centres, and other spaces or online channels that migrants are likely to access.**
- **Address transport barriers. Suggestions included payment of travel costs or organising transport.**
- **Address language barriers, for example by making more volunteering roles available to people who are not fluent in English.**
- **Reduce bureaucracy and provide more support to those applying for volunteering roles.**
- **Support and welcome volunteers – this is important as some migrants may be concerned about language proficiency and whether they will be welcome.**
- **Offer a variety of roles and greater flexibility in timing. A wider range of volunteering roles should be on offer; roles should be developed that utilise the knowledge and experiences of migrants; and there should be greater flexibility in the timing and time commitment involved in volunteering to accommodate those with work and family commitments.**







1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The integration of migrants has received much attention both in policy and academic circles during the last two decades, particularly following the 'European refugee crisis' from 2015/6 onwards (Sportmann *et al.* 2019). As part of a wider policy response, countries such as Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK have encouraged members of their migrant populations to participate in volunteer activities, particularly in 'mainstream' organisations, as a means of promoting inclusion and integration (Baert and Vujic, 2016). Volunteering is widely seen as a stepping stone for the integration of migrants because it provides opportunities to gain skills, and increase social and human capital (Handy and Greenspan, 2009; Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020).

In Ireland, the *Migrant Integration Strategy* (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017) provides a framework for government action on the integration of migrants and their Irish-born children across ten areas of public policy, including volunteering. The strategy specifies one action point in this area – that volunteering be promoted among 'less well represented groups' – with the Department of Rural and Community Development taking responsibility for its delivery. The issue of diversity is raised again in the *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* which includes a commitment to achieve 'greater diversity in who volunteers' and to ensure that the diversity in Irish society is 'reflected more proportionately within the volunteering community' (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020: 39). This is to be achieved, in part, through the provision of public information and more awareness programmes to enable people from marginalised communities and ethnic minorities to volunteer.

Evidence suggests that Volunteer Centres (VC) have become important entry points into volunteering for migrants in Ireland. In 2013 nearly 50% of volunteers newly registered with Dublin City VC came from migrant backgrounds (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020: 21); while 46% of those registered with Cork VC in 2019 identified themselves as non-nationals. Despite the policy focus on volunteering as a means of integration, and the significant numbers of migrants coming forward to volunteer, little research has been carried out on migrant volunteering in Ireland.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The research set out to explore migrant integration and engagement in civic society through volunteerism. Based on a mixed-methods approach, the research focused on motivations and pathways into volunteering, the benefits and challenges, and the factors which facilitate or inhibit volunteering. This research investigated the strengths and agency migrants bring to Irish society and explored the issue of integration in the context of volunteering. The research also provided an insight into the volunteer experiences of migrants both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.



In particular, the research set out to:

- investigate migrant perspectives on volunteering and understand their motivations for volunteering.
- explore migrants' experience of volunteering, including the perceived benefits and challenges, and the impact which volunteering has had on their lives.
- investigate barriers which may hinder migrants from volunteering.
- understand how to enhance collaboration between migrants, community stakeholders and Volunteer Centres, around a shared understanding of local needs and strengths.
- develop concrete recommendations and guidelines for sustainable action in support of migrant volunteering.

1.3 Research Methodology

This exploratory study was carried out by a research team in University College Cork (UCC) in partnership with Cork Volunteer Centre (CVC) during 2021. CVC is part of a national network of Volunteer Centres that provide a placement service, matching individuals who want to volunteer with non-profit organisations. As noted above, a significant proportion (46%) of registrants with the CVC identified themselves as non-nationals and this presented a unique opportunity to explore migrant participation in volunteerism.

The research was based on quantitative and qualitative fieldwork comprising an online survey of migrants who had registered with CVC and eight semi-structured interviews. The survey was the primary research instrument and was designed to provide a broad overview of migrants' experiences of volunteering, while the qualitative element of the research, although limited, afforded the opportunity for a more in-depth analysis of specific issues, some of which emerged from the survey. Details on each of these stages of the research are outlined below.

Phase 1: Online Questionnaire

The research was based principally on an online questionnaire which examined pathways into volunteering, motivations, benefits, and the factors which promote or constrain volunteering amongst migrant communities. The questionnaire was designed to include the perspectives of those who had volunteered over the previous five years and those who had not volunteered during this period. In this way, we hoped to elicit information on migrants' experiences of volunteering, as well as the reasons why some, who had expressed an interest in volunteering by registering with the CVC, had ultimately not gone on to volunteer. The questionnaire design draws on a number of previous migrant surveys including the Migrant Participation in Sports Volunteering in Ireland Study (Collins, 2019) and Harder *et al.*'s (2018) 'Multidimensional measure of immigrant integration' study.

All questionnaire respondents were required to answer an initial filter question (on whether or not they had volunteered in the last five years), after which each group was directed to separate sets of questions. Some questions were common to both groups, including those relating to demographics, and views on what more could be done to support volunteering amongst migrant communities. The questionnaire included 33 questions that were divided into 5 main sections covering: motivations, experiences of volunteering, barriers to volunteering, supporting and enhancing volunteering, and profile of respondents. The questionnaire consisted mainly of 'closed' questions, though a small number of open-ended questions allowed respondents to express their views on volunteering in more detail. Details on the project and instructions on how to complete the questionnaire, including a definition of what constitutes volunteering, were provided on the first page. After reading this information, participants were required to provide their informed consent to participate in the survey (by choosing the 'agree to participate' option) before they could proceed to the main body of the questionnaire. Only those aged 18 or over were invited to complete the survey.

It should be noted that while the definition of volunteering provided at the start of the questionnaire encompassed both formal and informal volunteering, most of the experiences described by survey participants were of formal volunteering, i.e. volunteering undertaken with an organisation or initiative. Given that the survey sample was recruited through a Volunteer Centre – which matches individuals with non-profit organisations - the focus on formal volunteering is to be expected. Nonetheless the interviews yielded several examples of informal volunteering, which are presented in chapter 4.

Prior to launching the online questionnaire, we undertook a pilot testing phase with migrant volunteers to assess the clarity and accessibility of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to comment on: the clarity of the instructions and





questions, the time it took to complete, and the ease of navigating through the online questionnaire. Feedback from the pilot informed the final version of the questionnaire. Plain English guidelines were also followed in the formulation of survey questions.

The questionnaire was administered online (using Google Forms) during June 2021. Cork Volunteer Centre emailed information on the research and the survey web link to 3544 non-nationals who had registered with the centre over the previous five years. All those who register with the centre are asked an optional question on their country of origin, and can select their respective country from a drop-down menu. The initial email was followed by two reminders. 244 completed questionnaires were returned: 143 of respondents had volunteered in the previous five years, while 101 had not. After the survey was closed, the data was downloaded onto SPSS for analysis. Responses to open-ended questions were coded and analysed thematically. While 244 questionnaires were returned, there were slight variations in the number of responses per question, denoted by the N number in tables and figures in the report.

Phase 2: Research Interviews

Phase 2 of the research consisted of semi-structured interviews with migrant volunteers. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given brief details on the planned research interviews and asked if they would like to participate. Purposive sampling was used to identify a short-list of interviewees who reflected different volunteering roles and experiences.

From June-August 2021, interviews were carried out with eight volunteers (six female and two male) from Italy, Albania, Poland, Brazil, India, and Libya. They volunteered in a number of areas and roles, including drama and theatre, youth work, education, special needs and mental health, Tidy Towns, charitable fund-raising and retail, and supporting migrants and advocating on their behalf. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were held online using Microsoft Teams. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically. Pseudonyms are used when referring to interviewees in the report.

Ethical approval for this research was applied for and granted by UCC's Social Research Ethics Committee.

1.4 Limitations of the Research

The current research is a small-scale study based in one Irish county and focused principally on formal volunteering. The research sample is derived from those who registered with the Cork Volunteer Centre, and so represents a particular cohort of the migrant community and of migrant volunteers. Notwithstanding these limitations, our findings are broadly in line with the international research (outlined in chapter 3) and provide initial insights into an area of migrant integration which has to date received little attention in the Irish context.

1.5 Report Structure

After this introductory chapter, the next two chapters will explore the policy context and previous research on migrant volunteering in Ireland and internationally. The research findings are presented in chapter 4, including a profile of the research participants and their routes into volunteering, the types of voluntary activities undertaken, motivations and benefits, and the barriers to volunteering. The two final chapters look at what more can be done to support migrant volunteering in Ireland and summarises the main findings of the research.

2: POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Volunteering Policy in Ireland

Despite Ireland's long tradition of volunteering (Prizeman *et al.* 2010), it is only in the last two decades that policy makers have intervened in a consistent way to promote, document or regulate volunteering (see Table 2.1 for key developments). Ireland's participation in the International Year of Volunteers (2001) was an important turning point, focusing attention on volunteering and on the responsibility of the government to support volunteering. In December 2000 the National Committee on Volunteering (NCV) was established and the publication of its landmark report, *Tipping the Balance* (2002) paved the way for the development of a national volunteering infrastructure. The report made two main recommendations: that a national policy on volunteering should be developed; and that an infrastructure to support and develop volunteering be established, comprising a National Centre for Volunteering and a network of local Volunteer Centres (VCs).

Support for the development of a national volunteering infrastructure received a further boost with the publication of the Joint Oireachtas Committee report on volunteering (2005) and the report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007), both of which endorsed the setting up of VCs throughout the country. While a network of centres was put in place during this period, the development of a nationwide infrastructure faced a significant setback following the financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent introduction of austerity measures. From 2009 the setting up of new centres was put on hold and Volunteer Information Services (VIS) were established as an alternative (albeit limited) service (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020: 11). In 2021 all VIS were given full Volunteer Centre status, every county now has a designated VC.

The primary role of the VCs is to provide a placement service, matching individuals who want to undertake voluntary activity with non-profit organisations that involve volunteers. Volunteering opportunities are advertised through I-VOL, a national database that is owned, managed and administered by Volunteer Ireland (the national volunteering development agency) and the network of VCs.

The long-awaited *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* was published by the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2020. As well as noting the importance of volunteering to Irish society, the strategy acknowledges the challenges and barriers to volunteering. The report highlights the need to improve awareness and take-up of volunteering opportunities, particularly among those sections of society that are currently underrepresented, including younger people and marginalised groups. Looking to the future, the strategy identifies a series of key objectives, including the need to increase participation and diversity in volunteering; to facilitate, develop and support the volunteering environment; and to recognise and communicate the value and impact of volunteering.

2.2 Definition of Volunteering

The *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* defines volunteering as 'any time willingly given, either formally or informally, for the common good and without financial gain'. The strategy further distinguishes between formal and informal volunteering:

> *Formal volunteering takes place in organisational settings, particularly through voluntary organisations, non-profit organisations, or the social economy, but also under the aegis of employers, political and social activism or in conjunction with statutory schemes. Informal volunteering occurs outside of an organisational setting, often by individuals who may not even regard themselves as volunteers.*
>
> (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020: 12)

The strategy report notes that over half (54.7%) of volunteering is carried out directly by individuals and not through an organisation (informal volunteering) while 45.3% of volunteering is carried out through an organisation (formal volunteering) (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020: 12).

2.3 Volunteering Figures

It has been estimated that over 560,000 people formally volunteer their time every year in Ireland's 11,500 community and voluntary organisations, 8,500 of which are registered charities (O'Connor, 2016). In economic terms, the 2013 Quarterly National Household Survey estimated that the value of Irish volunteer work amounted to over €2 billion annually, applying the national minimum wage at that time (CSO, 2015).

2.4 Volunteering during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Voluntary and community organisations have for many years led the way in the provision of a range of socially beneficial activities including youth work, sports, culture and heritage, and informal education. The importance of volunteering has been particularly evident during the COVID 19 pandemic, when volunteers provided vital services and supports for vulnerable people. This included manning COVID-19 contact tracing centres, delivering 'meals on wheels' and providing essential services to people in their community (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020: 25; Volunteer Ireland 2020). Volunteer Centres reported a significant increase in the number of volunteers registering with them in response to COVID 19 (Kerry Volunteer Centre, 2020:1). Internationally, there is evidence that the pandemic unlocked additional volunteer capacity and more people than ever before became 'helpers' (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2021). On the other hand, research also indicates that there was a fall in volunteering activity across a range of sectors as many organisations (such as youth clubs and sporting facilities) were forced to suspend their activities or move them online (VolunteerMatch, 2020; Volunteering Australia, 2021).

Table 2.1 Volunteering in Ireland: Key Events, Publications & Policies (2000–2020)

1997	The United Nations General Assembly designates 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers.
2000	Publication of *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*. Setting up of the National Committee on Volunteering (NCV).
2001	International Year of Volunteers. The NCV organises a range of events to showcase and celebrate volunteering.
2002	*Tipping the Balance: Report of the National Committee on Volunteering* is published. Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is established. For the first time volunteering is named as the responsibility of a government department.
2005	Publication of Joint Oireachtas Committee report, *Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland*.
2006	Setting up of the Task Force on Active Citizenship to review trends in civic engagement in Ireland and start a national conversation on what Active Citizenship means.
2007	Publication of the *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship*.
2009	The establishment of new Volunteer Centres is put on hold due to financial restrictions.
2011	European Year of Volunteering (EYV). Volunteer Ireland appointed as the National Coordinating Body in Ireland. Hundreds of events, exhibitions, demonstrations and activities take place to mark EYV 2011. Volunteer Ireland is formed, following the merger of two earlier organisations (Volunteering in Ireland & Volunteer Centres Ireland).
2013	Volunteer Information Services are set up in counties that do not have a Volunteer Centre. I-VOL is launched as the national volunteering database.
2018	A Call for Input is issued as part of the consultation on the development of a volunteering strategy.
2019	*Working Draft of Volunteering Strategy 2020–2025* goes out for consultation.
2020	Launch of the *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025*.





