



Trust & Understanding: Public Confidence in Charities and Community Groups

Comissioned by

WE ACT

Prepared by

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Introduction

This report explores public attitudes toward the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, examining how trust has evolved and been influenced by a variety of factors. These include media representation over time, organisation size, transparency & accountability, and perceived effectiveness. We aim to explore the current state of public trust in Irish charities using research across different demographics to identify shifting patterns and trends.

The Irish charity sector plays a critical role in addressing societal needs, promoting community welfare, and advocating for social justice. This was clearer more than ever amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Appreciation for the charity sector, its workers and volunteers, was seen and shared, causing an increase of media recall, remember seeing or hearing about a charity in the media recently, amongst the public from 36% in December 2020 to 49% in May 2021 (nfpResearch, 2024). However, not all media attention is positive – so the impact of visibility on trust is not always constructive. This can be seen in the coverage of charity-related scandals such as the 2013 Central Remedial Clinic Scandal, or the 2016 Console Ireland Scandal where both received coverage from major news outlets including the Irish Times, the Irish Independent, and the Irish Examiner (Murphy, 2014 & Horgan-Jones, 2019). Other outlets covering these scandals included the Journal, the Irish Mirror, the Belfast Telegraph, the Irish Central, the Irish Post, the Irish Sun, and RTÉ. These stories have made many among the Irish public cautious of charities generally, and resulted in some people losing their trust in them (nfpResearch, 2024).

To provide a comprehensive overview, this report includes insights from those working and volunteering within the community and voluntary sector in addition to public sentiment data. Frontline experience offers valuable context to the broader public perceptions and reveals the challenges organisations face in responding to media scrutiny and public expectations.

Using the latest data from research associated with the We Act campaign, this report aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the Irish charity sector today. By examining both public perceptions and the views of those within the sector, we hope to offer a balanced and informed perspective that can guide future strategies for enhancing trust and strengthening the relationships between charities and the communities they serve.

Methodology

Data Collection

Data referred to in this report are primarily drawn from a series of surveys of the general public in the Republic of Ireland carried out online by nfpResearch. Fieldwork dates were as follows:

- Wave 1: March 12th – 30th 2021
- Wave 2: May 4th – 31st 2022
- Wave 3: November 14th – December 11th 2023
- Wave 4: October 30th – November 18th 2024

Respondents were asked general questions about the charity and community sector. The surveys sampled 1,000 members of the general public and were representative for age, gender, province and social grade. The samples for the Irish general public surveys are as follows:

Sex

- Female: 510
- Male: 490

Age

- 16-24: 104
- 25-34: 180
- 35-44: 200
- 45-54: 170
- 55-64: 140
- 65+: 170

Four Provinces

- Dublin City & County: 280
- Rest of Leinster: 270
- Munster: 270
- Connaught & Part of Ulster: 180

Social Grade

- AB: 310
- C1: 340
- C2: 150
- DEF: 200

Finally, figures that reference the views of those working and volunteering in the community and voluntary sector refer to a series of surveys carried out by nfpResearch in parallel to the general public polls described above. A survey link was shared by members of the We Act Steering Group with their list of contacts and fieldwork was conducted by nfpResearch. Fieldwork included collecting responses from participants, monitoring how many surveys were submitted, and the quality of the responses. Fieldwork dates and number of responses are listed below: ▼

- Wave 1: May 10th – 31st 2021 (783 responses)
- Wave 2: May 12th – June 7th 2022 (620 responses)
- Wave 3: November 13th – 7th December 2023 (529 responses)
- Wave 4: October 25th – November 26th 2024 (331 responses)

Since respondents were collected via convenience sampling using the We Act Steering Group contacts, the demographic breakdown of respondents from wave to wave varied; however, all respondents were involved with the charity and community sector. Approximately half of the sampled respondents from wave to wave described themselves as full time employees in the charity and community sector. Approximately a third of the respondents from wave to wave described themselves as volunteers. Approximately a quarter of respondents from wave to wave described themselves as board members. Approximately 5% of respondents from wave to wave described themselves as consultants and this was the same with those who described themselves as holding other roles.

Analysis

Results from the surveys are reported throughout as valid percentages of the sample as a whole, except where it is noted otherwise. For example, when it is indicated that a percentage is not from the whole sample this indicates that the data was filtered for demographic groups.

Driver Analysis

We conducted a statistical analysis known as driver analysis, a form of linear regression. This is a statistical method that looks at how important some factors (drivers) are in explaining another factor (the outcome variable). In this analysis we took individual level trust in the community and voluntary sector as an outcome variable and attempted to explain it in terms of individual attitudes towards the sector as well as personal demographics.

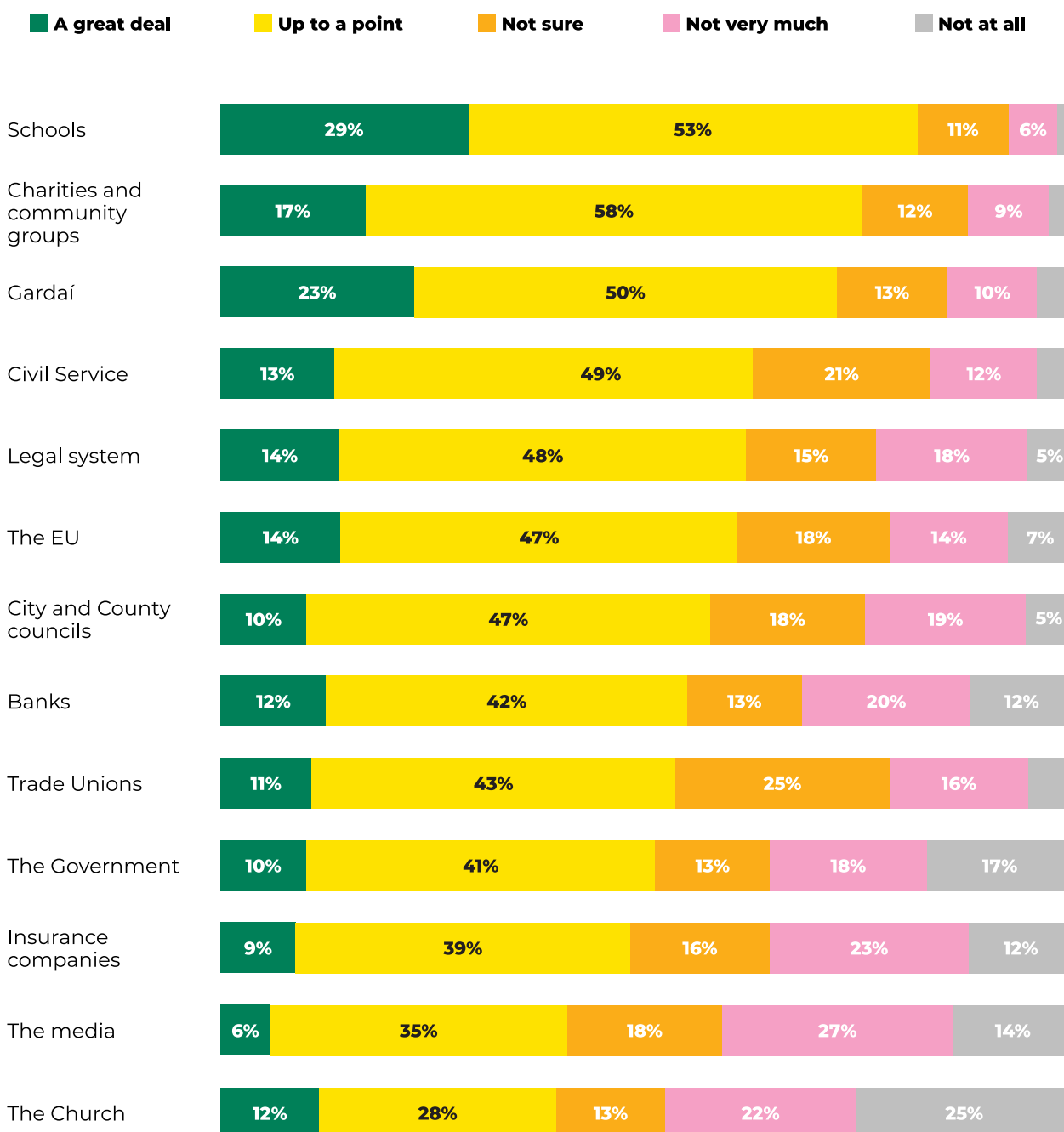
The agreement statements and demographics from our survey data were fed into this regression model. We then looked to understand which ones best predicted trust or lack of trust in Irish charities and community groups. These drivers are explained in more detail in the final section of the report.

