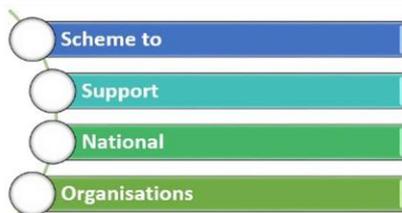


Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO)

Annual Progress Report 2016 - 2017



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



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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the progress and impact of the Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO) funding in the period July 2016 to June 2017 using data collated from annual monitoring progress reports submitted by the SSNO funded organisations. The Scheme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development (formerly by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government) and administered by Pobal.

Headline figures

- 71 organisations have received funding of over €6.8m, with over €5.2m reported as spent at the end of June 2017.
- 157 staff were funded across these organisations, funding an average of 72% of the costs of these staff.
- The most common primary target groups worked with by SSNO funded organisations were people with a defined illness, disease or physical disability (14%), charities or community and voluntary organisations (13%), and children and young people (11%).
- SSNO funded organisations spent an average of 33% of their staff time on frontline service provision, 30% on awareness raising and advocacy and 13% of their time on training.
- 75% of SSNO funded organisations stated that their activities have expanded as a result of SSNO funding, with 43% of these reporting providing services to a greater number of people and 40% offering new activities or services.
- 85% of organisations reported improving the quality of the services they offer. Of these, 38% reported increased staff capacity and 33% reported the ability to improve the evidence base from which they work.
- Organisations were asked what they had achieved which would not have been possible without SSNO funding. The most common response was the provision of education or training followed by the development or provision of specialist supports to their respective target groups.
- Asked about the main challenges these organisations faced, issues such as the changing regulatory environment, increased demand for services, as well as internal challenges such as recruitment were identified.
- Key areas of learning included the importance of working in collaboration with other agencies and departments, reviewing and identifying areas for improvement in their policies and working methods, and the importance of strategic and long term planning.

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the progress and impact of the Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO) funding in the period July 2016 to June 2017 using data collated from annual monitoring progress reports submitted by SSNO funded organisations. The report will cover financial and non-financial aspects of programme delivery and provides a summary of the achievements, activities, challenges and learning as reported by SSNO funded organisations during this reporting period.

1.1 Background

A new round of the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) was formally launched in July 2016, by Minister Simon Coveney, TD. The new programme covers a three year period up to July 2019. The scheme is under the remit of the Department of Rural and Community Development¹ (hereafter referred to as 'the Department').

The scheme has been renamed as the ***Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO)***. This new emphasis in the title reflects the scheme's importance as a key element of the State's support for the role of the sector in contributing to the development of strong and vibrant civil society and in improving outcomes for those most disadvantaged.

The overall aim of the SSNO is to provide multi-annual funding for the **core costs of national organisations** in the community and voluntary sector, with a focus on organisations that provide supports to those who are disadvantaged.

A total programme budget of **€16,660,913** has been made available for this purpose across a three year funding period (July 1st 2016 – June 30th 2019). Applicants were eligible to apply for grants of between €20,000 and €90,000 per annum.

Pobal's role is to administer funding under the scheme on behalf of the Department to support national organisations in the sector around three key strategic priorities:

- Frontline service delivery;
- Organisational development;

¹ The lead Department during the reporting period covered by this report was the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, however, since July 2017 the scheme is under the auspices of the Department of Rural and Community Development.

- Policy development.

This report contains a summary of data taken from the 2016 - 2017 Annual Monitoring Forms submitted by SSNO funded organisations covering the first 12 months of their contract (July 1st 2016 – June 30th 2017).

1.2 Purpose of SSNO funding

The Department designed the SSNO with the aim of providing multi-annual funding towards the **core costs** of national organisations in the community and voluntary sector to assist them to operate and carry out core activities. Core costs relate to those expenditure items that are considered critical to the operation and day-to-day running of an organisation. In the context of the SSNO, core costs may refer to: the salary of core staff members, specific non-salary costs attributed to core staff and contributions towards the organisations overheads. In practice, SSNO funding is primarily used towards funding the salary of core member(s) of staff, with a lesser percentage contributing to various organisational overheads. Further information on categories of expenditure is contained in the financial summary in Chapter 3.

The SSNOs primary focus is the provision of core funding to national organisations that demonstrate good governance and deliver services and supports that have a focus on one or more of the following:-

- Addressing poverty;
- Social exclusion;
- Promoting equality.

1.3 Application and appraisal process

Applications to the new round of the SSNO were invited in January 2016. The Department and Pobal hosted two information sessions which provided an overview of the application process. The closing date for submission of applications to Pobal was 8th February 2016. The Scheme received a total of **151 applications with 71 national organisations** successfully approved for funding.²

The appraisal process set out a number of key criteria against which applications were measured. Organisations were required to have met the following criteria to be deemed eligible:

² **Note:** one of the funded organisations, G.L.E.N. subsequently engaged in a transfer of undertakings to LGBT Support and Advocacy Network Ireland (as of 5th September 2017).

- Provided evidence of a national membership and demonstrated extensive reach and engagement across the country in terms of the supports and services they provide;
- Focused on one or more of the following: addressing poverty, social exclusion and promoting equality;
- Demonstrated effective corporate governance procedures as recipients of public funding;
- Evidenced a need for core funding and demonstrated how critical the SSNO funding is to the future existence, sustainability and ongoing operation of the organisation;
- Demonstrated that the costs applied for represent 'core costs' as opposed to costs that are more appropriate to a time-bound project.

1.4 Reporting and monitoring requirements

In 2016, an SSNO Monitoring Framework Reference Group was established made up of a number of self-nominated individuals from SSNO funded organisations to inform the approach to monitoring under the Programme. The reference group recommended that the monitoring and reporting framework for the SSNO should increase the focus on the impact of the funding on the organisation, rather the impact the organisation has had on their members, beneficiaries, or service users. This was in part due to the diverse nature of services, target groups and organisation sizes.

As a result a new monitoring template was designed with the aim of capturing how the SSNO funding enables the organisations to carry out their core work and how the funding can add value to the work such as improving the quantity or quality of services they provide.