3: LITERATURE ON MIGRANT VOLUNTEERING

This review outlines some of the major themes from the national and international research on migrant volunteering, including rates of participation and profile of migrant volunteers, motivations and routes into volunteering, benefits and outcomes, and the barriers to volunteering in migrant communities.

3.1 Rates of Migrant Volunteering

Studies in Canada, the UK and several mainland European countries indicate that the rates of volunteering are lower amongst migrants, relative to 'native-born' citizens (Qvist, 2017: 7; Scott *et al*., 2006; Sportmann, 2019: 935). The differences in rates of participation seem to narrow with the length of residency, however they remain significant across the life course (Qvist, 2017: 7). In interpreting variations in the rates of participation in volunteering, it is important to note that the concept of formal volunteering is not common across cultures (Scott *et al*., 2006) and may be viewed with a degree of perplexity, or even suspicion, by different nationalities. A study of migrant volunteering in seven European countries found that 'the highly professionalised and organised Western European notion of volunteering is often at odds with the attitudes that third country nationals have to volunteering' (European Volunteer Centre 2006). According to Khvorostianov and Remennick (2017) migrants from former socialist countries associate volunteering with forced forms of collectivism imposed by the state. These and other studies found that migrants often engage in informal volunteering, which tends to be under-reported in figures on volunteering (European Volunteer Centre 2006: 23; Schwingel *et al*., 2017). Furthermore research suggests that migrants face significant barriers to formal volunteering – an issue we will consider in detail below.

There are also variations in rates of volunteering *within* migrant populations. International studies have consistently shown that migrants are more likely to volunteer if they have lived in the host country for a lengthy period (Handy and Greenspan, 2009; Scott *et al*. 2006); and if they have higher levels of formal education (European Volunteer Centre, 2006; Greenspan *et al*. 2018; Guo, 2014; Handy and Greenspan 2009; Ksienski, 2004; Scott *et al*. 2006). It should be noted that studies of volunteering amongst the *general* population have reported a similar link between education levels and propensity to volunteer (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). In the context of migrant volunteering, concerns have been raised that the social capital benefits of volunteering are likely to accrue to those who already enjoy a stronger position in the host country, because of their education. Hassemer (2020: 51) argues that the linguistic requirements for certain volunteering roles privileges those with access to language education, and may thereby reproduce existing inequalities between migrants from different class backgrounds.

3.2 Motivations for Volunteering

Canadian national surveys suggest that migrants volunteer for much the same reasons as the Canadian-born population, particularly in relation to supporting a cause in which they believe, and utilising their skills and experience (Scott *et al*. 2006). One marked difference in the motivation of migrants and Canadian-born respondents was with regard to religious observation, with a larger proportion of migrants indicating they volunteered 'to fulfil [their] religious obligations'. Motivations can also vary within the migrant population, depending on the length of time in the host country. Recent migrants were more likely to volunteer because they wanted to boost their employment prospects, improve their English or French, or gain a better understanding of Canadian workplaces. This is consistent with findings from another Canadian study (Handy and Greenspan, 2009: 967) which found that recent migrants are significantly more likely to choose employment-related motivations for volunteering, including 'obtaining job training skills and/or other professional reasons'.

International studies also point to the importance of social and community-related motivations for volunteering, such as making social connections within and outside the migrant community (Handy and Greenspan, 2009). Migrants who volunteer with 'ethno-specific' organisations may do so because of a desire to maintain their ethnic identity and connections; and because they experience a greater sense of belonging within these settings (Guo 2014: 61; Khvorostianov and Remennick, 2017; Weng and Lee, 2016). For example, Khvorostianov and Remennick (2017) found that Russian migrants in Israel volunteer with causes targeting fellow migrants in order to build 'a co-ethnic community', and thereby overcome their sense of marginalisation in Israeli society. The authors note that many volunteers were simply looking for new friends among other Russian migrants living in the vicinity. In addition, individuals may volunteer to reciprocate for services they themselves received from migrant organisations and religious congregations, resulting 'in processes whereby recipients of services turn into producers of these services' (Handy and Greenspan, 2009: 969).





Those applying for residency or citizenship may volunteer in the hope that this experience will strengthen their application and increase their chances of success. Hassemer (2020) argues that asylum seekers (and migrants in general) in Austria and other European countries feel pressurised to prove their qualities of 'good citizenship', through different means including volunteering. The assessment of applications for 'humanitarian residence status' in Austria takes into consideration the applicant's 'integration' into the country, and in this context volunteer work may be taken 'as evidence…to prove a sufficient degree of (investment in) "integration"'. Thus, Hassemer (2020: 50) argues, 'volunteer work becomes a liminal site of investment in accessing various degrees of legal and/or moral "citizenship"'.

3.3 Benefits and Outcomes of Volunteering

There is considerable evidence to suggest that volunteering not only benefits organisations and communities, but also the volunteers themselves (Low *et al.* 2007; Powell *et al.* 2018; Prizeman *et al.* 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2010; Wilson *et al.*, 2017; Woods, 2017; Volunteering Australia, 2016). While all those who volunteer are likely to profit from the experience, volunteering may have added significance for migrants (Collins, 2019). Research suggest that migrants derive a range of benefits from volunteering including: developing skills and knowledge; greater understanding of different aspects of life and work in the host country; building a community and sense of belonging; increased self-confidence and empowerment; enhanced employment opportunities; and a sense of satisfaction from helping others (Guo, 2014; Ksienski, 2004; Scott *et al.* 2006). For example, participants in Guo's research with Chinese migrants to Canada reported that volunteering had helped them to increase their knowledge of Canada, acquire new skills, gain Canadian work experience, build a social network, and integrate into Canadian society. Being able to secure a reference through volunteering was seen as especially important for new migrants because, as one participant noted, '"in the beginning no one trusts us"' (Guo, 2014: 64).

Volunteering is widely seen as a stepping stone for the integration of migrants in the host society because it provides opportunities to gain skills, and increase social and human capital (Handy and Greenspan, 2009) as outlined above. In considering the nature and outcomes of migrant volunteering, a distinction is often made between 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital. Drawing on the work of Robert Putnam (2000), Greenspan *et al.* (2018) note that volunteering in ethnically-homogenous or religious organisations produces 'bonding' social capital, whereby social ties develop among members of similar groups. On the other hand, engagement in mainstream organisations where migrants interact with peers from other groups produces 'bridging' social capital. It has been argued that if migrants' participation is solely in organisations of their own ethnic origin (bonding), this will limit the process of integration and potentially lead to further segregation of migrants. According to a report from the European Volunteer Centre (2006: 27 & 40) 'there is a major fear of the development of parallel societies of migrants through their ethnic organisations and networks' and 'immigrant organisations in particular often feel accused of fostering "ghettoisation"'. On the other hand, North American studies found that migrants who volunteered within their own ethnic organisations were simultaneously involved with mainstream organisations, thereby building both bridging and bonding social capital (Greenspan *et al.* 2018: 808). Research with a migrant community organisation ('SUCCESS') in Canada found that migrant volunteers went on to engage with many other outside organisations including community centres, schools, hospitals and social service agencies (Guo, 2014: 66). Furthermore Handy and Greenspan's (2009: 970) research with ethnic congregations found that there are volunteering activities that, alongside their bonding nature,

provided bridging opportunities. They point to multicultural festivals as one example of an activity which requires extensive interactions between migrant volunteers and the wider community, prior to and during the events.

3.4 Routes into Volunteering

Research suggests that being a member of an organisation or group is an important route into volunteering (Collins, 2019; Guo, 2014; Greenspan *et al*. 2018; Handy & Greenspan 2009). Within religious congregations there may even be an expectation that members will volunteer in some capacity, as the services provided by congregations are volunteer-led (Handy and Greenspan, 2009). Migrants also volunteer with organisations that previously provided them with help or support. For example, Guo (2014) found that nearly one fifth of those who volunteered with a migrant service organisation in Vancouver had availed of its services.

3.5 Barriers to Volunteering

Previous studies suggest that some of the main barriers to volunteering are common to both migrants and non-migrants, including lack of time, difficulties in making a regular commitment, lack of information, and the financial costs involved (European Volunteer Centre, 2006: 40; Scott *et al*. 2006: 17). At the same time, migrants are significantly more likely to face certain barriers, particularly in relation to accessing information on volunteering opportunities. One Canadian national survey, for example, found that the percentage of migrants who indicated that they 'did not know how to become involved' was almost twice that for Canadian-born respondents (Scott *et al*. 2006: 17). A substantial proportion (42%) of the migrant group in this study also said that they did not volunteer because they had not been asked to do so. According to Schwingel *et al*. (2017) members of migrant communities that do not have a tradition of formal volunteering may find it particularly difficult to source information and navigate the volunteer system, with the result that lower rates of participation are perpetuated within these communities. Research in Ireland found that the main routes into sports volunteering and the predominant method of recruitment are through sports clubs and organisations (Collins, 2019). However, this poses challenges to the migrant community because if an individual does not have these connections, they are unlikely to hear about opportunities to volunteer or be asked to volunteer.

Other barriers to volunteering identified in the literature include lack of language competencies and restrictions linked to migrants' legal status (European Volunteer Centre, 2006). Recent migrants, in particular, are likely to encounter multiple barriers, such as the pressures of finding work and housing, lack of familiarity with the host country language and lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities and benefits (European Volunteer Centre, 2006; Scott *et al*. 2006).

Several commentators have highlighted the importance of looking not only at individual barriers (such as language competencies) but also at the wider contextual factors that may deter migrants from volunteering and lead to lower rates of participation (Greenspan *et al*. 2018: 819; Handy and Greenspan 2009: 975; Scott *et al*. 2006: 7). Concerns have been raised that migrants face discriminatory anti-immigrant sentiment from the local community and limited volunteer opportunities in mainstream organisations (Greenspan *et al*. 2018: 806). Research carried out in England, as part of a wider European project (INVOLVE), found that new migrants often live in deprived communities, where their arrival can fuel animosity among existing residents (European Volunteer Centre, 2006). In these circumstances, people may fear taking an active role as community volunteers. Discrimination against migrants – within society and at the organisational level – was identified as a potential barrier to volunteering in several European countries (European Volunteer Centre, 2006). Migrants who do volunteer may also face challenges, such as a lack of intercultural openness and uncertainty about being welcome (Collins 2019: 18).

3.6 Conclusion

Previous studies have highlighted the contribution of volunteers from migrant backgrounds to the voluntary and community sector. Migrants also derive important benefits from volunteering - including meeting people, learning about the local community, developing language skills – all of which facilitate inclusion and integration. At the same time migrants continue to face barriers to volunteering, particularly in relation to accessing information on volunteering opportunities and concerns about language proficiency. As we shall see in the following chapter, many of the issues raised in the literature review resonate with the findings of the current study.

4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings from the survey and interviews. The main focus is on the experiences of those who had volunteered in the last 5 years, including their pathways into volunteering, motivations and types of volunteering undertaken, and the benefits and challenges associated with volunteering (sections 4.2 – 4.6). The final section (4.7) of this chapter reports on the barriers to volunteering, as identified by survey participants who had not volunteered in the previous 5 years. The chapter begins with a profile of all survey respondents.

4.1 Profile of Survey Respondents

A brief profile of the 244 survey respondents is set out in Table 4.1 below, while further details are provided in the appendix.

As noted above, survey respondents were divided into two groups: those who had volunteered in the last five years (n=143) and those who had not (n=101). There were relatively small differences in the demographic profile of these two groups. Consequently the profile of those who volunteered is almost identical to that of the overall sample, set out in Table 4.1, i.e. the majority of those who volunteered in the last five years were female (69%), educated to degree level (81%), aged between 25-44 (78.5%), resident in Ireland between 1-6 years (62%) and employed on a full or part-time basis (67%). In terms of ethnicity most volunteers were White (58%), with a significant minority of Black and Asian (25%) participants.

The high rate of third level educational attainment among the sample of migrants in this research reflects the high levels of educational attainment among migrants more generally in Ireland. For example, the recent *Monitoring Report on Integration for Ireland* found that 60% of non-Irish residents in Ireland aged 20-24 years had a third-level education compared to 53% of the Irish population in the same age cohort (McGinnity *et al.* 2020). The employment rate of respondents in this study was slightly lower (66%) to that of non-Irish residents more generally in Ireland (73%) (McGinnity *et al.* 2020). This may reflect changes to employment status due to COVID-19 or that there was a higher proportion of students responding to the survey than to other migrant research studies in Ireland.

As well as demographic information, survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of connectedness to Ireland. As Table 4.2 opposite shows, the majority (66%) felt an extremely close or very close connection, while a further 21% felt a moderately close connection. Again there were relatively small differences between the two cohorts involved in the survey: 67% of those who had volunteered over the last 5 years felt extremely/very close to Ireland compared with 66% of those who had not (although the proportion of those who felt *extremely* close was higher for those who volunteered).

Table 4.1: Summary of Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	66% of respondents were female, 33% were male and a further 1% selected 'non-binary' or other.
Residence	84% of respondents are currently living in Ireland. The majority of these live in Cork city (74%), followed by Cork County (23%), with a further 3% divided between counties Kerry, Waterford and Dublin.
Country of Origin	Migrants from 58 countries were represented in the survey (see Appendix Tables 1 & 2). The highest proportion of respondents were from Europe (43%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (21%), Asia (13%), Sub-Saharan Africa (12%), Northern America (5%), and North Africa (4%).
Ethnicity	The majority of respondents (58%) indicated that they were White, while 15% were Black and 12% were Asian (see Appendix Table 3 for further details on ethnicity).
Education	Most survey respondents (80%) had been educated to degree level (see Appendix Table 4).
Age	Over three quarters of respondents (79%) were aged between 25-44. Only 5% were aged 55+, while at the other end of the spectrum only 5% were aged 24 or under (see Appendix Table 5).
Employment Status	Two thirds of respondents were employed on a full- or part-time basis, 12% were unemployed. Students represented 10% of participants (see Appendix Table 6).
Period resident in Ireland	Most respondents (65%) had lived in Ireland for between 1-6 years. 14% were relative new-comers, having arrived in the last year, while a further 14% had lived in Ireland for over 10 years (See Appendix Table 7).