Findings

Trust in Charities and Community Groups

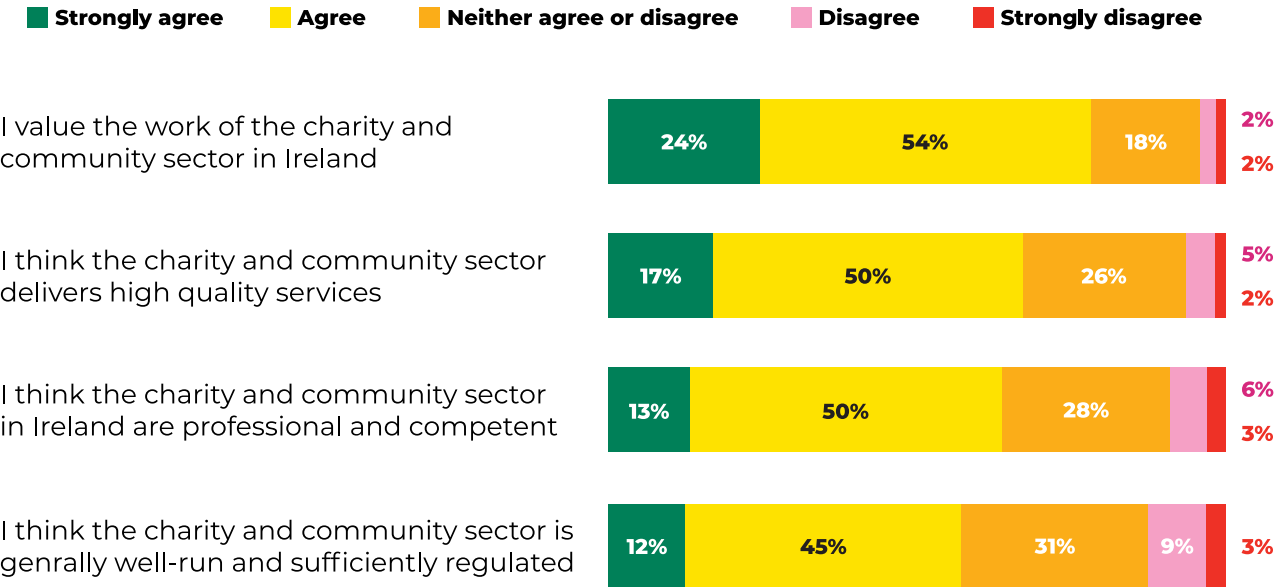
The Irish public generally maintains a high level of trust in charities and community groups, as 75% of respondents expressed “a great deal” or “up to a point” of trust in the sector in 2024. This figure has been consistently high over the past four years at 72% in 2023, 73% in 2022, and 73% in 2021.

Figure 1: Respondents were asked, “Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.” The bar chart depicts levels of agreement or disagreement with different statements.



As Figure 2 shows, a high proportion of the public value the charity and community sector. 78% of respondents agreed (i.e., strongly agree or agree) with the statement, “I value the work of the charity and community sector in Ireland,” while only 4% disagreed (i.e., strongly disagree or disagree). 67% of respondents agreed that “the charity and community sector deliver high quality services,” and only 7% disagreed. 63% of respondents agreed that “the charity and community sector in Ireland are professional and competent,” and 9% disagreed. Finally, 57% of respondents agreed that “the charity and community sector is generally well-run and sufficiently regulated,” which is still significantly more than the 12% who disagreed.

Figure 2: Respondents were asked, “Do you use any of the following social media or websites?” Bar chart shows the frequency of use for the listed social media platforms.

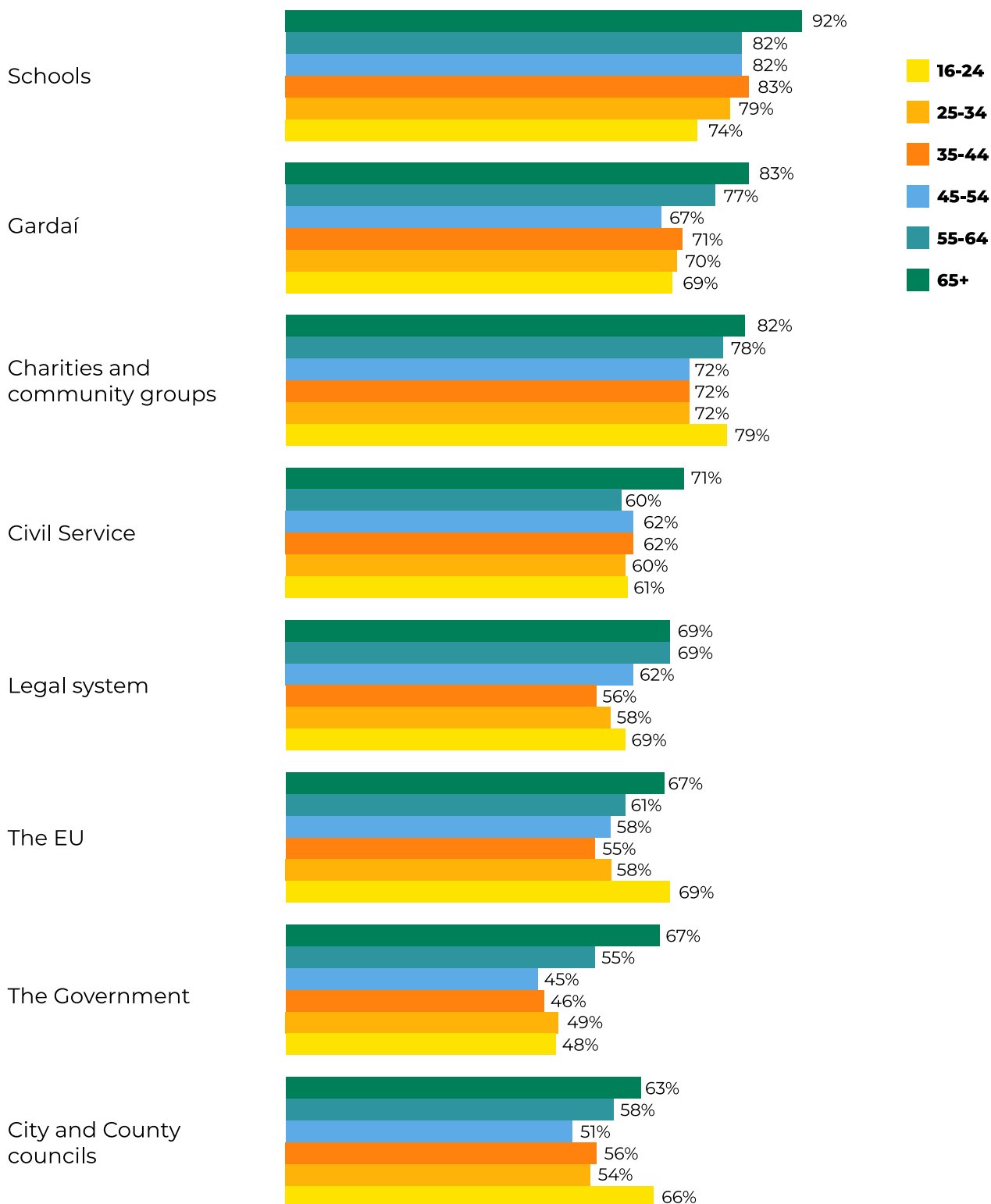


Trust in Institutions by Age

When asked “To what extent do you trust each of the following institutions?”, respondents have consistently reported that they trusted schools more than any other institution for the four waves of We Act research. 82% of respondents said they trust schools “a great deal” (29%) or “up to a point” (53%) and 6% said they trust them “not very much” (6%) or “not at all” (1%). In the 2024 wave of We Act research Charities and community groups were the second-most trusted institution; however, in the first three waves they were the third-most trusted institution. 75% of respondents said they trusted charities and community groups “a great deal” (17%) or “up to a point” (58%) and 12% said they trust them “not very much” (9%) or “not at all” (3%). In the 2024 wave of research An Garda Síochána was the third most trusted institution, 73% of respondents said they trusted it “a great deal” (23%) or “up to a point” (50%) and 14% saying they trust it “not very much” (10%) or “not at all” (4%). In the past An Garda Síochána was the second most trusted institution.

Figure 3 below shows the demographic breakdown of the top eight institutions respondents said they trusted “a great deal” or “up to a point”. When looking at charities and community groups there were high levels of trust among younger and older age groups, with slightly lower levels of trust in middle age groups. Those over 65 had higher levels of trust for many institutions compared to other age groups. 92% of 65-year-olds and older stated that they trusted schools, 83% An Garda Síochána, 82% Charities and community groups, and 71% the Civil Service these percentages being higher than most if not all other age groups. A similar proportion (79%) of 16–24-year-olds also responded that they trusted the Charities and community groups compared to those over 65-years-old; however, 16-24-year-olds had a lower proportion of trust in schools (74%) and An Garda Síochána (69%) compared to other age groups. 16-24-year-olds (79%) and over 65-year-olds (82%) had the highest percentages of those who trusted Charities and community groups with 55-64-year-olds also close at 78%. 16-24-year-olds and over 65-year-olds also had the highest percentages of those who trusted the EU, 69% and 67% respectively, as well as City and County councils, 66% and 63% respectively.

Figure 3: Respondents were asked “To what extent do you trust each of the following institutions?” This shows those who responded “A great deal” + “Up to a point” by age group.