Reporting requirements

SSNO grantees are required, as part of their 3 year grant agreement with Pobal, to report on the SSNO funding in relation to financial expenditure and performance monitoring. The **financial** and **non-financial** reports are submitted to Pobal via an on-line portal at the following reporting intervals:

- Financial return on a six-monthly basis.
- Non-Financial Monitoring template on an annual basis

The non-financial monitoring template (Annual Monitoring Form) was submitted following the first 12 months of funding and contained the following:

- A profile of the SSNO organisation including the activity areas undertaken by staff and information on their target groups and communities of interest (individuals and organisations);
- An outline of how the SSNO funding has impacted on the work of the organisation in the previous 12 months, e.g. ability to contribute to addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality; capacity in relation to good governance and sustainability;
- Identification of the added value of the SSNO funded core staff, relative to the overall work of the national organisation;
- Details on specific contractual conditions, including any changes that had occurred during the reporting period;
- Any challenges and learning arising in the delivery of the agreed activities under the SSNO.

In addition to the above reporting requirements, verification visits are carried out by Pobal staff to a sample of SSNO funded organisations each year. Six SSNO funded organisations received verification visits during this reporting period.

The information presented in this report is based principally on the data reported in the annual monitoring reports as well as the key findings from the financial reporting as of 30 June 2016.

2. Profile of SSNO funded organisations

A broad range of organisations are funded under the Department's Scheme to Support National Organisations, delivering a variety of valuable supports and activities across the Community and Voluntary Sector. A full list of these organisations is available in Appendix I of this report. There is significant diversity, both in the nature and size of the organisations funded and in the sectors they represent, which include:

- Community and Rural Development
- Social Enterprise
- Disability
- Education, Youth and Children
- Equality
- Older People
- Health

These national organisations often work as umbrella bodies with a network of member organisations based around the country. SSNO funded organisations work directly and indirectly with individuals across a range of target groups. Many of the organisations work closely with community and voluntary organisations, providing guidance and support to their respective sectors. During this reporting period, the 71 funded organisations reported working with some **2,039,746** individuals, **16,834** community and voluntary groups and **6,405** member organisations. These figures will be examined in further detail in section 2.2 below.

2.1 Staff time supporting activities

SSNO funded organisations were asked to estimate the percentage of staff time³ that was devoted to undertaking or supporting the following activities:-

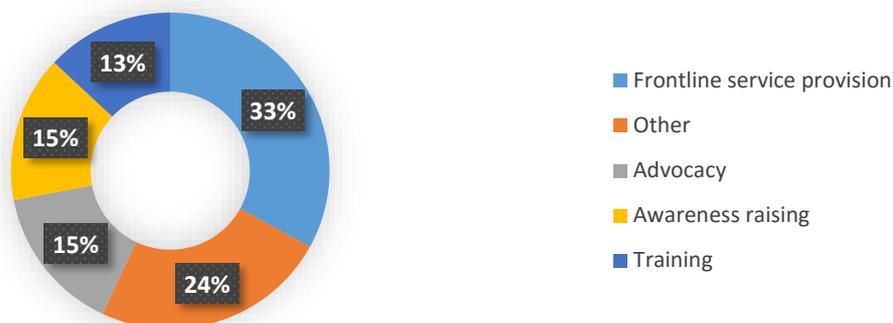
- Advocacy;
- Awareness raising;
- Frontline service provision;
- Training;
- Other.

³ This included staff time for all positions in the organisation – both SSNO funded and non-SSNO funded

Figure 2.1 shows the **average** percentage of staff time estimated across all groups for each of these activities:

- Front-line service provision was the category with the highest average percentage of staff time at 33%.
- An average of 24% of organisations' staff time was spent on 'other' activities. Examples cited under 'other' covered a broad range of activities including fundraising, administration, financial management, governance and research.
- An average of 15% of staff time was spent on advocacy related activities and a further 15% on awareness raising.
- The lowest percentage average was reported for training activities (13%).

Figure 2.1 Average % of staff time supporting activities



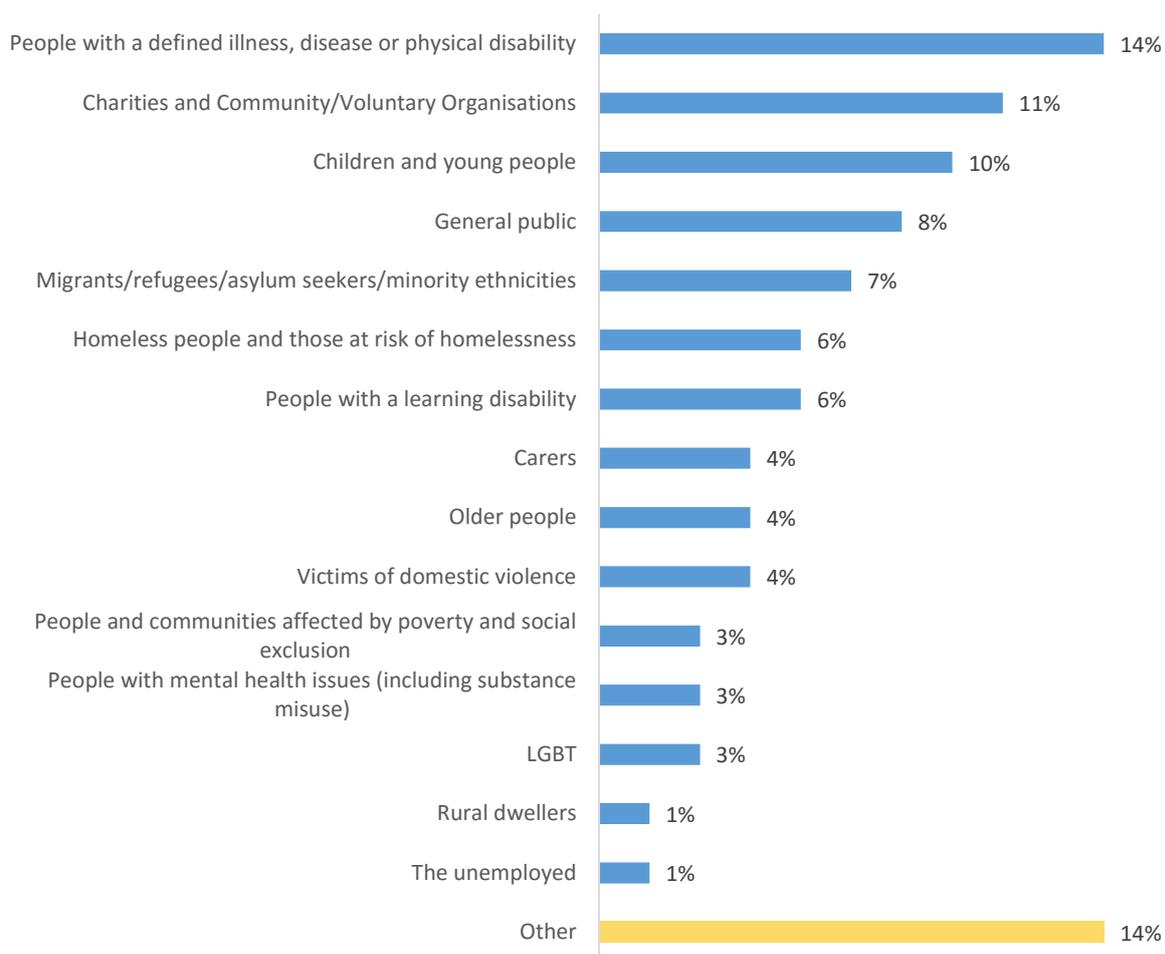
Further detail on activities carried out by organisations which the SSNO funding enabled is contained in Chapter 4 of this report.