Table 4.2: Connectedness to Ireland

	N	%
extremely close connection	69	29
very close connection	89	37
moderately close connection	51	21
weak connection	18	8
no connection	11	5
Total	238	100



4.2 Pathways into Volunteering

4.2.1 Previous Volunteering Experience

Nearly three quarter (73%) of those who volunteered in Ireland over the last 5 years had volunteered *before* coming to Ireland. It was clear from their comments that some saw volunteering as a life-long commitment, and that their involvement in volunteering in Ireland was a continuation rather than a new departure, for example:

In Mexico, I used to be part of volunteering for years, so I wanted to keep doing the same activities in Ireland. Volunteering is part of me.

All my life in Croatia and Italy I was involved in volunteering and my life purpose is to help others. I wanted to continue to do the same here because I know that every little thing matters.

Data from an open-ended survey question suggest that before coming to Ireland migrants were principally involved in supporting and raising funds for vulnerable groups. A significant proportion also volunteered in an educational capacity, where the beneficiaries were often children from poorer backgrounds or ethnic minorities. The other areas in which migrants volunteered are listed in Table 4.3 below.

Only a small number of the research participants appeared to have been involved in advocacy and activism. One participant volunteered with Amnesty International in the Czech Republic, while another volunteered as a community leader and youth activist supporting women and young people in Libya – she went on to become an activist in Ireland and her story is explored in a later case study (section 4.4).

Table 4.3: Previous Experience of Volunteering

Area of volunteering	Sample Activities
Supporting vulnerable groups	Working with children and adults with disabilities or special needs, homeless people, older people, and victims of abuse; fund-raising for charitable organisations.
Education	Afterschool homework clubs, teaching IT, running literacy classes for adults, teaching English and other languages.
Sports	Coaching football, rugby and other sports.
Health and well-being	First aid, hospital visiting, fund-raising for hospitals and organisations. Counselling.
Arts, culture & music	Stewarding music festivals, organising museum visits, volunteering as a guide at heritage sites.
Animal welfare	Volunteering at animal shelters, rescuing street animals.
Cleaning/maintaining outdoor areas	Gardening, planting trees, local area & beach clean-ups.
Youth work	Scouting, summer camps.
Supporting migrants	Volunteering in refugee centres.





Below are examples of formal and informal volunteering undertaken by migrants before coming to Ireland.

It was a summer camp for children…We would do activities with them every week talking about our culture but also different cultures. The whole project was Summer Around the World so each week we had a continent we would pick and we would do countries within that continent and teach the kids about it … - the place, the food, things children like to do there, books of the different countries. It was really interesting.

I was involved in animal rescue. I was doing this by myself. I was not part of any group or anything, though I did join forces with other people [sometimes]. I was just doing it because I wanted to. It was for a couple of years and I kind of rescued them [cats and dogs], kept them in my house with me, took care of them and then found other places for them to go to – sometimes I kept them myself. We have a lot of stray animals and that is a social problem. I don't really know when it started. All I know is when I realised, I decided to do something.

So a group of friends had a project and we used to go to the suburbs, to the favelas – to the poor parts of our city back in Brazil - to talk to these communities and to help them to enter the [labour] market, to write their CVs and to check what were their skills back then that would actually help them find a job.

I was giving less privileged children grade one to five after school lessons as they could not afford private tutors. I did this because I know how it felt to be deprived from getting a good education … I was cut off school when I was doing my form 3 in Zimbabwe.

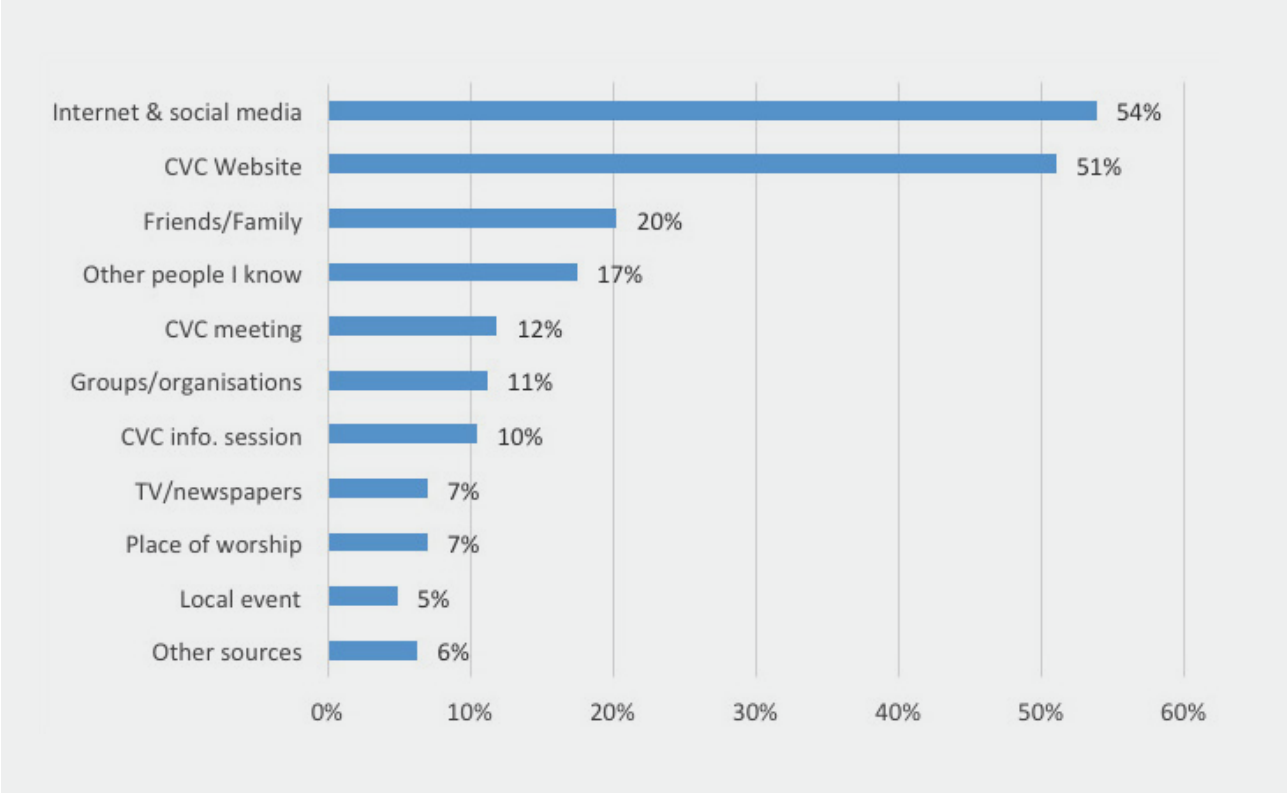
Just over a quarter of respondents indicated that they had volunteered for the first time when they came to Ireland. One interviewee explained that formal volunteering is very limited in her country, so for her becoming a volunteer was a novel experience:

Our country is not well known for voluntary work. It's not the same in my country as in Ireland. The word is not well known. [As a student] when I had to go and clean the garden, tidy everything up, you have to be paid, you know. It's not the same here as in my country.

Because this interviewee was not familiar with the concept of volunteering, she did not initially seek out volunteering opportunities in Ireland and only became involved after she was invited to do so by another volunteer. Her account is consistent with previous research that suggests that formal volunteering is not common across all European countries (European Volunteer Centre 2006; Khvorostianov and Remennick, 2017).

4.2.2 Main Sources of Information on Volunteering in Ireland

Figure 4.1: Finding out about Volunteering Opportunities



N=143

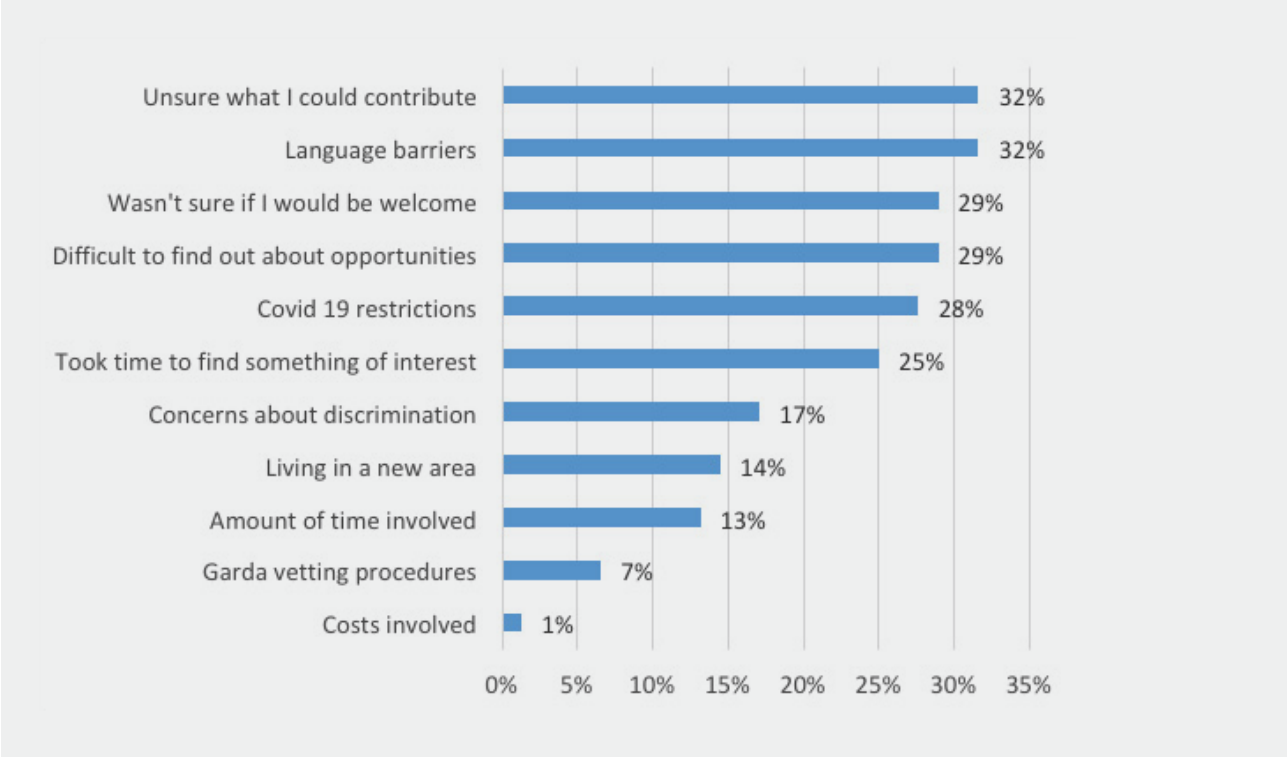
Participants were asked to indicate their main sources of information on volunteering in Ireland. As Figure 4.1 shows, survey participants found out about volunteering opportunities in a variety of ways, but the principal sources of information were the internet and social media (54%) and the Cork Volunteer Centre (CVC) website (51%). The qualitative data suggests that people often begin with a general internet search for volunteering opportunities, and locate the CVC site in the course of their search. A considerably lower proportion of survey respondents identified 'word of mouth' information sources such as family and friends (20%), 'other people I know' (17%) and 'groups/ organisations I'm involved in' (11%). There is a notable contrast with surveys of volunteering amongst the general population where word of mouth is often the main source of information and pathway into volunteering (Davis Smith, 1998; Low *et al.* 2007; Powell *et al.* 2018; NYCI, 2011; Volunteering Australia, 2016). Further analysis suggests that those who have lived in Ireland for 3 years or less are particularly reliant on the internet and social media: 63% of this group found out about vacancies in this way, compared with 49% of those who have lived here for four years or more.





4.2.3 Challenges to Getting Involved in Volunteering

Figure 4.2: Challenges to Getting Involved



N=76

Of the respondents who volunteered in the last five years, just over half (53%) indicated that they had experienced challenges or difficulties in getting involved. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, two of the main challenges were uncertainty about what they could contribute and whether they would be welcome – an issue also highlighted in an earlier study on sports volunteering in Ireland (Collins, 2019). Further analysis revealed significant variations by gender: women were more likely to feel unsure about the contribution which they could make (38% compared with 15% of men) and to feel that they might not be welcome (32% compared with 20%).

English as a second language featured prominently in the list of challenges, identified by nearly one third of respondents. In an open-ended question, survey participants elaborated on the anxieties associated with language, pointing out for example that: 'It can be intimidating to do something when you don't feel confident speaking the language', and 'this can be scary because you are not comfortable enough, you are not sure if you know the English enough'. Furthermore the qualitative data (from both the survey and interviews) suggests that concerns about not feeling welcome are often linked to host language proficiency rather than to concerns about discrimination.