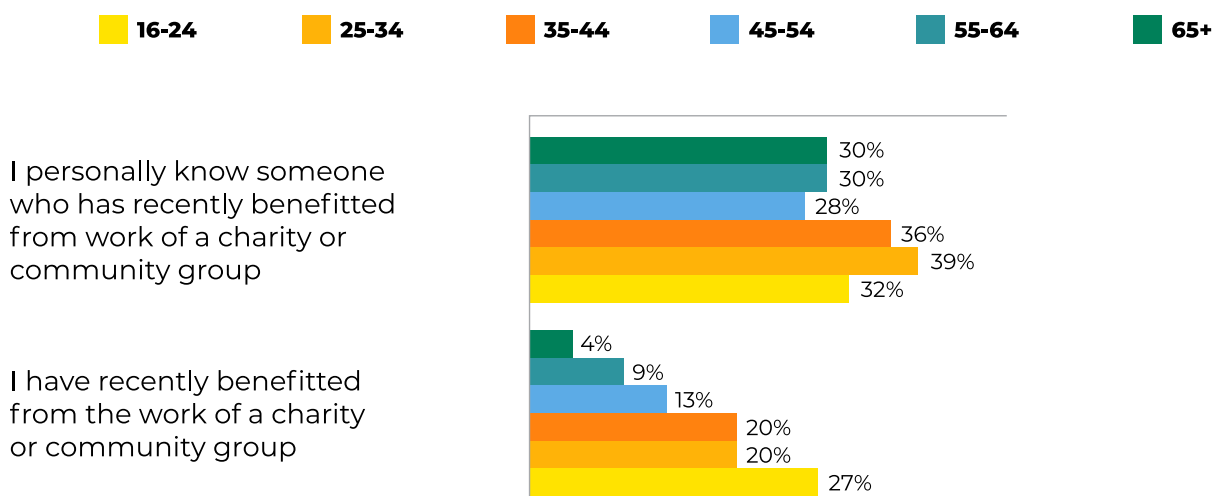


Affiliation with Charities and Community Groups

A third (33%) of respondents said yes, “I personally know someone who has recently benefitted from the work of a charity or community group” and 58% said no. When asking if respondents themselves “have recently benefited from the work of a charity or community group” 15% said yes and 78% said no.

When asked if they had recently benefited from the work of a charity or community group, 16-24-year-olds were more likely to report that they personally had (Figure 4). Personal benefit from a charity or community group appears to decline with advancing age, while the pattern is less clear for those who personally knew someone who had, as similar levels across age groups reported knowing someone who had benefitted.

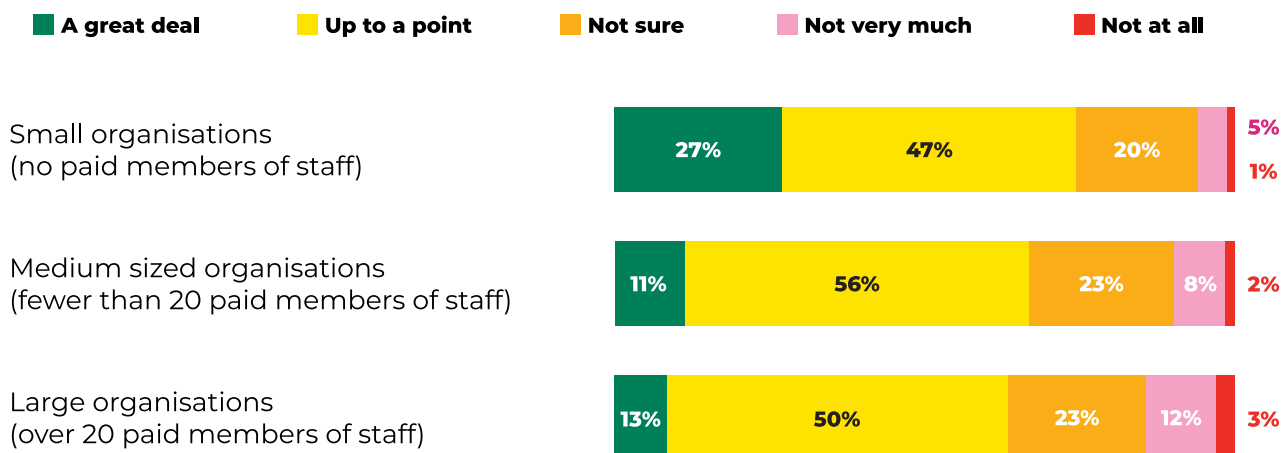
Figure 4: Respondents were asked "Please indicate which of the following below are true for you." The bar graph shows age breakdown for two statements about benefiting from charity work and those who responded yes.



Organisation Size and Public Trust

When asked about levels of trust by size of organisation, significantly higher numbers reported trusting a small organisation “a great deal” (27%) compared to a medium organisation (11%) or a large organisation (8%) (Figure 5). ▼

Figure 5: Respondents were asked, "To what extent do you trust each of the following types of charity and community groups?" Bar graph shows levels of trust for small, medium, and large charities.



More respondents also believed that small charities and community groups are more understanding of people's needs they exist to help (67%) and are more generally trustworthy organisations (61%) than large and medium organisations (32% and 49% respectively) (Figure 6).

Similarly, when it comes to spending money, 57% of respondents believed that large charities and community groups "are often wasteful in how they spend money" while 27% believed that of medium charities and 11% believed that of small organisations.

78% of respondents also believed that small charities and community groups are run by volunteers and 62% believed that their chief executive is also a volunteer.

However, small charities and community groups were seen as less professional, with just 28% of respondents viewing them as "quite professional in their approach" compared to 62% for large organisations and 47% for medium organisations. 53% of respondents viewed small organisations as "usually a bit amateurish in their approach" compared to 12% for large organisations and 20% for medium organisations. When asked if "They should be able to deliver public services" 50% of respondents said large organisations could, 36% said medium organisations should, and only 23% said small organisations should.

Figure 6: Respondents were asked "From the following statements, please indicate whether you think each applies to any of the following organisations:" they then selected from either small, medium, or large charities or community groups and had the option not sure.

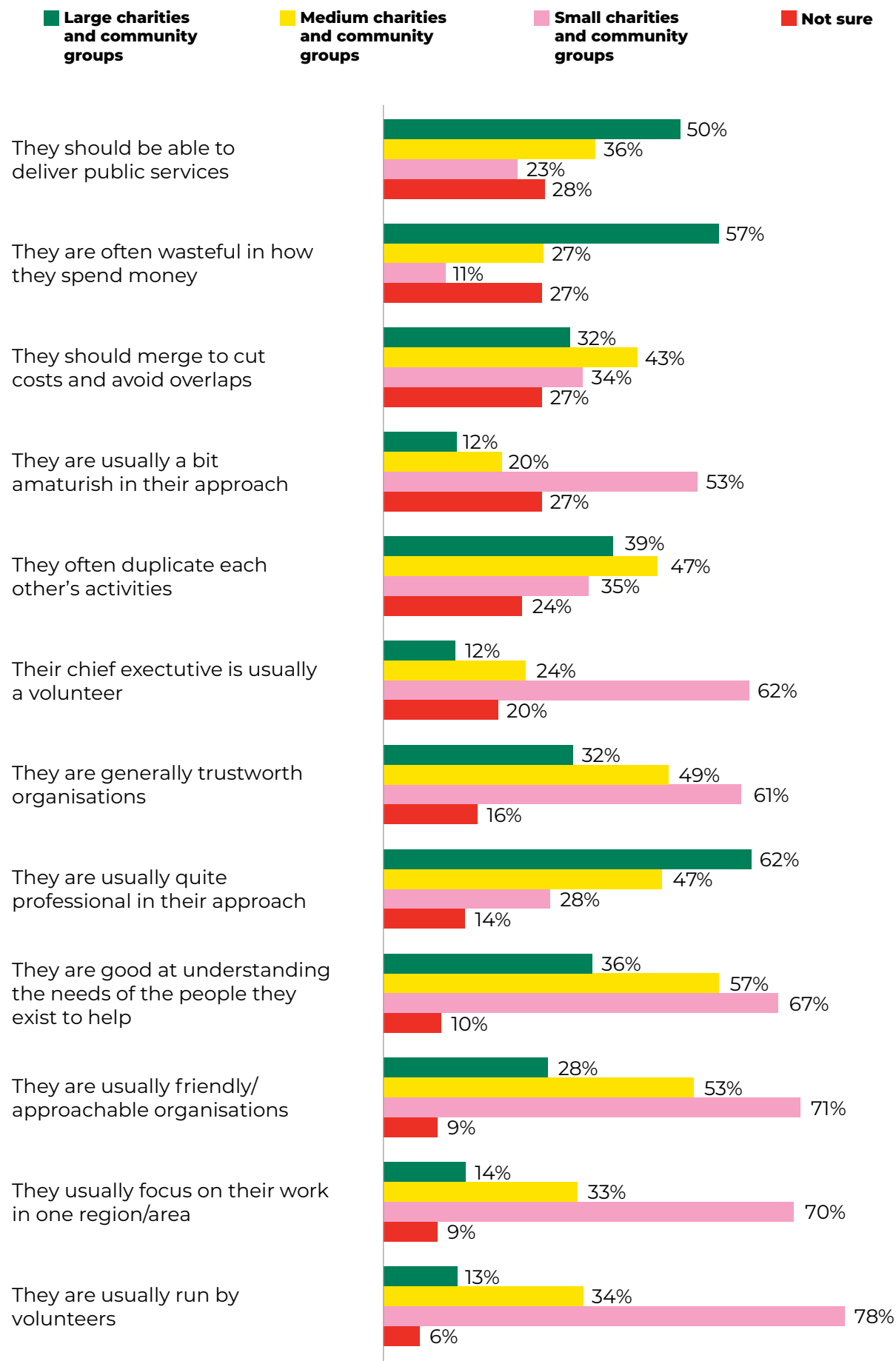
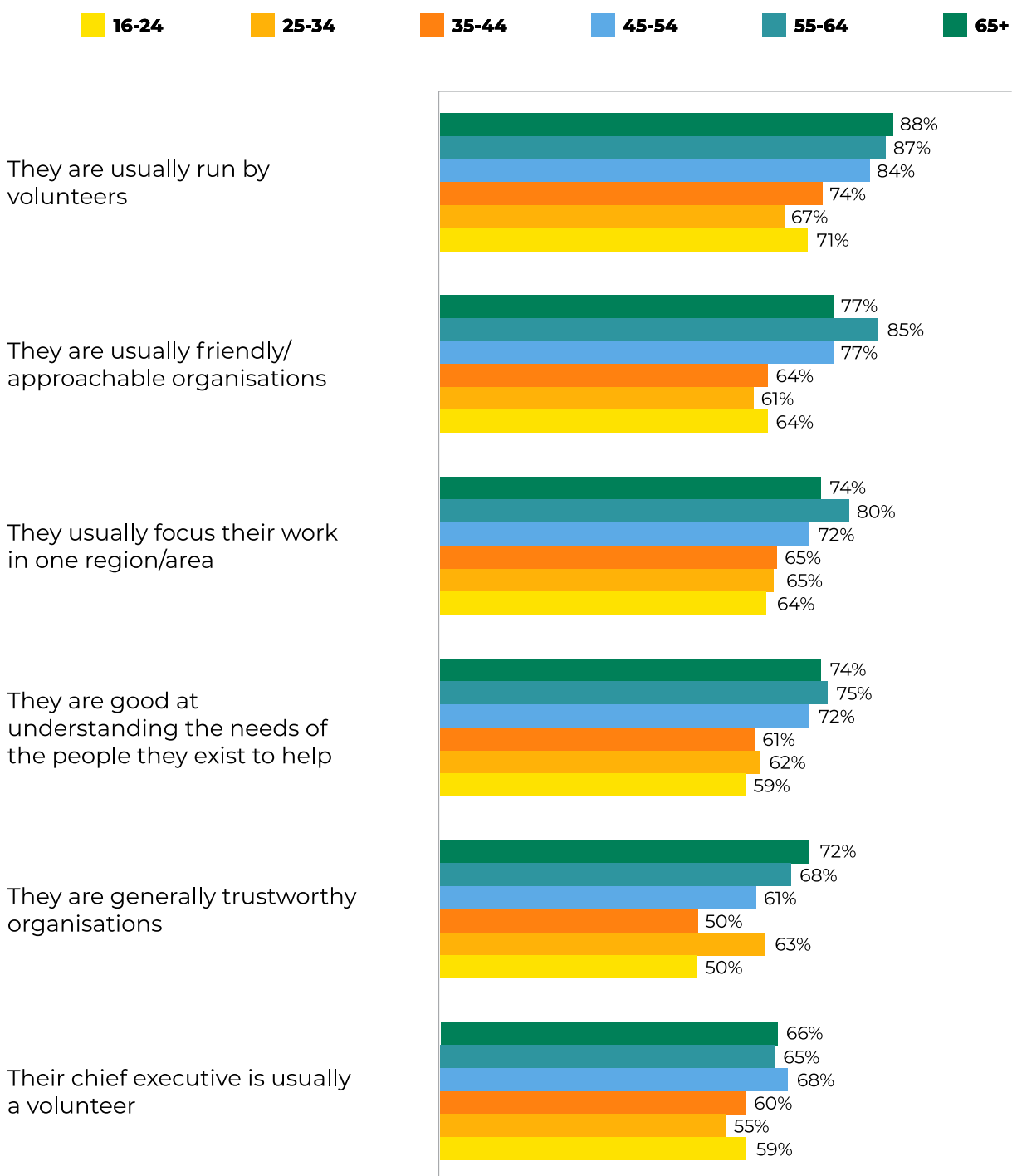