2.2 Primary target groups

Organisations in receipt of SSNO funding support a broad range of target groups across a variety of sectors. Organisations were asked to report on the primary target group or community of interest that they focused their activities on. Figure 2.2 displays the breakdown of primary target groups supported across the SSNO.⁴

⁴ It should be noted that Pobal re-categorised entries under the "Other", category that fit with some of the existing target group categories. 27 original entries under the "Other", category were reduced to 10.

Figure 2.2: Primary target groups of SSNO funded organisations



It is acknowledged that most organisations funded under the SSNO will work with multiple different target groups from this list. The results provide a snapshot of the range of people and groups supported through the programme, including some of the most marginalised people in society. As highlighted in Figure 2.2:

- 14% of SSNO funded organisations reported ‘*people with a defined illness, disease or physical disability*’ as their primary target group.
- 11% of SSNO funded organisations reported working with other organisations in the charity and community/voluntary sectors as their primary target groups. This is indicative of the role of many SSNO funded organisations as a national body for a particular sector or community of interest.
- 10% worked with children and young people
- 8% reported the general public as their target group
- The ‘other’ category accounted for a further 14% of primary target groups selected. The high number of entries under this category reflects the broad nature of the programme as

well as the inherent challenge in accurately capturing the breadth of the work and people supported through the scheme, particularly where specific/specialised supports are being provided. Some of the target groups listed under “Other” include:

- Prisoners, their families and communities
- Persons involved in foster care
- Palliative care professionals

It is clear from the above list of target groups and the additional entries under the ‘other’ category that the SSNO is a far reaching programme providing supports to vulnerable and marginalised individuals and groups.

2.3 Number of people and organisations worked with

As part of the monitoring form, organisations were also asked to report on the number of people and organisations worked with. The following breakdown was requested: a) Number of Individuals; b) Number of Community/Voluntary Groups; and c) Number of Member Organisations (for umbrella organisations). Table 2.1 shows the total number of individuals, community and voluntary groups and member organisations worked with during the reporting period, alongside the reported primary target group. This table is arranged by number of individuals, however, it is important to note the number of groups and member organisations worked with, as this is the focus of the work for many SSNO funded organisations.

Table 2.1: Individuals, C&V groups and member organisations worked with

Primary target group of SSNO funded organisation	Number of individuals	Number of groups	Number of member organisations
Children and young people	1,061,538	296	162
People with a defined illness, disease or physical disability	479,503	3,068	371
Charities and Community/Voluntary Organisations	170,396	1,607	288
Older people	136,447	10	33
Other	55,638	2,218	640
General public	44,049	823	899
Homeless people and those at risk of homelessness	23,555	625	438
Migrants/refugees/asylum seekers/minority ethnicities	19,309	551	38
People and communities affected by poverty and social exclusion	18,530	440	271
Victims of domestic violence	10,800	96	362
The unemployed	5,595	508	140

LGBT community	4,900	5,893	2,326
Carers	3,708	171	215
People with a learning disability	3,175	510	124
Rural dwellers	1,788	0	39
People with mental health issues (including substance misuse)	815	18	59
Total	2,039,746	16,834	6,405

Table 2.1 gives an overview of the reach of the organisations funded under the SSNO. It should be noted that this information is gathered to provide a profile of the organisations supported under the SSNO. These outputs are not directly attributable to SSNO funding, given that many of these organisations are in receipt of multiple funding streams.

While some organisations work directly with individuals experiencing disadvantage, others work indirectly by supporting community and voluntary organisations working in a specialised area. Many of the SSNO organisations are umbrella bodies that work with a network of member organisations across the country.

For example, Table 2.1 indicates that ‘children and young people’ are the largest target group of the SSNO funded organisations (1,061,538 or 50% of all individuals worked with by organisations whose primary target group was children and young people). 296 community and voluntary groups were supported by organisations whose target group was children and young people. A significantly higher number of groups (3,068) were worked with by organisations in support of *people with a defined illness, disease or physical disability* but less individuals were targeted directly (479,503).

Due to the very different nature of the work and supports provided by the organisations funded by the SSNO, it was highlighted through consultation with SSNO groups that a clearer picture of the benefit of the SSNO funding emerges when we look at the impact of the funding on the organisations themselves rather than focusing on the numbers of people or groups worked with/targeted.

Further detail on the impact of the SSNO funding in relation to the SSNO organisations’ quality and quantity of services provided, is contained in Chapter 4 of this report.

3. Financial summary

All SSNO funded organisations were required to submit a financial report to Pobal on 20th July 2017 showing expenditure for the period from 1st July 2016 to 30th June 2017. This chapter provides an overview of the contents of the financial reports submitted.

A total of **€16,660,913** in grant aid was awarded to the 71 SSNO funded groups covering the three-year contract period. As at 30th June 2017, **€6,850,419** had been paid out and 76.1% of this amount (**€5,212,544**) had been reported back as spend (see Table 3.1 below).

Table 3.1: Total SSNO budget and spend reported to 30th June 2017

Budget awarded	To 30th June 2017 paid	Spend reported	% Spend
€16,660,913	€6,850,419	€5,212,544	76.1%

Grant allocations for the three year funding period ranged from €84,445 up to €270,000.

SSNO expenditure areas

SSNO expenditure is eligible under the following three categories:

- **Staffing:** this relates to core posts that are central to the work of the organisation. Eligible costs include: salary, employers PRSI, pensions and recruitment.
- **Administration:** This will typically include the expenses of day-to-day running of an organisation including stationary, staff training and travel and subsistence.
- **Facilities:** This covers the general running costs/overheads of an organisation which includes: light and heat, telephone, rent and insurance etc.