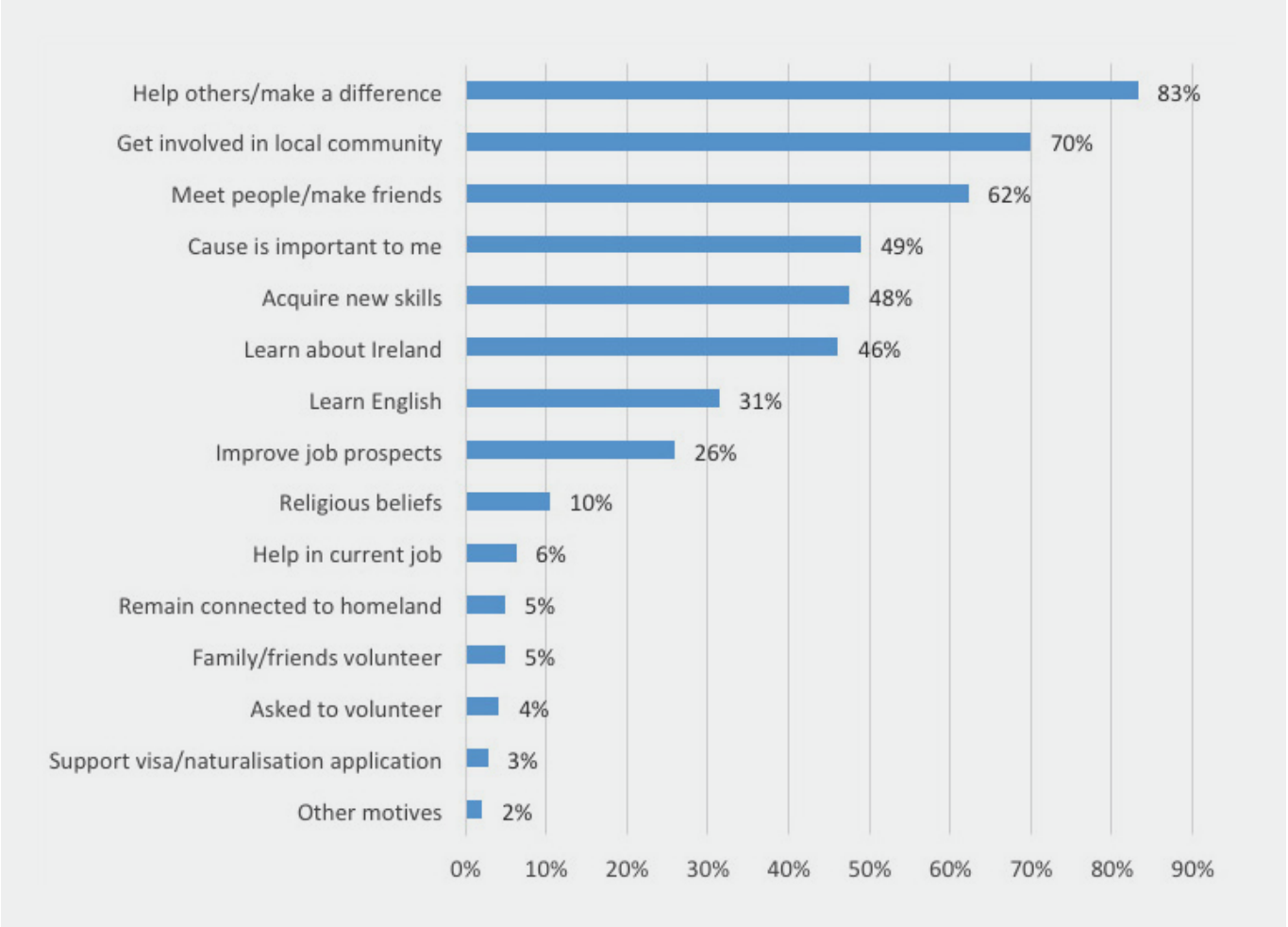
As might be expected, a higher proportion of those who had lived in Ireland for under four years regarded language as a challenge (38%), compared with those in residence for four years or more (28%). Furthermore, the proportion of those who viewed language as a barrier was higher amongst migrants who had been educated to school/ technical college level (46%), compared with those with a university degree (30%).

The survey also indicates that there are challenges to accessing information on volunteering: 29% of respondents said it was difficult to find out about opportunities, while a quarter said it took time to find a role in which they were interested. According to one respondent: 'Sometimes we do want to [volunteer], we do have the time, we do have the will power, but we don't know where to start'. Again there were variations by gender: the percentage of women who had difficulty finding a position that interested them was nearly twice that for men (29% compared with 15%).

Predictably, COVID-19 restrictions were another important challenge to getting involved, particularly for those who had moved to Ireland within the last year. As we shall see in section 4.6, the restrictions not only acted as a barrier to new recruits, but put on hold many existing volunteering roles.

4.3 Motivations for Volunteering

Figure 4.3: Motivations for Volunteering



N=142

As Figure 4.3 illustrates, migrants become involved in volunteering principally for altruistic reasons, and to meet people and get involved in the community. Acquiring new skills, learning English and improving their job prospects were also important motivations. In line with previous research, there were differences linked to the amount of time respondents have lived in the host country. A higher percentage of those in residence for *under* 4 years were motivated by a desire to learn English (43%), compared with those who had lived here for 4 years or more (19%). Similarly a higher proportion of more recent migrants wanted to learn about Ireland (57% compared with 34% of the 4-year+ group), and to meet people (67% compared with 59%).

There were also variations in relation to gender with a higher proportion of males than females indicating that they volunteered to acquire skills and to learn about Ireland. However with regards to the most popular reason for volunteering – to help others and make a difference – the percentages were identical.

As Table 4.3 shows, comparatively few respondents (4%) said that they were 'asked to volunteer' – by contrast studies of volunteering amongst the *general* population suggest that being asked can be one of the main reasons people become involved (NYCI, 2011). This may indicate that the participants in our research do not have a local network of contacts or links with voluntary and community organisations. Significantly one of the main recommendations on how to support migrant volunteering (made by participants) is that there be greater outreach from the community and voluntary sector to migrants who wish to volunteer (see chapter 5).

As noted in chapter 3, migrants sometimes volunteer with 'ethno-specific' organisations in order to maintain their ethnic identity and connections; and because they experience a greater sense of belonging within these settings (Guo 2014: 61; Khvorostianov and Remennick, 2017; Weng and Lee, 2016). There was little evidence of this in our data on motivations for volunteering: for example, only 5% of respondents cited a desire to

stay connected to their home country (Figure 4.3). Volunteering appeared to be a way of integrating into Irish society, rather than making connections with a specific ethnic community. However, this should be understood in the context of the research sample. Arguably, migrants who want to connect with those from their own ethnic background are unlikely to seek volunteering opportunities through Volunteer Centres, such as the CVC, which generally cater for opportunities in mainstream volunteer involving organisations.

Motivations were considered in more detail through the interviews, the main findings from which are outlined below.

- **Altruistic motivations**

Interview participants explained that they were motivated by a desire to help others, contribute to their local community or support a particular cause. For example, Paulo, who had moved to Ireland from Italy, said that his concerns about the environment and sustainability motived him to volunteer with Tidy Towns and other community projects. His comments below encapsulate the notion of 'thinking globally and acting locally':

Many people here – especially when they are young – they want to change the world but let's start with the small things because the small things do make a difference … helping with Tidy Towns and so on. I do think that sustainability is the main issue. Each of us has to do his own part and if we can do our small part that is already a huge difference. We need to start at some point … at the end of the day [if] we don't do anything, it is over. But if we do something, we have already made the difference.

Others were motivated by a desire to help vulnerable groups, particularly homeless people living in Cork city. In the following extract Maria, a migrant from Eastern Europe, explains how volunteering with the homeless and other disadvantaged groups is rooted in her own experiences and up-bringing:

I do have that need to help others and I guess it also comes from the way I was brought up by my mum. We didn't have it easy in life but thanks to that we are more sensitive to other people and we recognise that not everybody has … equal chances in life. [Because of] this I am drawn to people who are disadvantaged - who are less privileged because I am fully aware that even though I didn't have it easy, I am very privileged still. There will always be people better off but there are so many that are not.

In some instances, respondents reported that they wanted to 'give something back' to the community because they had been made welcome when they moved to Ireland.

- **To remain active while looking for work**

The qualitative data suggests that migrants (including refugees and asylum seekers living in Direct Provision) become involved in volunteering as a means of remaining active while they are either waiting to find work, or waiting for their work visa/residency applications to be processed. One interviewee explained how difficult it was for her to be without work, and how this motivated her to volunteer:

In my country, since I finished my degree and started working, this is the first time that [I haven't worked]. I can't stay without doing something. It's so hard for me. I've been working [for] 20 years, so I have to find something to do before I find another job. Because we have to get permission to go into work. During this time, until we get the permission to work, we needed to do something.

Another interviewee began volunteering in 2021, when she lost her job as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. Up until that point she did not have time due a busy working life. However Carla was exceptional – in most cases people had to either reduce or end their volunteering commitments during the pandemic, an issue we will return to in section 4.6.

- **Personal Interest in the area**

For some, volunteering is an opportunity to be involved in an activity that they enjoy, including sports, outdoor activities, culture and the arts, and so on. One interviewee, for example, explained that he became involved in youth theatre 'because I truly feel connected with the world of the arts … so theatre was important [to me] from an artistic point of view'.

- **Professional interest**

Volunteering can also be a means of utilising specialist skills or reconnecting with a professional area in which migrants no longer work. For example, Josephine decided to volunteer with an environmental group as she held a qualification in this field:

It was an opportunity for me because … it has been a while since I am working as a biologist; so that is why volunteering in Cork Nature Network has a special meaning for me because I could combine the two things [I wanted to do] which are: speaking in English and getting back to what I used to do and doing this in a relaxed – in a different – atmosphere – a new challenge.

An issue that was raised in both the questionnaire and the interviews is that some migrants are not permitted to work in the areas in which they trained because their qualifications are not recognised in Ireland. For these professionals, volunteering can be a means of using their skills. Maria, a drama teacher from Brazil, explained that she decided to volunteer (teaching drama) in order to keep in touch with the performing arts:

I think volunteering is a good way to find opportunities in your area – in your professional area – because if you are migrating from your country to Ireland some of your qualifications will not be accepted and you might not find a job in your area. I graduated in theatre – I am a theatre teacher in Brazil – but I can't teach theatre here in Ireland because you need another qualification, another test … So [volunteering] is the way that I found to stay in touch with theatre, that will get me some new experiences because I can't really teach theatre in a school … It is a way of connecting because I do know what to do, I do have the qualification but it doesn't fulfil Ireland's requirements.

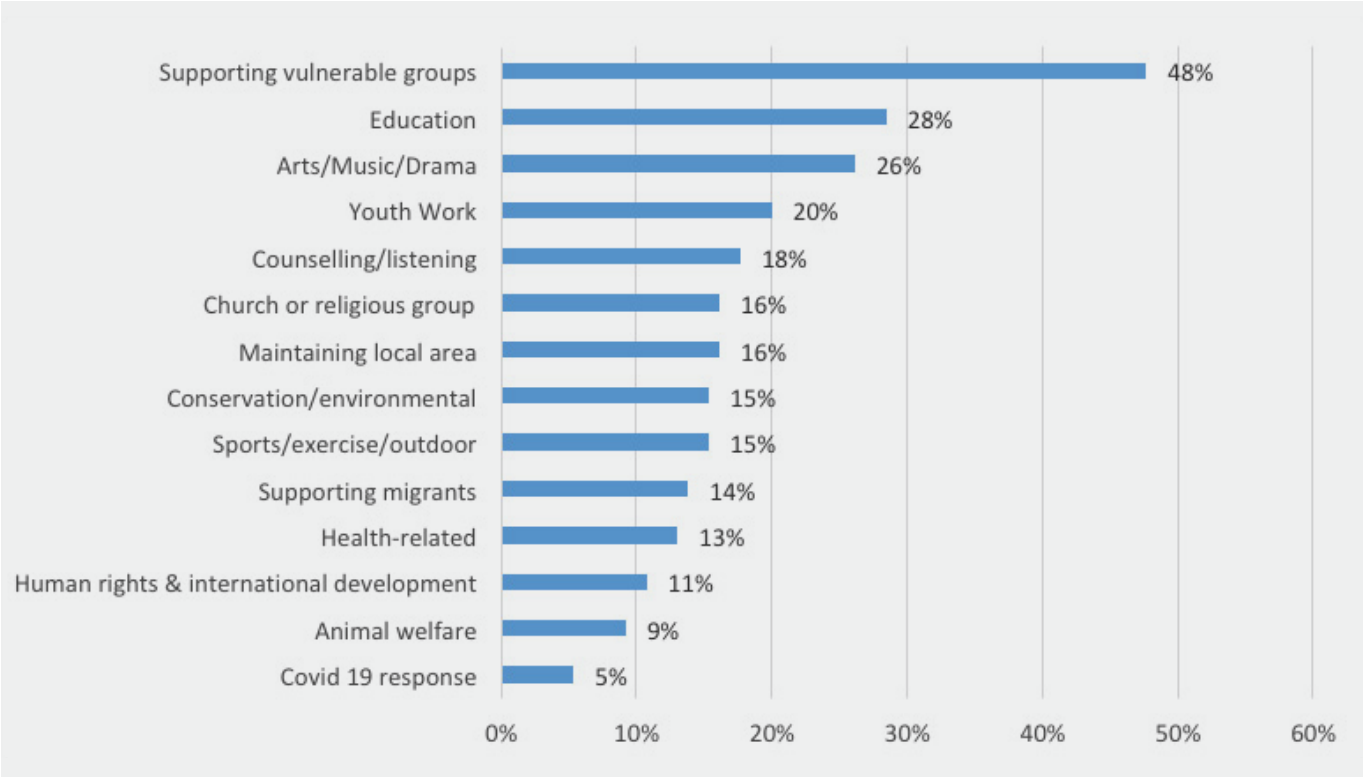
She located her own motivation for volunteering in the wider context of a lack of recognition of non-Irish qualifications:

I think most people that come to Ireland – we can't really work 100% in our area; so people come here and they start working as waitresses, waiters. They start working as cleaners. I know loads of Brazilians here that are cleaners and they have full Bachelor's Degrees – sometimes Masters and everything – but because of the requirements – the qualifications and everything – they can't get work in their area.