Figure 7 shows a breakdown of assumptions about small organisations by age. Respondents 45-years-old and older, were more likely to say that small organisations were run by volunteers, usually friendly and approachable organisations, focus their work in one region/area, good at understanding the needs of the people they exist to help, generally trustworthy, and have a volunteer chief executive. For medium and large organisations there were no distinct patterns for agreement with these statements when broken down by age.

Figure 7: Respondents were asked "From the following statements, please indicate whether you think each applies to any of the following organisations:" they then selected from either small, medium, or large charities or community groups and had the option not sure.

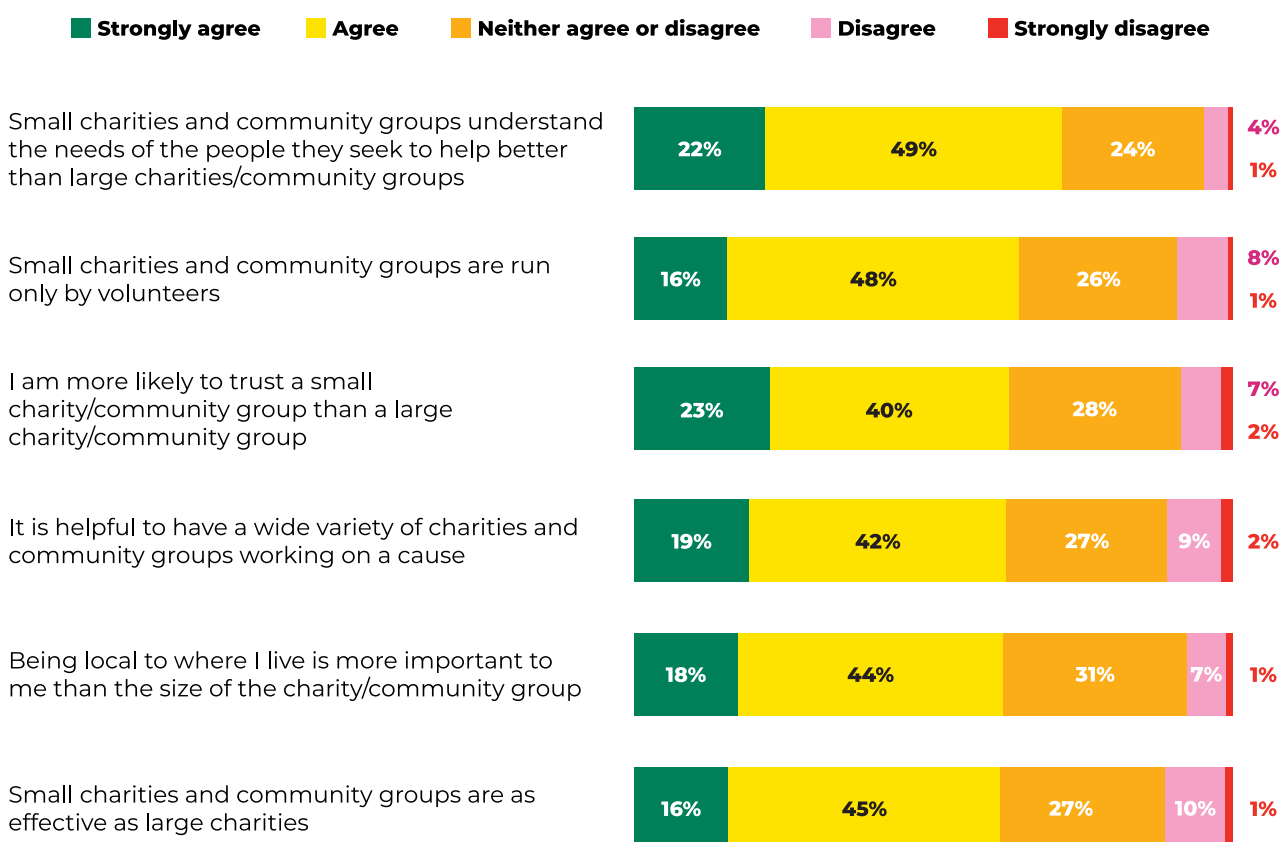


Respondents were further asked their opinion on charities and community groups overall (Figure 8). Almost three-quarters (71%) of respondents agreed (i.e. Strongly agree and Agree) that “small charities and community groups understand the needs of the people they seek to help better than large charities / community groups”, while 64% of respondents agreed that “small charities and community groups are run only by volunteers” and 63% agreed that they are “more likely to trust a small charity / community group than a large charity / community group”.

When asked about the breadth of the sector, 61% of respondents agreed that “it is helpful to have a wide variety of charities and community groups working on a cause”.

Local organisations were also seen as important, 62% of respondents agreed that “being local to where I live is more important to me than the size of the charity / community group” indicating the importance of local charities or local charitable works by national organisations.

Figure 8: Respondents were asked, "Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements." The bar graphs show levels of agreement or disagreement to six statements about small charities / community groups.