Table 3.2 shows that the vast majority (92.7%) of expenditure across SSNO supported organisations to date, is accounted for by salaries. This is in line with expectations, given that the primary aim of the SSNO is to provide funding towards the core costs of the organisation.

Table 3.2 Categories of expenditure

Budget category	Spend to June 2017	%
Salaries	€4,835,512	92.7%
Administration	€324,609	6.2%
Facilities	€52,423	1.1%
Total	€5,212,544	100%

4. Impact of SSNO funding – staffing, activities & achievements

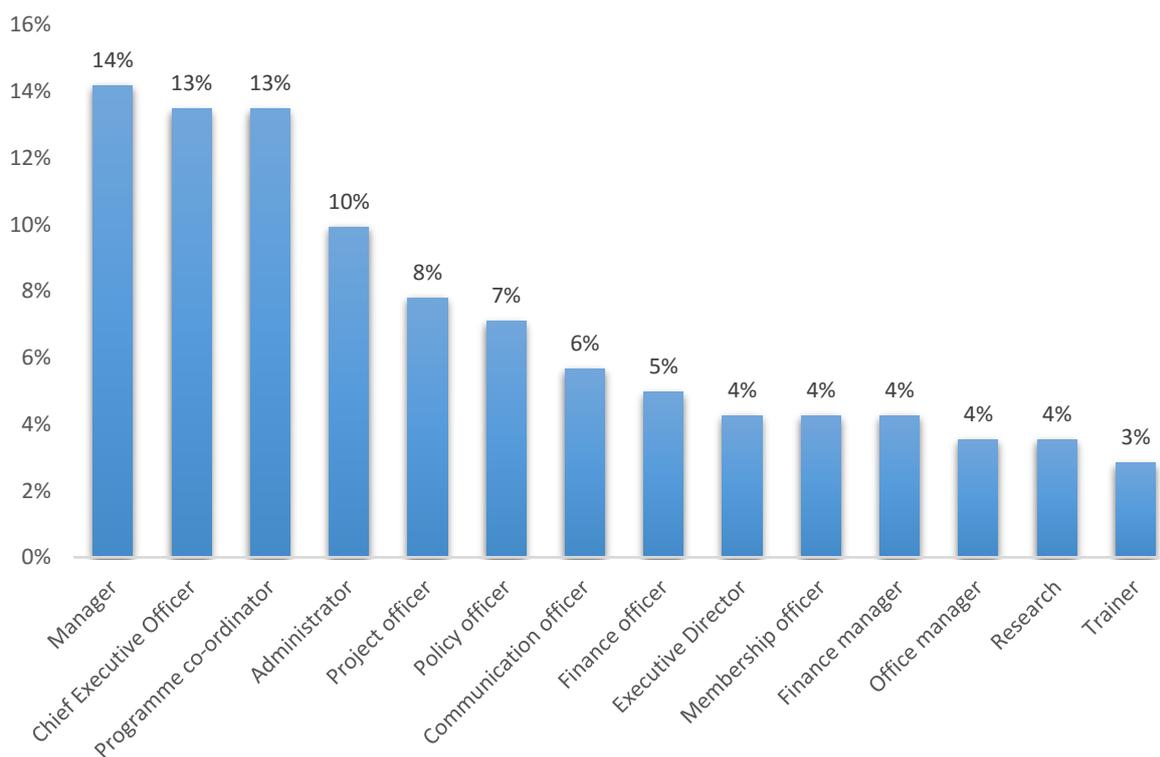
This section outlines the impact of the SSNO funding on organisations in terms of the positions supported and the organisations' activities and achievements as described in their annual monitoring report. The annual monitoring form for 2016-2017 was designed to capture the ways in which services offered were enhanced by the SSNO funding for example, through the expansion of activities and improving the quality of service provision to their target audiences.

4.1 Staffing

Positions supported

A total of **157 staff positions** were supported by SSNO funding during the reporting period. Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of positions supported by their category of work⁵.

Figure 4.1: % of Staff positions supported under SSNO by category of work



⁵ The information shown relates to 141 positions reported on by organisations in receipt of SSNO funding. 17 positions have been excluded due to missing data relating to their category of work.

As shown above, a large proportion of SSNO funded positions were at management and senior management level (35% of positions).

- 17% of positions were at senior management level (13% CEO and 4% Executive Director)
- 18% were at management level (14% Manager and 4% Finance Manager)

The remainder of positions funded covered all aspects of programme delivery, including:

- Programme Coordination (13%)
- Policy and research positions (11%)
- General administration, finance and support positions (23%)
- Communications (6%)
- Training (3%)

Organisations were asked to report on the proportion of each position funded by the SSNO. During the reporting period, SSNO funding accounted for an average of 72% of the cost of each position. Organisations were also asked to report any staffing changes between 2016 and 2017 in terms of the percentage funded by the SSNO. For the most part the proportion of SSNO funding towards each position remained similar to the previous year.

4.2 Level of activities/services provided

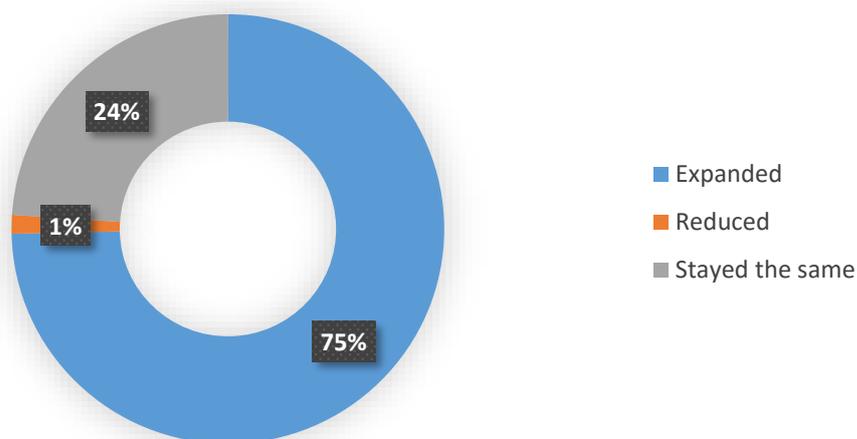
The Department designed the SSNO funding scheme with the aim of providing essential support to organisations to carry out their core activities. As part of the monitoring requirements, organisations were asked what impact the SSNO funding had in relation to their level of activities or services provided.

The vast majority (99%) of SSNO funded organisations reported that the funding allowed them to either:

- a) Expand their activities (75%) or
- b) Maintain the same level of activity (24%)

As shown in Figure 4.2, just 1% of organisations reported that their level of activity reduced during this funding period due to a set of specific challenges faced by the organisation during this reporting period. Please see Chapter 5 for further information on challenges faced by SSNO funded organisations during this reporting period.