While it is possible to apply to have qualifications recognised, it was felt that the process was lengthy and overly bureaucratic. Other respondents said that they volunteered in their area of expertise while waiting for their qualifications to be ratified. As these examples illustrate, migrants often bring a wealth of expertise to the voluntary and community sector.

4.4. Area of Volunteering

Figure 4.4: Area of Volunteering



N=130

The survey indicates that migrants are involved in a wide range of volunteering activities (see Figure 4.4 above). Supporting vulnerable groups was the largest single category with nearly half of respondents volunteering in this area. In response to an open-ended question further details were provided on their activities, which included: preparing/distributing food to homeless people and others 'in need'; visiting and providing practical assistance to older people; and supporting people with disabilities (for example with transport). It was clear from the data that members of the migrant community also play an important role in fund-raising for charities that work with vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, for example by volunteering in charity shops, and helping organise collections and other fund-raising events. Engagement in these types of activities is also reflective of the altruistic nature of their volunteering engagement which many of the participants identified as their primary motivation for volunteering.

As Figure 4.4 shows, over a quarter of respondents volunteered in educational roles, including teaching and supporting learning through homework clubs, school completion programmes and (in one case) the Junior Achievements Award programme, an initiative in which volunteers from the community deliver content which is complementary to the formal curriculum. Some volunteered for specific events, for example judging a debating competition, making a presentation to school students on careers in STEM, and providing support at a college induction day. While children and young people were the main beneficiaries, several participants volunteered to help older people learn computer skills or taught English to migrants – either informally or through a support group. In a few cases, participants provided learning support to people with disabilities, for example through the Field of Dreams initiative which supports adults with Down syndrome across Cork city and county.

Just over a quarter of respondents volunteered in the area of arts/music/drama. Data from the open-ended question suggests that they were principally involved in helping to organise and run festivals and other events, including: Cork Film Festival, Cork Midsummer Festival, Dublin Dance Festival, Midleton Arts Festival, the IndieCork Film Festival and the Cork Dragon Parade. In some cases they also provided a creative input for events and organisations, for example as illustrators, photographers, costume makers and content providers. Finally, a few participants were involved in coordinating or running arts and crafts classes. An overview of the other areas in which migrants volunteer, and the organisations with which they volunteer, is presented in Table 4.4 below.

Nature of Volunteering Roles

The types of volunteering activities undertaken include fund-raising and retail, working directly with people (e.g. young people in youth clubs and sport), organising events, and physical work (for example gardening). Only a few respondents volunteered with school boards, committees, or similar local decision-making bodies. Previous research on parental involvement in education with asylum seeking parents living in Direct Provision has found barriers for these parents to become involved in school boards and parent councils (Martin *et al.* 2016). Take up of these roles is often through invitation or 'word of mouth' and migrant volunteers may not be offered these roles. The administrative element of the role may also deter migrants who, as we have seen, are often concerned about their competency in English. Potential barriers to migrant participation in these types of volunteering opportunities is an area which warrants further research.





Table 4.4: Forms of Volunteering

SECTOR	EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES	ORGANISATIONS/INITIATIVES
Youth Work	Youth leader Mentor with 'Big Brother Big Sister'	Cobh Youth Services YMCA Foroige Youth clubs (not named)
Counselling/ Listening	Listening – both through telephone call-ins and online channels Fund-raising for support groups	Aware, The Samaritans, 50808 CanTalk Pieta House
Churches or Religious Groups	- Organising activities, supporting members in different ways - Volunteering with church youth groups - Cleaning and maintaining buildings - Church collections - Implementing COVID-19 measures e.g. monitoring the numbers attending a service	Churches, mosques and other places of worship
Maintaining Local Area	- Cleaning local area - Gardening, maintaining green spaces - Painting	Tidy Towns Mad About Cork, Reimagine Cork Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Community Garden
Conservation/ Environmental	- Cleaning beaches & other areas - Planting trees - Information/awareness-raising - Research	Rebels Against Waste The Irish Natural Forestry Foundation Cork Nature Network Green Spaces for Health (Cork Healthy Cities) Tree-planting group (unnamed)
Sports	- Coaching - Preparation or cleaning up after events - Pacer in athletics race	Togher Athletics Club, GAA Cork Marathon Sanctuary Runners School/college teams and sport centres
Supporting Migrants	- Advocacy - Teaching English - Interpretation and translation - Support with applications for citizenship/ naturalisation - Running workshops in different areas, including leadership, job hunting, and CV preparation	RefuNet Akina Dada wa Africa (AkiDwA) My Cork Polish Association New Communities Partnership Vision Community Support Services Together-Razem Centre City of Sanctuary Migrant Rights Centre Ireland Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre Citizenship Application Support Service (CASS) Intercultural Language Service Informal volunteering not connected to any group
Health	- First aid/first responders - Fundraising and volunteering in charity shops - Assisting with the coordination of activities in nursing home - Raising awareness of mental health issues and supports, e.g. through school visits - Providing support in workshops for people with mental health problems - Distributing condoms and HIV tests	St John Ambulance, The Red Cross Irish Cancer Society, Crumlin Children's Hospital Farranlea Road Community Nursing Unit Irish Heart Foundation CUMH Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health Sexual Health Centre
Human Rights & International Development	- Volunteering in charity shops - Public relations and media liaison	Self Help Africa, Oxfam, Amnesty International, SERVE in Solidarity Ireland, Bóthar, Comhlámh, Team Hope, Concern
Animal Welfare	- Information/awareness-raising - Caring for animals in shelter - Transport (driving) - Training	Irish Guide Dogs Cork Nature Network Seal Rescue Ireland Birdwatch Ireland Animal shelters
COVID-19 Response	Helping with shopping and other tasks	Organisations not specified

Bridging and Bonding Volunteering
Previous research on migrant volunteering makes a distinction between roles/activities based on 'bonding' (where migrants engage with others from the same background often through migrant or religious organisations); and 'bridging' (where they interact with peers from other groups through mainstream organisations).

As Figure 4.4 shows, providing support to migrants was one of the smaller categories in the current research, with only 14% of participants volunteering in this area. Details provided through an open-ended question indicate that their work with other migrants typically involves teaching English, translation/ interpretation, assistance with visa/naturalisation applications, preparing CVs and job applications, and (in a few cases) advocacy. They volunteer with organisations that support migrants broadly (e.g. Migrant Rights Centre Ireland) or specific national or ethno-cultural groups (e.g. My Cork Polish Association). In addition they volunteer *informally* within their own ethno-cultural communities, for example acting as translators or assisting with the processing of paperwork. Far from 'ghettoising' the migrant community, as is sometimes feared (European Volunteer Centre, 2006), the data suggests that migrants who volunteered within their own ethno-cultural communities were often engaged in activities that promote integration, for example by helping fellow migrants learn English and find employment. Furthermore most of those who volunteered with migrant support groups (listed in Table 4.4) also volunteered with 'mainstream' organisations, including Tidy Towns, Penny Dinners, St Vincent de Paul, the Irish Cancer Society, Age Action and others.

Examples of the types of volunteering undertaken by migrants are set out in two case studies below.







Case Study 1

Mira came to Ireland from Libya as a student, but following deteriorating conditions in her native country she applied for and was granted asylum. During her first year in Ireland she became involved in volunteering in order to develop her English skills. Through the Cork Volunteer Centre she started fund-raising for the Irish Cancer Society and helped organise events, including the Cork Colour Festival. Mira eventually moved to Dublin for work purposes, where she was keen to find new volunteering opportunities 'to give back to society and expand my network'. She was especially interested in volunteering with initiatives that support and empower vulnerable migrant communities, and advocate for the rights of asylum seekers, including their right to work. Mira's interests in this area were partly due to her previous involvement in advocacy and activism in Libya (where she had worked to engage young people in politics and decision-making); and to her own first-hand experience of being an asylum seeker in Ireland. She recalled:

I was very lucky. I got my status within maybe eight months so for those eight months I was not allowed to work…It was really hard to make money and I had to work under the table – cash in hand – and that gave me a difficult life and I was exposed to some dangerous and some bad people abusing me. When I was on my feet, I decided to help others not to go through the same experience that I had by raising awareness of how dangerous it is to prevent asylum workers from working and having their work permit.

However, while it had been relatively easy to find volunteering opportunities in fund-raising and events organisation, the route into advocacy/activism proved to be more difficult. She eventually began to develop a network of contacts with advocacy groups, after her experiences as a migrant featured in a newspaper article on 'newcomers' to Ireland. Mira subsequently became involved in initiatives that support, empower and advocate on behalf of migrants in Ireland, including the City of Sanctuary's campaign to grant asylum seekers the right to work. She went on to become a board member of AkiDwA, an organisation that supports and promotes the rights of migrant women living in Ireland. In addition, she was involved in an initiative to build capacity amongst migrant women from the Sudanese community and promote their participation in local communities. Some of the women with whom she worked had not learned English or been able to integrate into Irish society, leading to social isolation and exclusion from the workforce:

I started to give some workshops to migrant women about leadership, communication skills, presentation skills – to help them to develop their communication skills and interview skills to enter the workforce. As a migrant woman, my role is to empower others. Some people – they have been living here in Ireland for 10 or 15 years and they are still staying at home. They didn't learn the language and that is affecting them really badly psychologically …because they feel isolated. They are not well integrated into Irish society - they don't work; so this is affecting them. So I decided to help out these women to empower them, to give them the tools to enter the workforce and for them to support their family and to support themselves.

Mira's own experience as a migrant woman was seen to be particularly important in reaching out to women from the Sudanese community:

Some of the organisations – they find it better for me to be the one who gives those workshops because the idea was that [I am] one of them – as a migrant woman, same culture – and I made it into the workforce. I am working; so they wanted me as a motivation to them. If I could do it, they could.

As noted above, one of the concerns expressed in the literature is that volunteering within the same ethno-cultural community may contribute to the ghettosiation of migrant groups. However as Mira's experience illustrates, her identity as a migrant woman from the same ethno-cultural background was seen as important in reaching out to this cohort, with the ultimate objective of helping them integrate into Irish society, as Mira herself had done.

Case Study 2
Adrianna came to Ireland from Poland in 2006. Because of her status as an EU citizen, her fluency in English, and the presence of a substantial Polish diaspora, Adrianna's initial experience of life in Ireland was very different to that of Mira's. She recalls that 'when I arrived, there was half of my home town in Cork'. She moved into a shared house with other Polish migrants and soon started to volunteer both formally and informally within the Polish community.

One of Adrianna's first roles was as a translator for the 'My Cork Polish Association', an online forum which provides migrants with information on life in Ireland, supports the integration of the Polish community in Cork, and promotes Polish culture and traditions. The organisation was at that point building the English version of the website and her role was to translate information from Polish to English and from English to Polish. Like many of the other participants in our research, Adrianna was well-qualified for her volunteering role, having graduated with a degree in English Philology. She also used her translation skills informally to help Polish migrants prepare CVs and job applications, and negotiate different types of bureaucracy and 'paperwork', for example in relation to renting a house.

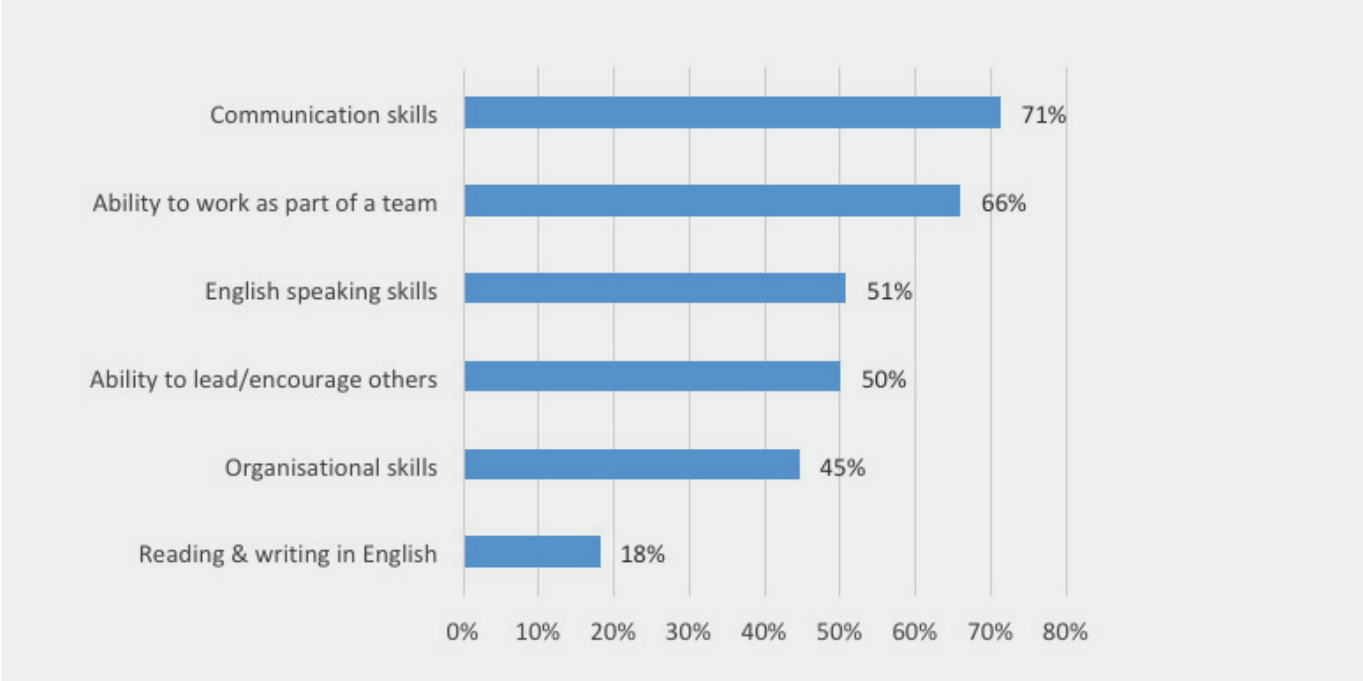
The volunteering roles which Adrianna initially took on within the Polish community are typical examples of 'bonding' volunteering. She later became involved with a number of mainstream charities and initiatives, including volunteering with Foroige's Big Brother/Big Sister programme; organising collections for homeless charities; and coaching people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through the 'Coaching through COVID' initiative. She has also been involved in a range of ad hoc and informal activities, for example organising a delivery of flowers to women living in a local shelter on International Women's Day. Her motivations for volunteering, particularly with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, were rooted in her own family background and values.