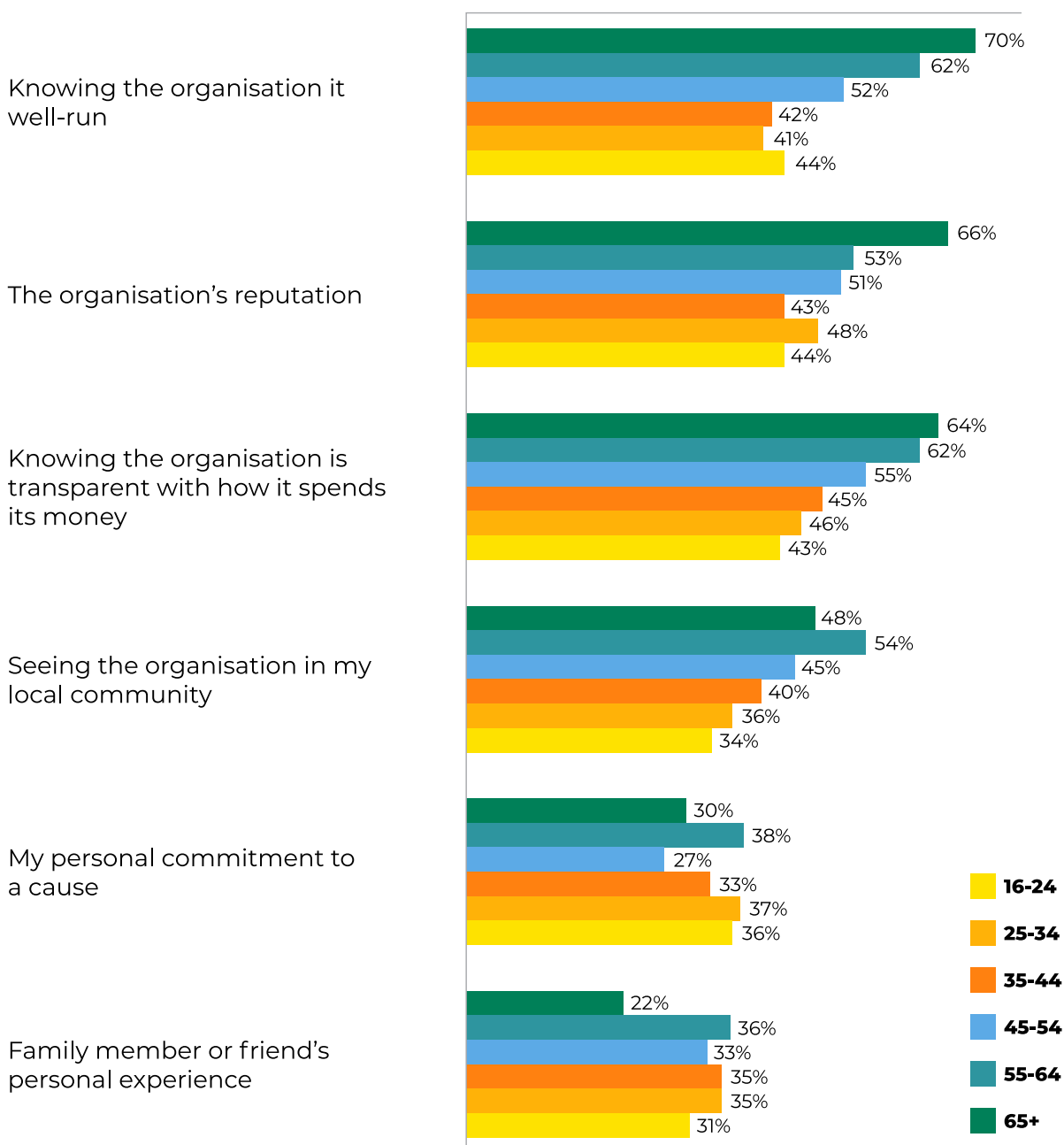


Drivers of support

“Knowing the organisation is transparent with how it spends its money” is the most important factor for supporting a particular charity or community group, 52% of respondents chose it as a top five contributing factor to their support. “Knowing the organisation is well run” and “The organisation’s reputation” are tied for second as 51% of respondents chose these as top five contributors to their support.

“Knowing the organisation is well-run,” “The organisation’s reputation,” and “Knowing the organisation is transparent with how it spends its money” are the top three factors contributing to support for those who are 65+.

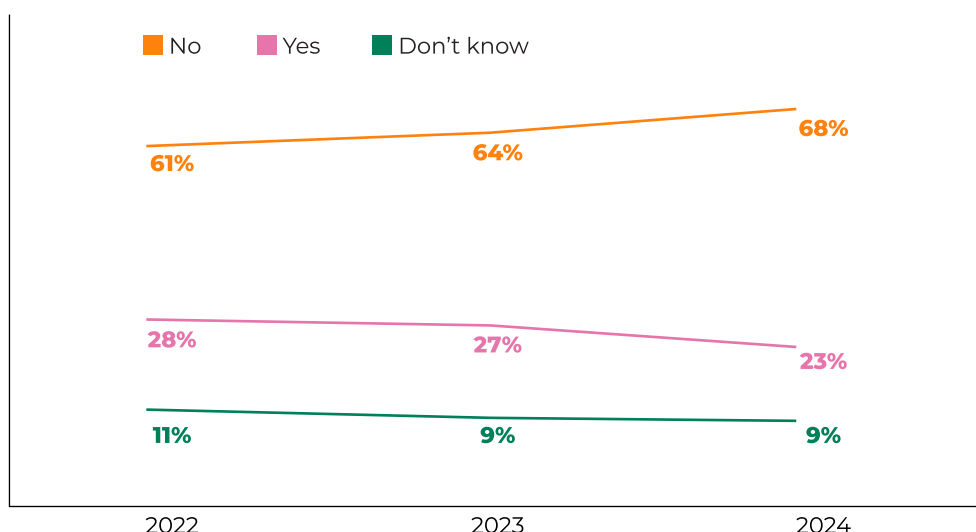
Figure 9: Respondents were asked, “When it comes to supporting a particular charity or community group, what are the most important factors to you? Please select up to five from the list below.” The bar chart shows age breaks for different factors contributing to support.



Media Narratives and Public Trust

Respondents indicated a relatively high level of trust for charities and community groups (75%); however, this does not connect with recall of charities in the media. Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) reported not having seen anything about charities in the media recently (Figure 10), this is higher than in 2023 (63%) and 2022 (61%).

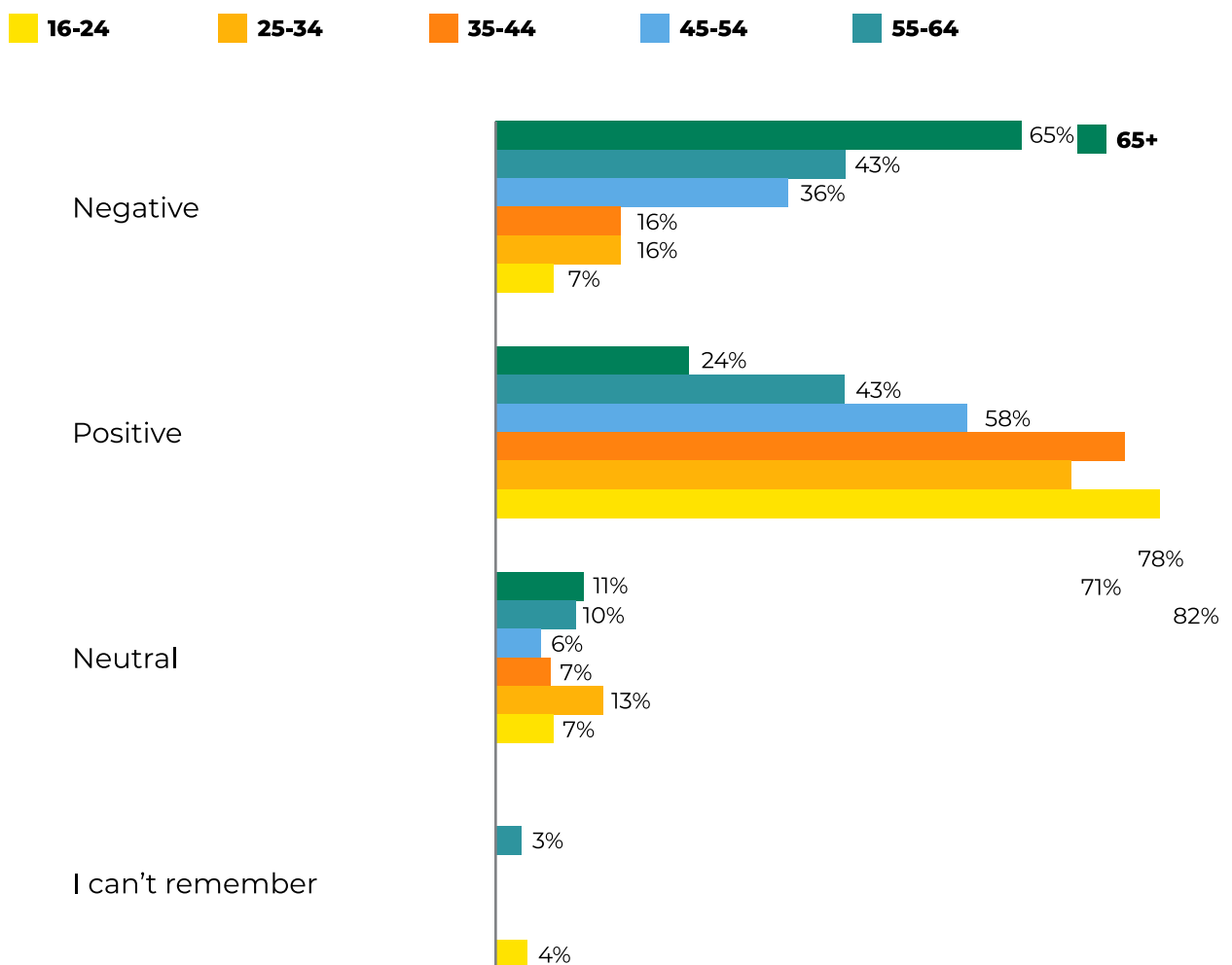
Figure 10: Respondents were asked "Have you seen, read or heard anything in the media or on social media recently about charities?" The trend graph shows their yes, no and don't know answers from 2022 to 2024.