Figure 4.2: Level of activity/service provision as a result of SSNO funding



Organisations were then asked to provide further detail about the way in which their services had expanded. The responses are displayed in Figure 4.3. Of those who reported an expansion of their level of activity:

- 43% reported that they offered the same activities but were able to provide services to a **greater amount of people**;
- 40% reported that they could offer **new activities/services** to their target groups
- 17% reported that the funding enabled them to **hire additional staff**.

Figure 4.3: Expansion of Activities/Services as a result of SSNO funding



Examples in practice – Level of activities/services provided

Increasing the number of service users

“In autumn/winter 2016, the Alliance piloted a targeted approach with our Know Your Rights programme. We developed a two day programme for services working with people with mental health difficulties. We trained over 100 people from our membership, NGO, statutory and other bodies.”

– Children’s Rights Alliance

New Activities/Services offered

“We have developed two specific training modules to facilitate engagement between Local Authority staff and the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental organisations in their city/county.”

- Social Analysis and Action for Justice Ireland

Additional staff hired

“The resettlement officer role is completely new to the organisation and would not have been possible without SSNO funding. The resettlement and relocation of refugees to Ireland has increased significantly in recent years and is an in demand service.”

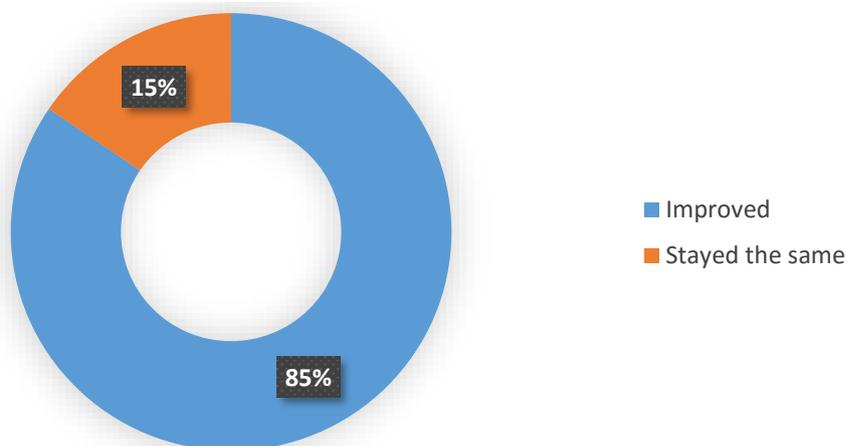
- Irish Refugee Council

4.3 Quality of services

Organisations were asked if the **quality** of their service provision had improved in the last 12 months as a result of SSNO funding. Figure 4.4 displays the breakdown:

- 85% reported that the quality of service provision had improved
- 15% reported that the quality remained at the same level.

Figure 4.4: Quality of service provision



Where organisations reported an improvement in services, they were asked to identify the types of improvements to the quality of service provision. The ways in which quality of services was improved through SSNO funding is displayed in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Types of improvement to quality of services



- **38% reported increased staff capacity as opposed to increased staff numbers.** Two commonly cited methods of increasing staff capacity were the provision of training programmes and the upskilling of staff members.
- **33% reported that they improved the evidence base on which their programmes were designed.** This took several forms as some groups conducted internal reviews of their own data; some took part in conferences and policy talks; and others invested in independent research to further their understanding and to assist in policy development.
- **20% of groups responded that they had undertaken stakeholder consultation.** Stakeholder consultation on a range of important issues was used in the design of their own supports and services, or fed back into their engagements with Government departments and other agencies.
- **8% adopted a model of quality standards for continuous improvement of services.** Although a lower proportion of organisations selected this option to demonstrate how their quality of services had improved, over 30% of organisations reported developing a strategy document detailing their plans for the future improvement of their services. This indicates that SSNO funding is contributing to an increased focus on continuous improvement of services.

It is important to note that organisations were asked to select one option from the above categories. This allows for the identification of which types of improvements were concentrated on, however, many organisations reported making improvements across these four categories as a result of SSNO funding.

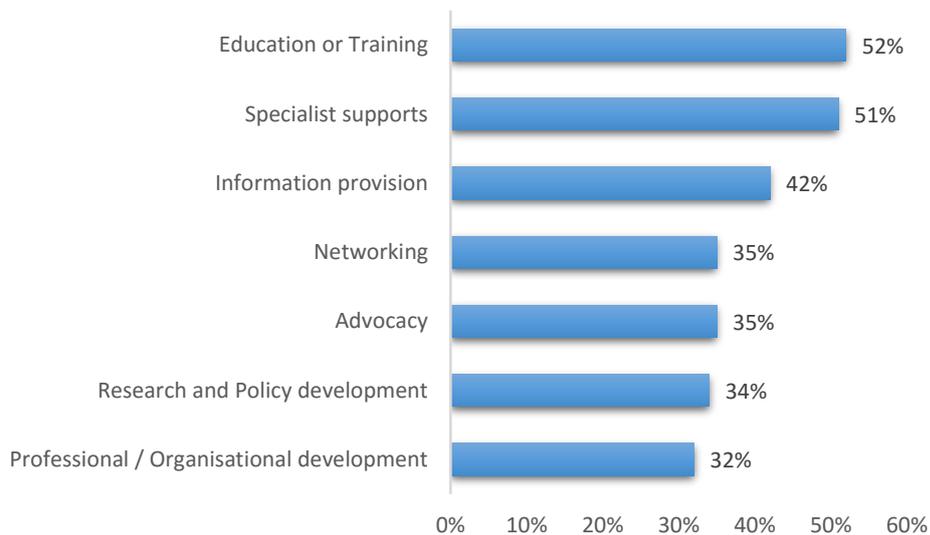
4.4 Achievements

Organisations were asked to provide examples of specific accomplishments and improvements to services they had made in the past 12 months that **would not have been possible without SSNO funding**. This could include new activities they had provided, improvements they had added to existing services, or extensions to programmes that would otherwise have been terminated. While there are significant differences between the types of service provided by each national organisation, 7 key areas of achievement were identified from their responses.

- Education or Training
- Information provision
- Advocacy
- Networking
- Professional / Organisational development
- Specialist supports
- Research and Policy development

The amount of activity reported in relation to these key areas of work across SSNO funded organisations, is shown in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6: Percentage of organisations with achievements in each activity area



Education or training

52% of organisations reported co-ordinating or collaborating on the provision of training events, workshops or education programmes for target groups and stakeholders.