Skills and experiences volunteers bring to their roles
As we have seen, migrants volunteer in a wide range of areas. When asked an open-ended question on what skills and experience they brought to their volunteering roles, most participants identified administrative and organisational skills (39%), creativity (37%), leadership (20%), communication and listening skills (16%), and IT/computer skills (7%). Other skills and experiences included: team work, motivation, problem-solving, business/financial acumen, teaching, and multilingualism (each mentioned by between 1-5% of respondents). Practical skills (such as cooking and knitting) and experience of manual work were also identified. In addition several participants referred to important personal attributes such as patience, positivity, openness, and the ability to understand and empathise with others. One respondent also said that as 'the only foreign person' she brought 'diversity' to the organisation where she volunteered.

As noted earlier (section 4.3), some migrants volunteer because of professional interest in the area. For these professionals, volunteering may be a means of using their qualifications, which in turn brings valuable skills and experience into the voluntary and community sector. Moreover the vast majority (81%) of migrant volunteers in our research were educated to degree level.

4.5. Perceived Benefits of Volunteering

Figure 4.5: Benefits of Volunteering: Skills and Abilities



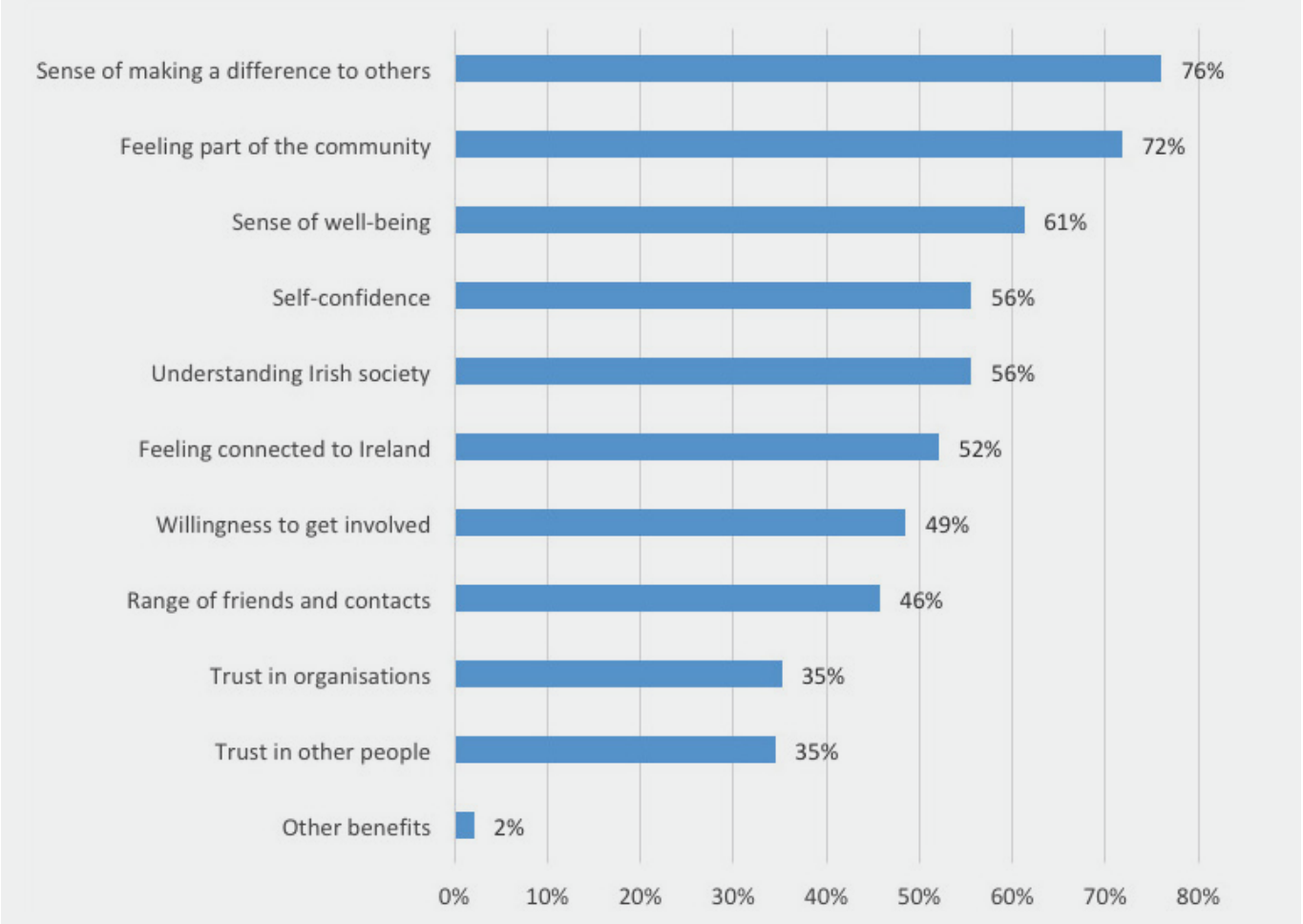
N=132

Volunteering is considered to be a highly reciprocal relationship (Volunteering Australia, 2016). In addition to the benefits to the community, volunteers themselves gain from the experience in a number of ways (Collins, 2019; Powell *et al.* 2018; Wilson *et al.* 2017; Woods, 2017). In the current study, the majority of survey participants indicated that volunteering had helped them to develop their communication skills (71%) and their ability to work as part of a team (66%) (Figure 4.5). Just over a half reported that their English-speaking skills had improved although, as might be expected, there were considerable variations based on length of residency: 62% of those who had lived in Ireland for under 4 years said that their English-speaking skills had improved due to volunteering, compared with 36% of those who had lived here for four years or more. As Figure 4.5 shows, a significant proportion of respondents also reported increased organisational skills (45%) and a greater ability to lead/encourage others (50%). On the other hand, less than one fifth of respondents said that volunteering had helped with reading and writing in English – this may reflect the nature of the roles in which they volunteer, which are often 'hands-on' (e.g. interacting with people, working in charity shops or physical/manual activities) rather than administrative.





Figure 4.6: Benefits of Volunteering: Social and Personal



N=142

A second survey question explored a wider range of benefits, particularly in relation to inclusion, connectedness to the community and feelings of personal well-being and confidence (Figure 4.6). Consistent with motivations for volunteering, the most frequently mentioned benefit was the sense of having made a difference to others, identified by over three-quarters of participants.

Migrant volunteering is often seen as a pathway to greater integration (as outlined in chapter 3). The findings from the current study appear to support this view: the majority of volunteers indicated that they had a greater sense of being part of the community (72%); that they had gained a better understanding of Irish society (56%) and felt more connected to Ireland (52%). For 46% of participants, volunteering had increased their range of friends and contacts. In addition, volunteering had a number of affective benefits, including a boost to self-confidence and sense of wellbeing, and a greater willingness to get involved.

The perceived benefits of volunteering are explored further below, using qualitative data from the open-ended survey questions and interviews.

- **Professional and career benefits**

The benefits identified in the qualitative data often related to work, education and career development. Survey respondents reported that volunteering had helped them in their search for employment: it was a useful addition to curriculum vitaes, voluntary organisations provided references, and volunteers were able to develop their employability skills (e.g. communication, team work) through volunteering. In some instances volunteering had motivated people to go on to further education ('it gave me encouragement to start two great courses in my field of study') or provided them with the experience they needed to get a place in university ('my volunteering experience helped me apply to college', 'reinforced my CV that resulted in my being accepted for a PhD programme'). One interviewee (who is currently an undergraduate psychology student) described how the experience of volunteering helped with her career choice:

All of the volunteering I have done kind of relates to psychology; for me it was really important to have some experience in that area. I was very interested in studying it but I wasn't 100% sure that was the thing to do. And working with more vulnerable individuals and people in Next Step [helped me decide]. I also

worked with a psychologist for example when I went to Italy. I was working close to psychologists; so that was really beneficial for me to be able to say: 'Yeah I definitely want to continue with this career. I can see the practical side of it as well as the academic side of it, that I was a bit more familiar with'.

Several respondents noted that volunteering had helped them to develop professional networks and to become more familiar with different sectors and initiatives, which in turn could be useful for their future career, as the following examples illustrate:

I found a way to access organisations and other bodies who are focused on areas which are my own areas of interest and are my academic background, like the environment, nature, sustainability.

[Volunteering] is about helping … but it is also good in a practical way for you to find a job, by starting networking with people and building relationships, so that is a great benefit.

In addition, some respondents reported that volunteering was relevant to their current employment, providing useful insights and experience.

- **Social and personal benefits**

A sense of satisfaction at being able to 'give something back' and contribute to the well-being of others was identified as another important benefit of volunteering. Survey respondents spoke for example of 'the ability to see that I can make a difference', 'I feel better when I can give something from myself', 'it gives me comfort knowing I helped someone and made their day better'. Similar points were made in the interviews, for example:

So obviously you get a lot out of helping people in general. I think that is a fact. So if you are doing something for other people regardless of what it is, if you are dedicating your time to other people, you are going to benefit in a lot of ways – it is good for you to have a notion of a community, that it is not just about you.

Those who were involved in manual activities (e.g. as part of Tidy Towns) described their sense of achievement from growing plants and trees, developing community gardens, and cleaning and improving their local area (see Case Study 3 on the following page).

As well as a sense of making a difference to others and to the community, interviewees often spoke of how much they enjoyed volunteering and meeting new people. While the social dimensions of voluntary work is important to volunteers generally, this is particularly the case for migrants, many of whom knew few (if any) people when they first arrived. One participant, for example, explained that volunteering had provided a sense of 'connectivity both personally and on behalf of my family', going on to say that 'as a foreigner it is easy to feel isolated'. Other comments suggest that the experience had made volunteers more confident and open to meeting new people. The social and personal benefits of volunteering for those living in Direct Provision was highlighted by one respondent who said that 'It worked as a panacea to distress from the unfriendly living conditions in the Direct Provision system'.

Volunteering can also be a good way of finding out more about the host country, as one interviewee, who had volunteering with a range of initiatives, explained: 'Well doing this volunteering I have learned a lot about the Irish community, the Irish people, the Irish culture… it has been a journey and I like to do it this way'.

The social and personal benefits of volunteering are explored further through a short case study (no.3) of one family's experience below.

- **Recognition and acceptance from the local community**

Some participants felt that one of the benefits of volunteering was that it had made them more accepted and valued within the local community. According to one interviewee, migrants are less likely to be seen as the 'other people' or 'the foreigner' if they contribute to society through volunteering:

Then even being involved has made me recognised from a social point of view because many people, when they ask you where you are from, what do you do here, I have this feeling … that if you tell someone 'I stay here because I work with this or that' they say 'fair enough' but if you say 'I work with this or that and I also help the community' … people look at you in a very different way. So it is not a matter anymore of the other people – the foreigner – who comes here to make a living and so on. No, it is this person who comes here to Ireland, does his job and then helps our community with his contribution to make our place, our country, a better place.

In the following extract, from another interview, there is also a sense of the importance of being *known* as someone who is contributing:

I think people in one way or another know who I am and maybe they appreciate what I am doing here. They know I have come from another country and I am doing something in their country. This is important for me.

Comments such as these raise questions as to whether migrants feel a need to 'prove themselves' in certain ways, including through volunteering, an issue which has been raised in the literature (Hassemer, 2020).

Case Study 3: Volunteering and Integration

Agnesa and her family moved to Ireland in 2019 and were initially housed in an Accommodation Centre (Direct Provision). By 2021 the family appeared to have integrated well into the local community, but Agnesa recalls that in the beginning it was a struggle. As non-EU nationals she and her husband had to apply for permission to remain in the country. The family did not know anyone in Ireland and while Agnesa had studied English in college, her husband and children spoke very little English, putting them at further risk of isolation. Her husband was initially reluctant to even go out because he felt no one would understand him. Looking back on this period she recalls 'It was difficult, there is no word to describe it, it was very difficult'.

Unlike most of the other research participants (who sought out opportunities), Agnesa became involved in volunteering because she was *asked* to do so. She explained that the concept of volunteering is not well known in her country and she was not aware that she could work on a voluntary basis with charities and other organisations. Through visits to the local charity shop she got to know the manager, who asked if she would be interested in volunteering. In accepting this offer she was principally motivated by a desire to meet people, and also to have something to do: 'we needed to be involved in something, we needed to know more people, and for people to know us'. Her husband later began volunteering with Tidy Towns and both continued to volunteer even after they started work.

Volunteering appeared to be an important first step in helping the family integrate into the local community. Through volunteering in a charity shop Agnesa was able to meet people and learn more about the area, which in turn helped her children become involved in local sports:

I have learned about [the town], and places close to the town, and what activities they do here, I have learned so many things. I wanted my children to go and do sports, I didn't know [how to go about it] and when I met people, for example when they were buying something, and they told me you have a basketball club, you have a football club and you can go there and ask and introduce your children. Staying on your own you wouldn't know these things.