For those who have encountered media coverage of charities, 59% said that the media coverage portrayed charities in a positive light, 31% said it portrayed charities in a negative light, 9% said it portrayed charities in a neutral light, and 1% said they can't remember.

When broken down by demographics, there was a pronounced split between the sentiment of content younger and older age groups have seen, 82% of respondents aged 16-24 indicated seeing positive media coverage of charities, compared to just 24% of those aged 65 and older (Figure 11). 65% of those aged 65 and older, and 43% of those aged 55-64 stated they saw negative media portrayal of charities.

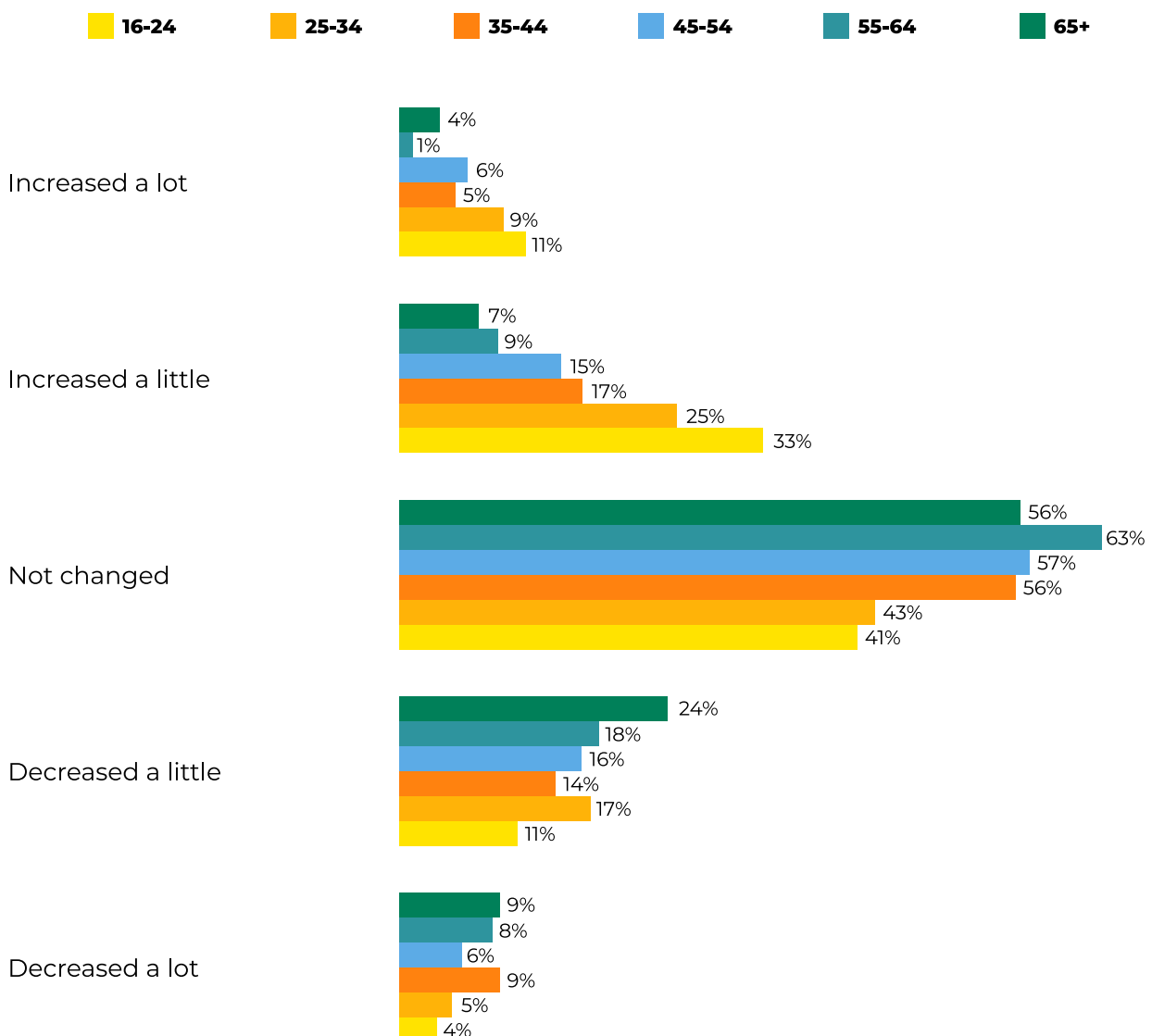
Figure 11: Respondents were asked, "Did this media coverage portray charities in a positive, negative or neutral light?" Their answer choices were negative, positive, neutral, and can't remember. This bar graph is also broken down by age group.



Approximately half (53%) of respondents stated that over the last two years their overall trust and confidence in charities and community groups in general has not changed. Less than a quarter (23%) said their trust and confidence increased (i.e. Increased a lot and Increased a little). Less than a quarter (24%) said that their trust and confidence decreased (i.e. Decreased a lot and Decreased a little).

Almost half (44%) of respondents aged 16-24 indicated that their trust and confidence in charities and community groups had increased in recent years, compared to 11% of people aged 65+. About half of respondents in the 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65+ age groups had experienced no change in trust and confidence. Those in the 65 and over age group had the most people experience a decrease in trust and confidence at 33% (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Respondents were asked, “Over the last two years would you say your overall trust and confidence in charities and community groups in general has...?” Bar chart showing responses broken down by age.

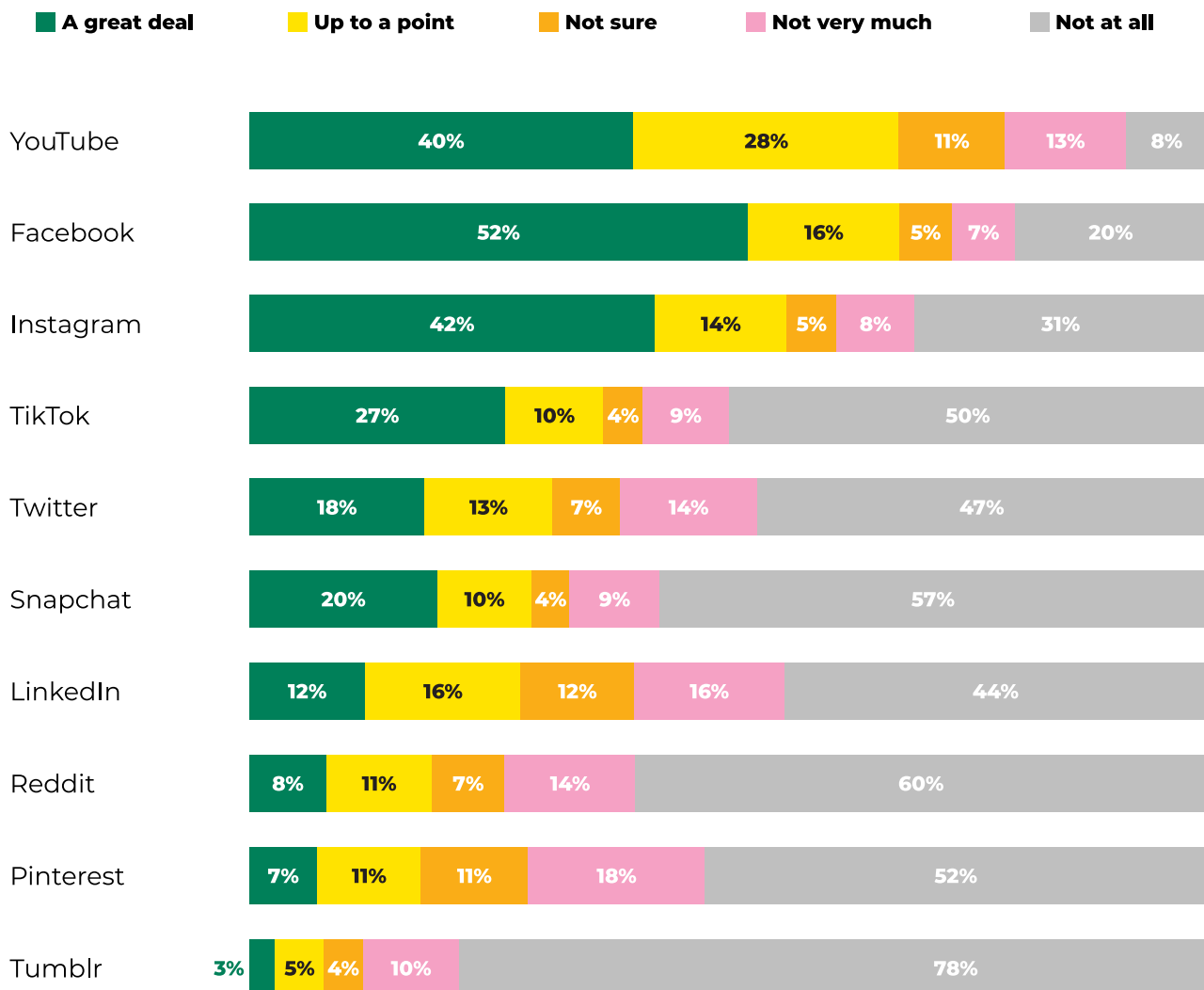


Media Consumption

Respondents were asked about their different forms of media consumption. 41% of respondents were not reading a newspaper regularly and 52% were not reading a Sunday newspaper regularly. Of the regular weekly papers, the Irish Independent was the most popular with 30% of respondents reading two or more editions in an average week, the Irish Times was second at 27%. Of the Sunday newspapers that were read once or more in an average month the Sunday Independent was the most popular with 20% of respondents reading it.