The size and scale of the training offered differed from organisation to organisation from national and regional events to local workshops. Examples included management and policy development courses targeted towards community groups; literacy and second language learning courses targeted towards immigrant and socially excluded communities; and other sector specific courses such as courses for carers; courses for those working with people with Autism, and training for staff working with sufferers of rare diseases.

Examples in practice - education/training activities

“From July 2016 - June 2017 the funding has specifically enabled the Best Practice Manager, with the support of the Training Administrator to coordinate and manage the provision of 80 Core Training events, resulting in 613 internal participants receiving Quality Practice Development Training, Child Protection Training, Human Resources Training and Health and Safety Training. This training has a direct impact on the capacity of staff to work effectively with service users with the aim of bringing about positive outcomes.”

- **Barnardos**

“Recruitment, training and support the organisations team of 20 helpline volunteers (who went on to take 1600 calls and emails) and 22 peer support volunteers (who provided services to 150 people).”

- **Arthritis Ireland**

Specialist supports

51% of organisations reported either continuing pre-existing or developing new supports specific to their target group or field. This included highly specialised supports to people with specific needs, opening new equality based schools, developing tailored training and support programmes for frontline staff at community and voluntary organisations and legal advice and information helplines.

A key area in the provision of specialist supports was the development of new resources and toolkits for a specific target audience/community. Common resources developed included handbooks, toolkits, leaflets, and survey templates. Several organisations developed multiple resources for use throughout their funding period. For example, the National Youth Council of

Ireland produced and distributed numerous leaflets, newsletters, and toolkits containing guidance on inclusiveness and diversity for other organisations in the Youth Work Sector.

Examples in practice – specialist supports

“Services such as the National Bowel Screening Programme still require people to phone them, and this has been challenging. Clients can come to our office to have phone calls made on their behalf by our administrator.”

– Irish Deaf Society

“A Case Worker was employed to support our case work on trafficking for forced labour and complex cases. This role also required a proficiency in Arabic as some of this time was allocated to working with vulnerable and at risk fishermen as well as supporting workers trafficked into domestic work and other at risk sectors.”

– Migrant Information Centre

“Dissemination of our 8 Steps to Inclusive Youth Work Toolkit - 500 copies plus downloads. This resource sets inclusion indicators that youth work organisations can use to meet and attain quality standards and outcomes ... We linked with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to ensure a broad and strategic reach”

– National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

Information provision

42% of organisations reported attending or co-ordinating meetings, events or services where the organisations role was to provide information relating to their target group, field or services. Information provision was seen as an essential part of their service by many organisations as it served as a way to engage new clients, develop their relationship with communities and to raise and maintain awareness of the organisation and their work. There were many different methods of information provision reported; from large scale conferences, to smaller outreach sessions, to the staffing and provision of advice and information helplines.

Examples in practice - information provision

“We hosted a recent information, capacity building session in Donegal in partnership with Special Needs Parents Association and Down Syndrome Donegal. In meeting people locally, we have hosted information/capacity building sessions on important issues such as the Assisted Decision Making Act, personal budgets, advocacy supports, advocacy skills, post school options, etc.”

– Inclusion Ireland

While some members are very aware of moving their clubs with the times, some are still working exclusively on paper and wouldn't even have emails. We are aware that this gap needs to be filled and have designed workshops that incorporate social media skills in our club development for our members that help them to set up email and Facebook to advertise their clubs success and training days. These have been rolled out in 2016/2017 with more for 2018'

- Irish Athletic Boxing Association

"We launched our 24/7 National Freephone Helpline with Minister Katherine Zappone."

- Women's Aid

Networking

35% of organisations reported engaging with stakeholders, user groups and policy makers to establish better relationships. Organisations attempted to establish closer ties with national and regional stakeholders by setting up conferences and workshops, and liaising with representatives of both the public and private sector to help share ideas, information and to link up around matters of importance to their field.

Examples in practice – networking activities

"We have joined a Shared Learning Group in the UK which has allowed us to learn from the UK experience and also have access to UK materials and expertise."

- Medical Research Charities

"We have increased our networking and attendance at events/conferences and our collaboration with other community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental groups. By shifting some routine work from the senior members of staff, they have had the time to engage with groups such as NESC and with new initiatives such as the 'Ireland 2040 Strategy' and Coalition 2030."

- Social Analysis and Action for Justice Ireland

Advocacy

35% of organisations reported advocacy related activities on behalf of their respective field or target group. Many organisations lobbied for legislative reform and this was regarded as a way to increase the influence of an organisation or target group while challenging existing stereotypes and assumptions.

Examples in practice - advocacy

“Following ongoing engagement and advocacy in 2016 to support strategic direction of HFH (Hospice Friendly Hospitals Programme)... the HSE agreed to the establishment of a joint HSE HFH oversight group. The first meeting of this group took place in May 2017, with representation from relevant clinical programmes, Hospital CEOs, Directors of Nursing and the Office of the Ombudsman.”

– **Irish Hospice Foundation**

Research and policy development

34% of organisations reported engaging in research and/or producing policy submissions to various Government departments and agencies on issues such as housing, disability, social protection and mental health on behalf of their sector. Organisations were often involved with multiple submissions over the course of their funding period.

Of the above, 10% of organisations reported specifically that they either engaged directly in research or contracted an external consultant to undertake research in their field or sector. Key pieces of research included: *Strategies for Eradicating Poverty to Achieve Sustainable Development for All - Social Analysis and Action for Justice Ireland*; and *Security and Instability in the Private Rented Sector in Ireland - Threshold*.

Examples in practice - research and policy development

“We have been able to publish four policy position papers, manage a consultant to undertake research on changes to the State Pension in 2012, participate in a wide range of consultation processes in relation to policies such as the National Women’s Strategy; Budget 2017 and Budget 2018; the Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare to name just a few”.

– **Age Action**

“We have made various written and oral submissions to flagship Government initiatives such as Rebuilding Ireland, the Strategy for the Rental Sector and legislation introducing rent certainty measures and prohibiting the occurrence of large-scale evictions such as Tyrellstown.”

– **Threshold**

“Our Policy and Research function is now well established and well respected, with a consistent output of discussion documents, submissions, research proposals and pro-bono consulting to researchers and others with an interest in family carers.”