For Agnesa, another important benefit of volunteering is that people in the town now know who she is:

I think they know me now, who I am. This is important to me because when someone knows you it's not a little thing, it's a good thing and it's a big thing when people know who you are.

Agnesa's frequent references in the course of the interview to the importance of being *known* possibly arises from her initial feelings of isolation and invisibility when the family first moved to Ireland. She also described the sense of achievement and inclusion that volunteering in Tidy Towns gave her husband. In the following extract there is a notable contrast between his initial reluctance to even leave the house, and his current pride and sense of belonging in the community spaces where he volunteers:

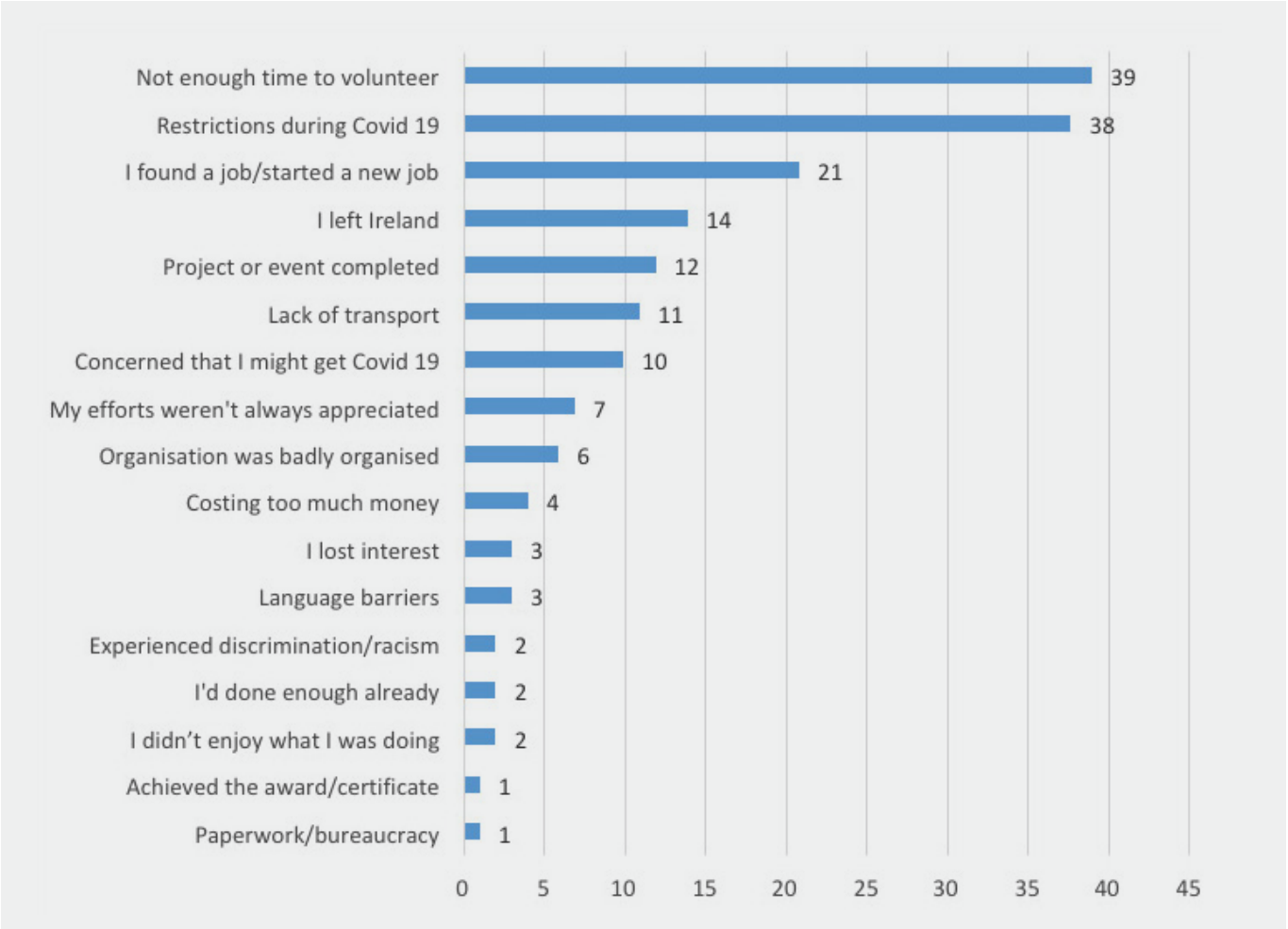
Every time he [her husband] goes there he is very happy. They planted flowers, they planted trees they cleaned the town and stuff like that. They are doing fairy gardens for children and when you enter here it's like a paradise. They have built with their hands, you know, it's beautiful. And when you go and see something you have built with your own hands it's different, it's a good feeling. We often go there with our children, and he can say, look 'these flowers, this tree I have planted with my own hands, be careful don't touch it'. [laughs]

As well as volunteering with mainstream organisations, Agnesa volunteered informally as a translator for several of the families in the accommodation centre where she lived when she first came to Ireland. Two years later, she notes that their English has progressed to a stage where they no longer need her assistance; while her children (who had initially known very little English) are fluent in the language: 'Now I am learning from them, they are more able than me'.

Overall the survey and interview data suggest that there are multiple benefits to volunteering, most of which relate to inclusion and integration including finding work, meeting people, learning about the community and developing host-country language skills. The findings also suggest that the experience of volunteering is important not only for the individual volunteer but for their families as demonstrated by Agnesa's account. Significantly the vast majority of survey participants (96%) said that they would recommend volunteering to others, only 4% indicated that they were 'not sure'. None of the respondents indicated that they would not recommend volunteering.

4.6. Challenges Associated with Volunteering & Reasons for Stopping

Figure 4.7: Reasons for Stopping Volunteering



N=101

The survey explored the reasons why participants who had volunteered in the last five years might have stopped volunteering in some or all of their roles (Figure 4.7). This could include instances where volunteers finished certain roles but took up others – it did not indicate that respondents had given up volunteering altogether. This was an important issue in the context of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, during which many voluntary roles were suspended but others emerged. The data also provided insights into the challenges associated with volunteering more generally, which might lead people to leave certain roles.

The two principal reasons identified in the survey were a lack of time (39%) and the restrictions linked to COVID-19 (38%). Lack of time is a perennial challenge, and is often cited as one of the main reasons why people do not get involved or reduce/end their commitment (Powell *et al.* 2018; Rutherford *et al.* 2019). Just over a fifth of respondents stopped volunteering when they found a job or started a new job, while others cited the completion of the event/project they were working on (12%); lack of transport (11%), or concerns that they might contract COVID-19 (10%). Interestingly, while language barriers were one of the main challenges to *getting involved* in volunteering in Ireland (see Figure 4.2), it was rarely a reason to stop. Furthermore very few respondents had stopped volunteering because they had lost interest or did not enjoy what they were doing. It is also noteworthy that while 17% of people had been concerned that they might experience discrimination (see Figure 4.2), only 2% had left roles because of discrimination. This is, of course, no reason for complacency – people may experience discrimination without leaving their role because of it. One of those who had left due to discrimination, described feeling excluded:

I've been left out of the group. I tried many times to talk to the others, to get to know them, but I would [be] left out every time … Irish people need to be more "human", they'll be polite, but then they'll leave you out of the group, they are not really inclusive, we have to remind them constantly that we are there and it would be nice if they talk to us more.

The need for inclusion and to make people feel welcome was raised again in a later question on what more can be done to promote migrant volunteering (chapter 5).

As Figure 4.7 shows, 7% of survey respondents felt that their volunteering efforts were not always appreciated. Several interviewees also reported that they had received little or no training (other than on Health and Safety or COVID-19 procedures) for their roles, although they did not necessarily see this as a challenge per se, as they were learning 'on-the-job'. Overall the interviewees were very positive about their volunteering experiences: most said they had not faced any challenges, and even those that had felt that they were outweighed by the benefits.

Impact of COVID-19 on Volunteering

International research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on volunteering and on the voluntary and community sector (VolunteerMatch, 2020; Volunteering Australia, 2021). In light of this, survey participants were asked an open-ended question on how the pandemic had affected their experience of volunteering. The majority of responses described a reduction or cessation of volunteering, following on from the closure of charity shops, youth clubs, sports amenities, churches, community facilities, and a range of other volunteer-involving organisations. Opportunities were further restricted with the cancellation of film festivals and cultural events which, as we saw earlier, are an important area of volunteering. In addition, several participants noted that access to hospitals has been severely restricted during the pandemic, ending hospital visits from volunteers.

Travel restrictions and concerns about using public transport – which many migrants rely on – constituted another barrier to volunteering during the lock-down. Migrants living in Direct Provision facilities were at a further disadvantage because they were viewed as 'high risk', as one respondent explained: 'I was viewed as an individual who is at high risk of spreading the virus due to living in confined rooms and more than 100 people living in one place.' The cessation of volunteering opportunities was particularly poignant in this case as the respondent had described volunteering as being a 'panacea to the distress' of living in the Direct Provision system. This example illustrates how some of the most vulnerable in Irish society were the worst affected by the pandemic and subsequent restrictions.

In some cases activities had moved online, providing an important resource to the community during the pandemic, as one survey respondent pointed out:

During the COVID-19, we engaged with most of the young people online with different activities, we call to check up on them as we know, during COVID-19 pandemic is the darkest moments, they were so stressed.

However several respondents, in both the survey and interviews, reported that the move to online volunteering had changed the nature and quality of their interaction with others. One participant said that she missed the 'interactions with people' at the centre where she volunteered. Similarly a marine biologist, who provided online talks to school children on environmental issues, noted that:

It was lovely to do but, no doubt, it would have been much more interesting if I had the chance to see them because I never got to see them at all. I could catch their interaction by the tone of their voice; however, I could never see their faces.

Another interviewee had stopped volunteering altogether as she felt that the service could not be effectively delivered online. Only one interviewee welcomed the move online as it allowed her to volunteer as a drama teacher with an organisation in another part of Co. Cork – something she would otherwise not have considered because of the travel and costs involved. While not ideal, she felt that online volunteering had removed several of the barriers to volunteering and made it possible for more people to get involved. Now that she knows the group, she hopes that she will be able to eventually teach them face-to-face, but doubts whether she would have originally applied for the post had it not been online:

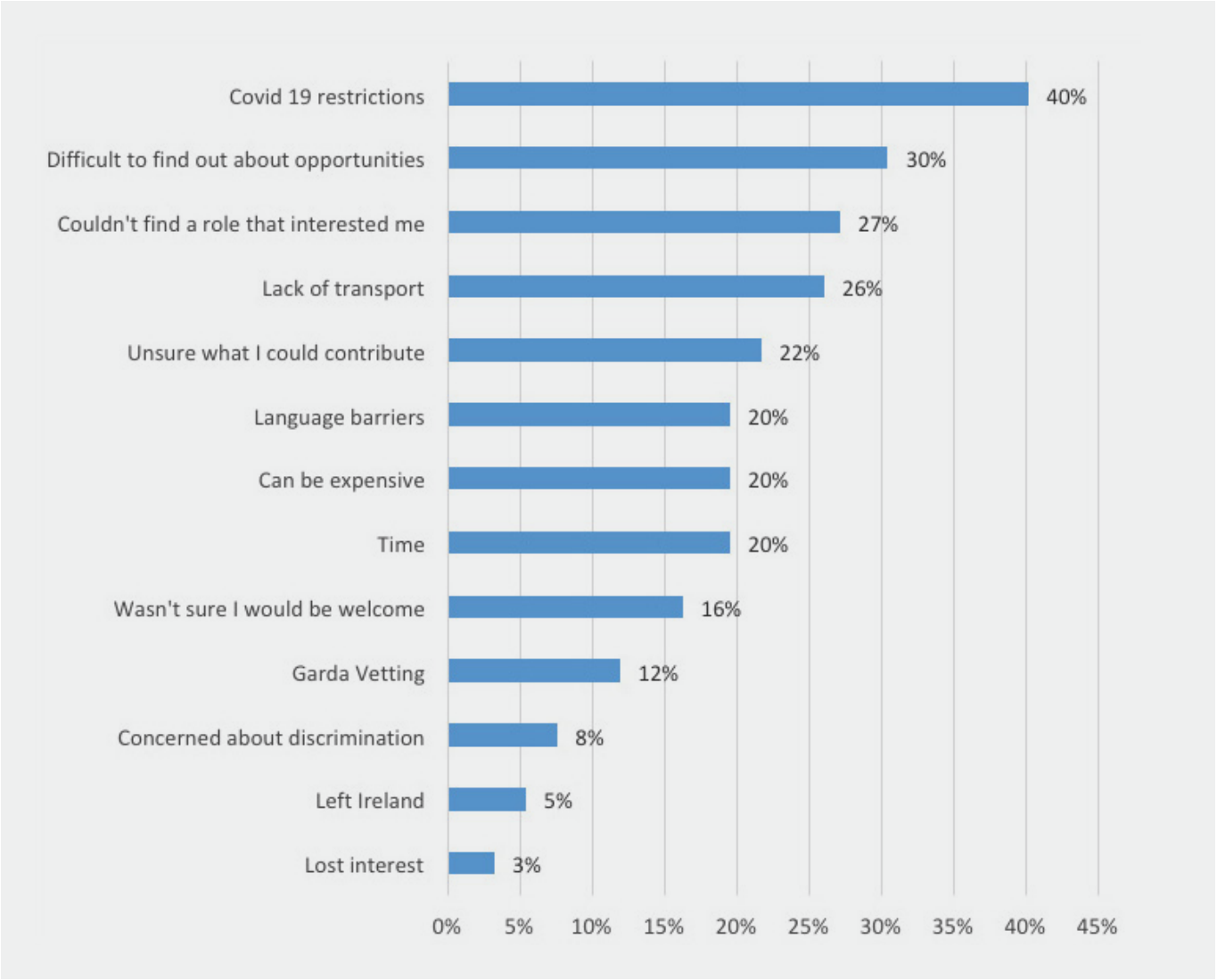
From the day I started, I really loved doing it. I might, I don't know, in the future do face-to-face lessons because I think it would be better for everybody…But in the beginning if that was the position they offered 'oh, can you come to us – one hour by bus', then the money and the time, I don't know if I would have been able to do it.