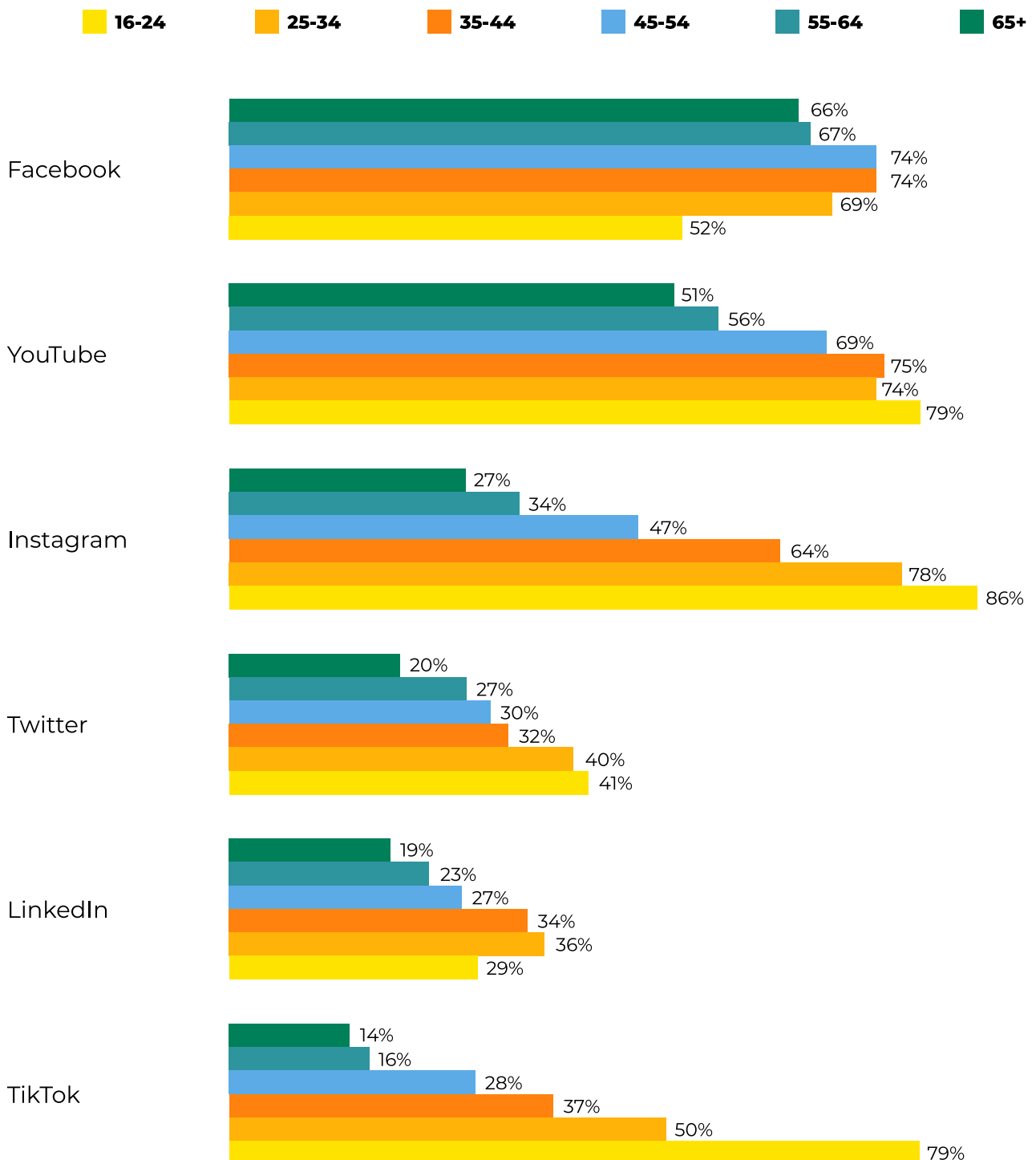
YouTube and Facebook were the most popular social media platforms with both being used by 68% of respondents either daily or weekly.

Figure 13: Respondents were asked, “Do you use any of the following social media or websites?” Bar chart shows the frequency of use for the listed social media platforms.



Facebook was less popular amongst 16-24-year-olds than other age groups, but 52% of 16-24-year-olds said they used it daily or weekly. Similarly, YouTube was less popular amongst those who were 65+ than other age groups but 51% of those over 65 said they used it daily or weekly.

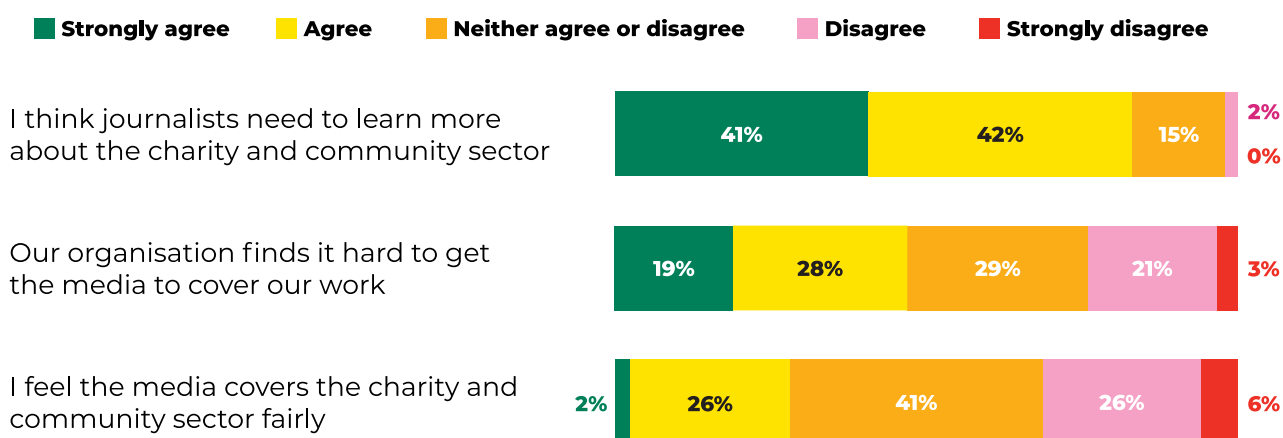
Figure 14: Respondents were asked, “Do you use any of the following social media or websites?” Bar chart shows those who used the listed social media platforms daily or weekly.



Attitudes within the Sector

When asked to think about media coverage of the sector and their organisation, 83% of respondents agreed that journalists need to learn more about the charity and community sector. When asked if the media covers the charity and community sector fairly, 32% of respondents disagreed with that statement (Figure 15). About half (47%) of respondents agreed that it is hard for their organisation to get media coverage of their work.

Figure 15: Respondents were asked, "Thinking about media coverage of the sector and your organisation, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" They then selected their level of agreement or disagreement to three different statements.



Analysis

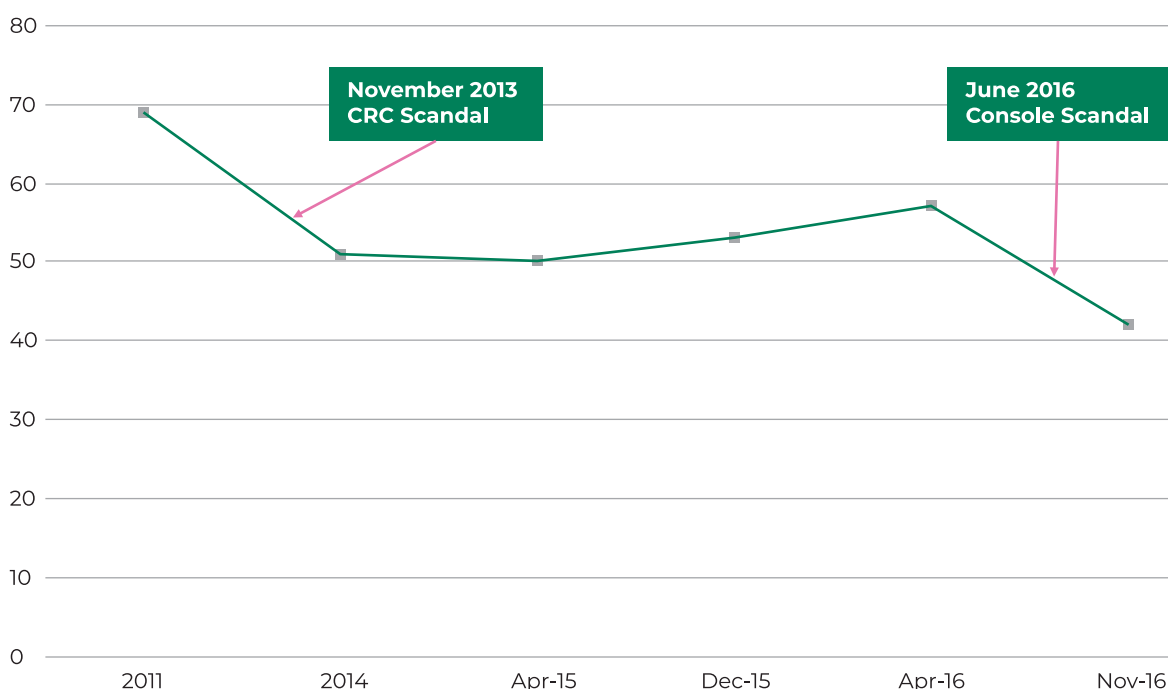
In the discussion section we examine the findings of this research, inspecting factors that might influence public attitudes toward the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. These factors include media representation over time, organisation size, transparency & accountability, and perceived effectiveness. The state of public trust in Irish charities was explored across different demographics to identify shifting patterns and trends. We also reviewed insights from those working and volunteering within the community and volunteer sector in addition to public sentiment data for context. In the following discussion section, we will inspect potential insights from the data in the findings section.