– **Care Alliance Ireland**

Professional / organisational development

32% of organisations reported that they engaged in staff upskilling and worked to improve their organisations compliance, governance and development of strategic plans. Organisations reported working to develop their capacity to meet a wide variety of requirements, including legal requirements. Many groups also reported sending staff members on courses and workshops for upskilling in areas such as good governance, leadership and organisational management as well as courses specific to their roles or fields.

Examples in practice – professional and organisational development

“Our CEO led on the development of our new 4-year strategy, ‘Stronger Charities, Stronger Communities’, which sets out The Wheel’s objectives and mission for the next few years.”

- **The Wheel (Rotha)**

“Throughout this period, MRCI developed its new strategic plan which would not have been possible without this funding ... This is essential not only as a good governance measure but also in terms of being clear about the future of the organisation and how we are supporting our action groups and our collective efforts for change.”

- **Migrant Information Centre**

5. Challenges and learning

Organisations were asked to outline the main challenges and key learning for their organisation in relation to the core activities funded by the SSNO over the previous 12 months. Organisations reported on a wide variety of challenges faced during this period, many of which related to the specific sector in which they work. Key areas of challenges have been identified with regard to a) external environment and changing landscape of the community/voluntary and charities sector and b) internal/organisational level challenges.

Learning during this period has also been identified and many organisations have demonstrated creative and innovative approaches to overcoming the barriers and challenges faced within their field.

5.1 Challenges

A. External Environment

A significant number of SSNO funded organisations reported challenges relating to the changing external environment in which they are operating which have impacted on their ability to carry out their work. Particular emphasis was made to changes in regulatory compliance, increased demand for services with limited resources, and difficulty in reaching hard to reach and isolated communities.

One of the major challenges faced within this reporting period, was meeting increased **regulatory compliance and legislative obligations** (such as meeting obligations for the Charities Regulator, data protection and adoption of the voluntary Governance Code). This involved a significant amount of resources and staff training in order to meet requirements. Many organisations also cited the new regulatory framework and improving governance as learning opportunities – see section 5.2.

A high number of organisations also cited an **increase in demand for their services** during this period, which coupled with limited resources, placed a strain on their ability to deliver the core work and objectives of the organisation. Many organisations reported that the resulting environment is one where they struggle to meet the demand for their services. One organisation, by way of example, noted that the number of parents attending their classes had doubled over a period of one year, with numerous other organisations alluding to similar increases in demand.

Organisations also reported that the increased demand for services coincided with a number of other **competing priorities for the organisation** to meet. For example, greater advocacy work on

behalf of their target groups, engaging in meaningful consultation and increasing public awareness and understanding in relation to particular issues and needs of target groups/communities. These areas of the work were deemed to be particularly demanding on resources with established organisations often invited to comment in the media, participate in consultations or meet with elected representatives on issues which, while of great importance to their area, were not the main focus of their work.

Awareness campaigns were another area which were deemed of high value to organisations but represented a major drain on resources. Awareness campaigns were often run as a method of advertising an organisations services or to garner attention to a particular theme or concept associated with their service area or target group. A number of issues were raised that presented challenges for organisations including:

- The time required to prepare for radio and TV programmes took resources away from the provision of core services.
- Difficulties with coordinating campaigns with other agencies were highlighted. While it was welcomed that some agency and state led awareness campaigns focused on issues close to their communities, there were challenges noted in maintaining communications, streamlining approaches and working in partnership with a number of bodies.

Another key challenge cited by organisations was in **reaching isolated communities**, both in terms of socially/economically marginalised and geographically isolated individuals and communities.

Many organisations reported that accessing communities in sparsely populated rural areas posed a significant challenge. One organisation noted that despite receiving high levels of interest from particular rural communities they subsequently had to cancel several planned training events due to low attendance which they attributed to the area's inaccessibility. Another organisation reported that they located training facilities as close to communities as possible to counteract this problem, however, low population numbers in these communities meant that training events had to be shared by several communities to be cost effective. This made it challenging to find one location to suit all and required additional time spent planning each event. Additionally, tasks such as raising awareness were considerably more difficult in sparsely populated areas, requiring more time to build up local support and involvement. One organisation stated that their services required the support of a wide range of community and statutory organisations to be successful which weren't readily available in many communities.

Other external factors such as the housing crisis, and unforeseen developments including Brexit were reported as having an impact on their work and resources.

B. Internal/Organisational Level

A number of key challenges at an organisational level were reported by organisations in relation to staffing, recruitment, upskilling and training, and stability/sustainability for the organisation.

Changes to staff, staff shortages, difficulties and delays in recruitment and other HR processes were cited by many as having an impact in the delivery of the organisations objectives. For many getting the right staff in key positions was essential to ensuring targets and goals were met, however, this was often a lengthy process which resulted in pressure across the organisation and temporarily reassigning of staff in different areas to fill gaps. Many organisations also cited the need to continually upskill and provide training to staff in specialist areas in order to deal with emerging issues in their sector.

“We have developed the communications skills of both SSNO funded staff with direct training in media work. Both are now confident to work with print and radio, and have logged numerous interviews and articles to promote our work and our vision for a just society.” - Social Analysis and Action for Justice Ireland

Several organisations reported difficulties in allocating time towards strategic planning and long term planning given their limited resources during this period. Linked to this were concerns about the stability and sustainability of organisations. Many reported that without securing long-term funding they would not be able to engage in long-term planning. Without long-term funding, groups did not feel that they had the security to expand their staff levels, to invest in targeted training programmes or to develop strategy and policy documents.

This provides an indication of the value that groups place on having access to core multi-annual funding such as the SSNO to support and enable charities to plan into the future.

5.2 Learning

As well as the challenges outlined, many SSNO funded organisations described the learning for their organisation during this period. Key areas of learning included the importance of working in collaboration with other agencies and Government departments, reviewing and identifying areas for improvement in their policies and working methods, and the importance of strategic and long term planning.

The importance of **building strong relationships and working in partnership** with other agencies and Government departments was cited by many as essential to ensuring that their voice is heard and that their target groups and communities are represented. Greater information sharing and interagency working were deemed to be the best way to maximise resources and reach as many people as possible. Although it was acknowledged that this was a challenging task, creating formal

protocols for engaging and developing relationships between service providers and state funded partners was one method of overcoming such challenges.

“We have learned to work around funding shortfalls and tried to spread our resources to get maximum return. For instance, increased building of relationships with Government officials has led to more effective lobbying of lawmakers to tackle hate crime” - National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

Developing strategic plans and other corporate governance documents covering the organisations responsibilities with regard to financial reporting, capacity building, staff training, data protection etc. were seen as key ways to maximise efficiency and secure the future of service provision.