Some of those who had to stop volunteering altogether because of the pandemic described a sense of loss. For one interviewee, the pandemic had ended a longstanding volunteering role in youth theatre, and also necessitated a move to another part of the country to find work. He was now struggling to find new volunteering opportunities because of the on-going restrictions.

4.7. Barriers to Volunteering

As noted earlier, the survey was designed to include the perspectives of those who had volunteered over the previous five years, as well as those who had not. In this way we hoped to find out more about the potential barriers to volunteering. 101 questionnaires were returned from migrants who had registered with the Cork Volunteer Centre but who, despite their apparent interest, did not go on to volunteer. The data from this cohort is presented in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8: Barriers to Volunteering



N=92

The main barrier to volunteering was the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly amongst those who had moved to Ireland over the previous two years. The other main barriers relate to sourcing volunteering opportunities: 30% of respondents said it was difficult to find out about opportunities, while just over a quarter said it took time to find a position in which they were interested. (A similar percentage of those who *had* volunteered in the last five years said that they had faced difficulties in accessing opportunities – see Figure 4.2). There were variations by location: a higher proportion of those living in small/medium-sized towns in Co. Cork said it was difficult to find opportunities that interested them (40%). In an open-ended question, participants provided further details on these issues. For example, one respondent explained that while she had volunteered in the past, when she moved to Cork she no longer had access to the same networks and channels of information on volunteering opportunities:

I used to be part of some volunteering projects such as helping to create a common garden for the neighbourhood, I also participated in coming up with cultural projects…However, since I moved to Cork city, I stopped being part of any of this type of projects, even though I would still love to, maybe because of a lack of time but also because I wasn't in contact with people participating in or starting these projects anymore, which were the main channel for me to learn about them.

The findings here are consistent with previous research which indicates that accessing information on opportunities is one of the main barriers to volunteering amongst migrants, significantly more so than amongst the general population (Scott *et al.* 2006).

As Figure 4.8 shows, just over a quarter of participants were deterred by a lack of transport. Several participants added that migrants often do not own cars, which may limit their options or prevent them from volunteering altogether. Other barriers identified in the survey included uncertainty about what they could contribute, the potential costs, the time involved, and English language proficiency – each of which was mentioned by approximately one fifth of participants. The qualitative data reiterated the point that there is an anxiety, even a sense of stigma, around not having fluent English, which may deter migrants from applying for volunteering roles. It was noted for example that 'it can be scary for those who don't have English', that people feel 'embarrassed' and are concerned that native speakers 'will look down on them if they are not fluent'. One interviewee (who was a volunteer) spoke of her mother's reluctance to volunteer due to language barriers:

She wants to volunteer with her time but she gets really, really shy about it. She is like 'oh, I would be there to support people but what if they can't understand me' and stuff like that. I have told her that there are different types of volunteering that she can do that don't require her to be talking a lot … I am sure other people are in a similar situation to her where they might be a little bit embarrassed about their broken English.

This example illustrates a point raised in the literature – that those who could benefit the most from volunteering (in terms of developing English skills) are the ones who may feel excluded (Hassemer, 2020: 51). Another issue raised in an open-ended question on barriers is that people have applied for volunteering roles but received no reply from the organisation. This lack of communication was discouraging and deterred further applications. Furthermore, a few respondents had applied for volunteering roles but were not accepted: 'I tried to enter volunteering work but was not selected in the process, unsure of why', 'I tried to offer help but it seemed as if I was not needed'.

It is clear from the data that migrants face a number of barriers to volunteering. In the final chapter we will outline respondents' views on how these barriers might be addressed.





5: ENHANCING COLLABORATION BETWEEN MIGRANTS, COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS & VOLUNTEER CENTRES





An important aspect of this research was to identify what more can be done to support migrant volunteering in Ireland. The following are recommendations, made by interview and survey participants, on how to promote volunteering and enhance collaboration between migrants, community stakeholders and VCs.

- **Provide more information on volunteering opportunities**

One of the main issues raised in the survey was the need for more information on volunteering. It was noted that migrants, as new-comers to Ireland, may not be aware of volunteering opportunities, therefore the voluntary and community sector needs to be more proactive in reaching out to them, for example through targeted advertising/ promotional activities in English Schools, migration centres, and other spaces or online channels that migrants are likely to access. Some sections of the migrant population might be reached through their places of worship, religious festivals and events, and schools. At a more fundamental level, a few respondents noted that some migrants are not familiar with the concept of volunteering, and organisations need to find ways of communicating what it involves.

- **Address transport barriers**

Respondents pointed out that migrants often rely on public transport, which limits their options in terms of volunteering. Travel costs can also be prohibitive. Suggestions on how to address these barriers included payment of travel costs or providing/organising transport.

- **Address language barriers**

In order to address language barriers, participants suggested that more volunteering roles should be made available to people who are not fluent in English. Furthermore it should be made clear (in publicity materials etc.) that migrants are *welcome*, even if they are not fluent. Other suggestions included advertising in different languages and providing language supports.

- **Reduce bureaucracy/provide more support to applicants**

Several suggestions related to the need to reduce the amount of time and paperwork involved in the application process; and to provide more supports with applications and Garda Vetting. There was also a need to improve communication between potential volunteers and voluntary organisations: there were a number of instances where people had applied for volunteering roles but had not received a response.

- **Valuing and supporting volunteers**

In some cases, respondents said that organisations could be more supportive in order to attract volunteers. According to one volunteer there needs to be 'better support - organizations don't always show you how you are valued - in some places you can't even get a cup of tea and there are no expenses at all'. Others emphasised the importance of welcoming migrants in particular because they may not be sure if they are wanted.

A small number of comments suggested that migrants may feel excluded or marginalised in Irish society and that this wider issue needs to be addressed in order to promote civic engagement, including volunteering.

- **Diversity of roles & greater flexibility in timing**

Organisations should offer a wider range of roles, for example: 'more diversity in offers (not only working in shops)'; 'providing diverse volunteering opportunities would help interest more migrants with varying skill sets'; 'more opportunities in different sectors'. Roles should also be developed that utilise the knowledge and experiences of migrant groups, for example migrant volunteers teaching children about their countries and cultures, or running music events and classes. Finally it was suggested that there be greater flexibility in the timing and time commitment involved in volunteering to accommodate those with work and family commitments.

6: CONCLUSION

This small-scale study set out to explore migrants' experiences of volunteering in Cork city and county, including their motivations and pathways into volunteering, the benefits and challenges of volunteering, and the factors which facilitate or inhibit volunteering. In line with the international research, we found that migrants volunteer across a range of different areas and bring important skills and expertise to their volunteering roles. The findings suggest that migrants become involved in volunteering principally for altruistic reasons and to make social connections within the local community. They are also motivated by a desire to develop different skills, learn English, find out more about the host country and improve their employment prospects. In addition, volunteering is seen as a means to get involved in activities which they enjoy, and to utilise their skills and training.

Our research indicates that volunteering can be an important aspect of two-way integration processes: the majority of those who had volunteered in the last five years reported that they had gained a better understanding of Irish society through volunteering; that they had a greater sense of being part of the community; and felt more connected to Ireland. Most of the benefits of volunteering identified by the research participants were linked to inclusion and integration, for example meeting people and making friends, finding work, learning more about Ireland, and developing language skills. Furthermore it was clear that volunteering not only facilitated the social inclusion of individual volunteers, but also their families, as Agnesa's account illustrates (Case Study 3).

The research highlights the reciprocal nature of volunteering, with benefits for both volunteers and local communities. Participants in the current study contributed to a wide range of voluntary and community activities, from supporting homeless people in Cork city, to running youth clubs and organising festivals, to raising funds for charitable organisations. At the same time it was clear that migrants face a number of barriers to volunteering, notably not knowing how to access information and become involved. Moreover the research raises concerns that migrants who are not proficient in spoken English – and who might therefore benefit from the social aspect of volunteering – are likely to feel excluded. Over the last 18 months the COVID-19 pandemic has posed further challenges, particularly to those living in Direct Provision, highlighting the precarity experienced by Asylum Seekers in Ireland.

Figures from VCs in Cork and Dublin suggest that Volunteer Centres are important entry points into volunteering for migrants in Ireland. As noted earlier, nearly 50% of volunteers newly registered with Dublin City VC in 2013 came from migrant backgrounds (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020: 21); while 46% of those registered with Cork VC in 2019 identified themselves as non-nationals. While these figures are very encouraging, indicating high levels of interest in volunteering, they also suggest that migrants may not have access to the same networks and routes into volunteering as members of the general population, who tend to rely on 'word of mouth' and being asked (Davis Smith, 1998; Low *et al.* 2007; Powell *et al.* 2018; NYCI, 2011; Volunteering Australia, 2016). In line with earlier research, our findings suggest that there is a need for mainstream volunteer-involving organisations and communities to recognise migrants as an 'untapped resource for volunteering' and to find new and imaginative ways of reaching out to them (Handy and Greenspan, 2009: 978). Clearly migrants are not a homogenous population, therefore targeted programs aimed at engaging with particular groups may be most effective (Valentova and Medina, 2020). Moreover as Weng and Lee (2016: 521) have argued, there needs to be a shift in perspective from viewing migrants 'primarily as people in need of communities' resources' to a view of the resources migrants can and do provide through volunteering and other forms of civic engagement.

The *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020) calls for greater diversity within volunteering and for the inclusion of under-represented and marginalised groups. However in order to work towards diversity and inclusion there needs to be greater understanding of the barriers faced by specific communities, and targeted approaches to addressing these barriers. To date, very little research has been carried out in Ireland on migrants' perceptions and experiences of volunteering. Through this exploratory, small-scale study we hope to contribute to this discussion as well as providing the basis for further, more extensive, research on both formal and informal volunteering amongst migrant communities in Ireland.

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APPENDIX: PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Country of origin

Migrants from 58 countries were represented in the survey, listed in Table 1 below. All of the main geographical regions were represented, with the exception of Oceania. As Table 2 shows, the highest proportion of respondents were from Europe (43%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (21%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (12%).

Table 1: Country of Origin

COUNTRY	%	N	COUNTRY	%	N
Brazil	15%	37	Togo	0.4	1
India	7%	18	Sudan	0.4	1
Spain	7%	16	Lithuania	0.4	1
Italy	6%	15	Russia	0.4	1
France	5%	12	Chile	0.4	1
United Kingdom	5%	11	Kenya	0.4	1
Zimbabwe	3%	8	China	0.4	1
Poland	3%	8	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.4	1
Nigeria	3%	8	Mozambique	0.4	1
Croatia	3%	7	Ukraine	0.4	1
Canada	3%	7	Nepal	0.4	1
Portugal	3%	7	Saudi Arabia	0.4	1
Mexico	2%	6	Belgium	0.4	1
Germany	2%	6	Japan	0.4	1
United States	2%	6	Congo, Democratic Republic of the	0.4	1
Hungary	2%	5	Sri Lanka	0.4	1
Pakistan	2%	4	Iraq	0.4	1
South Africa	2%	4	Sweden	0.4	1
Egypt	2%	4	Peru	0.4	1
Argentina	2%	4	Tajikistan	0.4	1
Morocco	1%	3	Israel	0.4	1
Switzerland	1%	3	Estonia	0.4	1
Belarus	1%	2	Bulgaria	0.4	1
Netherlands	1%	2	Fiji	0.4	1
Angola	1%	2	Romania	0.4	1
Uganda	1%	2	Venezuela	0.4	1
Colombia	1%	2	Latvia	0.4	1
Korea, South	1%	2	Albania	0.4	1
Sierra Leone	0.4%	1	Libya	0.4	1
Total				**100%**	**241**

Table 2: Geographical Area*

REGION	%
North Africa	4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	12
Latin America and the Caribbean	21
Asia (Central/Eastern/Southern)	12
Western Asia (or Middle East)	1
Europe	43
Northern America	5%

*Based on UN categorisations.
Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Table 3: Ethnicity

	N	%
White Irish*	3	1
White Eastern European	38	16
Any other White background	96	41
Black (African)	23	10
Black (Sub-Saharan African)	5	2
Any other Black background	6	3
Roma	5	2
Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi)	22	9
Asian (Chinese)	1	0.4
Any other Asian background	6	3
Arab (North African)	7	3
Arab (Middle Eastern)	4	2
Other**	19	8
Total	**235**	**100**

*Moved from the UK and the Netherlands to Ireland.
**Principally Latino/Latin American, and those of mixed ethnicity.

Table 4: Education

	N	%
Some secondary school	6	3
Finished secondary school	13	6
Technical or vocational	9	4
Other courses after leaving school	19	8
University Degree	185	80
Total	**232**	**100**

Table 5: Age of Participants

AGE RANGE	N	%
24 or under	11	5
25-34	106	45
35-44	81	34
45-54	28	12
55-64	7	3
65+	4	2
Total	**237**	**100**

Table 6: Employment Status

	N	%
Employed full-time	120	50
Employed part-time	39	16
Unemployed	28	12
Student	24	10
Looking after home/family	15	6
Retired	7	3
Unable to work due to disability or long-term illness	7	3
Carer	1	0.4
Total	**241**	**100**

Table 7: Period resident in Ireland

	N	%
Less than 1 year	33	14
1-3 years	102	44
4-6 years	49	21
7-9 years	13	6
10+	33	14
Total	**230**	**100**





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