“Focusing internally on improving the strategic, governance and administrative systems within the organisation to ensure that it is not only compliant with best practice but has robust systems in place to ensure the organisation maximises the resources available to concentrate on its core business and provide the most effective, streamlined and efficient way of running the organisation” - Neurological Alliance of Ireland

Many organisations reflected that the limited resources available has required them to seriously **examine the services** they offered in order to make the **best use of their time and resources**. An example of this, reported by the Irish Foster Care Association, was to contract an independent review of their services including identifying their volunteers training needs, what resources are required to fulfil roles and to produce a ‘roadmap’ for the further development of the service.

Other organisations identified **key areas for improvement** and gaps in their own capacity, knowledge and responses, for example, improving fundraising skills or improving advocacy skills. Others identified new tools and systems that could reduce the amount of time spent on operational and manual tasks such as reviewing methods of data collection or introducing a CRM system to streamline tasks and enable working with a greater case load.

Finally, many organisations noted the key importance of having the right staff in place. **Dedicated staff in particular key roles** helped organisations to focus their work where it should be which boosted morale in many organisations, rather than staff feeling stretched across a wide range of tasks. This reflects the importance as reported by organisations in receipt of SSNO funding in supporting core positions in organisations.

“The appointment of a dedicated Project Worker for the IFCA Helpline and Professional Supervisor for all volunteers on the service (Helpline and National Support Volunteers) has greatly enhanced the self-worth of all volunteers and reduced attrition.” - Irish Foster Care Association

In conclusion, it is recognised that many SSNO funded organisations are tackling significant issues with limited resources. The Department’s focus on providing funding for core costs is an important element in maintaining and developing services of SSNO funded organisations, allowing them to provide essential supports to their member organisations and target groups.

While organisations have outlined numerous challenges faced during this reporting period and in recent years, they have also demonstrated a capacity to think creatively and innovatively, working collaboratively and strategically with agencies and Government departments to ensure that the voices of their target communities are heard and represented which in turn informs and underpins the policies created to meet their needs.

Appendix I – SSNO funded Organisations 2016-2017

SSNO reference number	Organisation name
B00102-SSNO1601	Immigrant Council of Ireland Ltd.
B00104-SSNO1601	Migrant information Centre Ltd.
B00143-SSNO1601	Cherish Limited
B00293-SSNO1601	Asthma Society of Ireland
B00361-SSNO1601	Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups Ltd.
B00676-SSNO1601	Focus Ireland Ltd
B00760-SSNO1601	Barnardos - Republic of Ireland Ltd.
B00770-SSNO1601	Threshold Ltd.
B00835-SSNO1601	Community Creations Ltd.
B01187-SSNO1601	The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland
B01257-SSNO1601	Special Olympics Ireland
B01343-SSNO1601	Active Retirement Network Ireland
B01424-SSNO1601	Care Alliance Ireland
B01960-SSNO1601	Spinal Injuries Ireland
B02504-SSNO1601	New Communities Partnership (NCP) Ltd.
B02534-SSNO1601	Volunteering Ireland Ltd.
B02933-SSNO1601	Free Legal Advice Centres Ltd.
B02938-SSNO1601	Belong to Youth Services
B03287-SSNO1601	Co-operative Housing Ireland Society Ltd.
B03407-SSNO1601	Irish Environmental Conservation Organisation for Youth-Unesco Clubs
B03427-SSNO1601	National Youth Council of Ireland
B03914-SSNO1601	Age Action Ireland Ltd.
B03915-SSNO1601	Educate Together
B04009-SSNO1601	Children in Hospital Ireland
B04010-SSNO1601	Children's Rights Alliance-Republic of Ireland
B04011-SSNO1601	Community Action Network Ltd.
B04012-SSNO1601	Community Workers Ltd.

B04013-SSNO1601	Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency Ltd.
B04014-SSNO1601	Down Syndrome Ireland
B04015-SSNO1601	European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland Ltd.
B04016-SSNO1601	European Network Against Racism (ENAR) Ireland
B04017-SSNO1601	GLEN Limited
B04018-SSNO1601	Inclusion Ireland – National Association for People with an Intellectual Disability
B04019-SSNO1601	Social Analysis and Action for Justice Ireland Ltd.
B04020-SSNO1601	Irish Council for Social Housing
B04021-SSNO1601	Irish Foster Care Association Ltd.
B04023-SSNO1601	I.N.O.U. Company Limited By Guarantee
B04024-SSNO1601	Irish Refugee Council Ltd
B04025-SSNO1601	Irish Rural Link Co-op Society Ltd.
B04026-SSNO1601	Medical Research Charities Ltd.
B04027-SSNO1601	The Men's Development Network Ltd
B04028-SSNO1601	Mental Health Reform
B04030-SSNO1601	National Women's Council of Ireland
B04032-SSNO1601	Rape Crisis Network Ireland Ltd.
B04033-SSNO1601	Rotha Teoranta
B04035-SSNO1601	Women's Aid Limited
B04036-SSNO1601	Simon Community of Ireland
B04037-SSNO1601	Parents Plus Limited
B05951-SSNO1601	Dyslexia Association of Ireland
B06506-SSNO1601	Family Carers Ireland
B06636-SSNO1601	Amen Support Services Ltd.
B06637-SSNO1601	Breaking Through Ltd.
B06638-SSNO1601	Chronic Pain Ireland Ltd.
B06639-SSNO1601	Disability Federation of Ireland
B06640-SSNO1601	Grow in Ireland
B06641-SSNO1601	Irish Deaf Society

B06642-SSNO1601	Irish Penal Reform Trust
B06643-SSNO1601	Move Ireland
B06644-SSNO1601	The Irish Hospice Foundation
B06645-SSNO1601	The Neurological Alliance of Ireland
B06646-SSNO1601	Migraine Association Of Ireland Ltd.
B06647-SSNO1601	Autism Spectrum Information Advice & Meeting Point
B06649-SSNO1601	Irish Association for Palliative Care
B06650-SSNO1601	The Irish Local Development Network Ltd.
B06651-SSNO1601	The National Network of Women's Refuges & Supports
B06652-SSNO1601	Anam Cara Parental & Sibling Bereavement Support
B06653-SSNO1601	Irish Athletic Boxing Association
B06654-SSNO1601	Irish Senior Citizens National Parliament Limited
B06663-SSNO1601	Arthritis Ireland
B06664-SSNO1601	Irish Stammering Association
B06665-SSNO1601	National Association for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Ireland