Trust and Timing

Public trust in Irish charities is a critical factor in the success and sustainability of the sector. Trust directly influences not only the willingness of individuals to donate and volunteer but also their overall support for charitable causes (Amárach, 2023 & nfpResearch, 2024).

In the early to mid-part of the last decade, trust in the sector fluctuated in line with media coverage of notable scandals in the sector (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Percentage of respondents who trust the sector and timing of media coverage of sector scandals.



Over the past three years, trust has increased, and we now see a stabilisation of trust in the sector with about 75% of the public trusting charities and community groups “a great deal” or “up to a point.”

However, when asked about just “charities” rather than “charities and community groups”, there is a notable difference in trust for charities alone. 61% of respondents reported, “a great deal” or “up to a point” levels of trust for “charities” when asked, “To what extent do you trust the following institutions” (nfpResearch, 2024). This suggests that framing and the language used to describe the sector may have an impact on trust.

Affiliation with Charities and Community Groups

A majority of respondents valued the work of the charity and community sector (78%), thought the charity and community sector delivers high quality services (67%), thought the charity and community sector in Ireland is professional and competent (63%), and the charity and community sector is generally well-run and sufficiently regulated (57%). This aligns with other sector research, commissioned by the Charities Regulator, which showed strong support for increased regulation and controls (Amárach Research, 2023). nfpPublic Ireland has also found that the general public believed that the charity sector is well regulated and is increasingly aware of the Charity Regulator and its role in regulation of the charity sector in Ireland (nfpResearch, 2024).

It’s notable that respondents aged 16–24 and 65+ indicated the highest level of trust in charities and community groups of all age groups. This trend is especially noteworthy given the general trend that younger generations are more sceptical of traditional institutions as they have the lowest proportion of members that trust schools, and the second lowest in institutions like An Garda Síochána, and the third lowest for the legal system. Charities and community groups are the institution that 16-24-year-olds trust most.

However, 16-24-year-olds’ trust in charities may be explained by several factors unique to their generational experience. Young people in Ireland have grown up in a world where social issues, environmental concerns, and global crises are at the forefront of public discourse (Carnegie, 2022 & Winyi, 2024). Being the first truly digital-native generation, we often see a heightened awareness and passion for social justice and active engagement with a wide range of causes (Carnegie, 2022; nfpResearch, 2024 & Winyi, 2024). This has developed, in part, thanks to social media and other forms of information-sharing that propel activism and charitable involvement into the spotlight (Carnegie, 2022; nfpResearch, 2024 & Winyi, 2024).

16-24-year-olds are far more likely to have personal or second-hand experience with charities and community groups than older generations. This is likely a factor in why our research shows that they are the most likely to have improved perceptions of charities in the past two years. This age group engages with charities as beneficiaries, with 32% knowing someone who has benefited from charities and 27% having personally benefitted, which may explain their positive view of the sector.

The current landscape of trust in Irish charities is marked by a stable yet cautious confidence from the public. While total trust is not widespread, there are reasonable proportions of those who trust charities and community groups across the population which suggest that the charity and community group sector continues to maintain its credibility. There is a gradual decline in those directly benefitting from the work of charities or community groups as age increases. The middle age ranges between 25 and 64 decrease incrementally when looking at the proportion of those who recently benefited from the work of a charity or community group. These groups are likely the most economically and socially stable of all age groups, making it less likely that they need to avail of support provided by charity and community groups. This may demonstrate people feeling distanced from charities or community groups as they grow older; however, they may be unaware of the breadth of the sectors services and not realise that they are engaging and/or benefiting from them.

Organisation Size and Trust

In the Irish charity sector, the size of an organisation has a significant impact on public trust. Our research suggests that the Irish public holds small charities in higher regard than medium or large charities in three of the metrics we measure, i.e. that they are generally more trustworthy, are better at understanding the needs of the people they exist to help and are usually friendlier / more approachable. Over twice as many people (27%) report trusting a small charity “a great deal” compared to a medium (11%) or large charity (8%). This heightened trust in small charities is rooted in widespread perceptions: compared to large charities, people believe that smaller charities are as effective (61%), are more understanding of people’s needs (71%), and are more trustworthy (63%).

Based on our findings, the belief that small charities are more attuned to local needs and closer to the communities they serve could contribute to the higher proportion of respondents trusting them. 63% of respondents strongly

agreed or agreed to the statement “I am more likely to trust a small charity / community group than a large charity / community group.” This is supported by other research which found that small local charities have the highest level of trust (Amárach, 2023).

Grassroots efforts where resources are perceived to be directly channelled into causes instead of salaries may foster better connections with donors, who may feel their contributions have a more immediate and tangible impact. 52% of respondents also stated that one of the most important factors in supporting a particular charity or community group is “knowing the organisation is transparent with how it spends its money”. When considering regulation requirements large organisations are transparent about their spending. 57% of respondents believe that large charities and community groups are “wasteful in how they spend money”.

While small charities and community groups are seen as more community-oriented, they are also perceived as more amateurish. 53% of respondents said they saw small charities and community groups as “usually a bit amateurish in their approach.” Small charities are seen as less professional, only 28% of respondents saw small charities as “quite professional in their approach”, perhaps lacking the resources and sophistication of larger organisations. This perceived lack of professionalism does not necessarily deter public support and may enhance the idea that a charity is more community focused, as 67% of respondents believe that small charities “are good at understanding the needs of the people they exist to help” and 61% of respondents see them as trustworthy organisations.

The perception that small charities are often run by volunteers rather than paid staff may reinforce this sense of authenticity, with 62% of respondents believing that small charities’ and community groups’ chief executives are volunteers.

The bias toward small charities is more pronounced among those over 45, particularly those aged 55 and over. Almost three quarters of those 45 and older thought that small charities “are good at understanding the needs of the people they exist to help.” In contrast, only 59% of those aged 16-34 thought the same of small charities.

The public perception of small charities being amateurish does not appear to hamper but enhance their trustworthiness; however, they are also perceived as less capable of delivering public services compared to larger charities.

Media Narratives and Public Trust

Media coverage plays a role in shaping public perceptions of charities. The narratives presented in the media – whether through traditional outlets like newspapers and television or through digital and social media platforms – can influence how people view the charity sector (Amárach, 2023 & nfpResearch, 2024). Of the 23% of respondents that saw, read or heard anything in the media or on social media about charities, 90% said the media coverage portrayed charities in either a positive (59%) or negative (31%) light. In the nfpPublic Ireland research 38% of respondents recalled having seen, read, or heard about charities in the media (nfpResearch, 2024). Of those respondents, 52% reported that the coverage changed how they felt about charities. 31% said their view improved while 21% said it worsened (nfpResearch, 2024). There was also 48% who said it did not change how they felt about charities (nfpResearch, 2024). Approximately half (52%) of those who recalled seeing charities in the media thought the media they saw impacted how they viewed charities (nfpResearch, 2024).

A striking aspect of the current media landscape is that 68% of respondents reported not having seen anything about charities in the media recently.

For those who have encountered media coverage of charities, there is a pronounced split between the types of content younger and older generations have seen. For older individuals, stories about financial mismanagement may affect their trust more dramatically as they are more likely to be regular supporters and may feel that their donations have been misused or misallocated (nfpResearch, 2024). This can be seen in their assumptions about larger charities where 64% of those aged 55-64 and 65% of those aged 65+ say that larger charities are wasteful in how they spend their money.

The broader implication is that while younger people might see the charity sector as trustworthy, impactful, and aligned with their values, older people may view it with increased wariness. This generational divide may reflect different media consumption habits but also the broader narratives that resonate with each age group.

When we look at attitudes from within the sector, we can see that there was a strong feeling that traditional media sources do not have enough knowledge of the charity sector. 83% of respondents who work or volunteer in the sector strongly agreed or agreed that journalists need to learn more about the charity and community sector, while only 28% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the media covers the charity and community sector fairly.

We can also see that achieving coverage is difficult, 47% of respondents agreed that it is hard for their organisation to get media coverage of their work. The public's preference for small charities may present both opportunities and challenges for the sector. The high level of trust and positive perceptions associated with small charities can be leveraged to build stronger community ties and increase support for grassroots initiatives.



Recommendations

From the Research

Overall, the charity and community sector is well trusted by the public and organisations should do more to display where that trust has come from. No matter the size of the organisation, charities and community groups should communicate openly about how they are regulated and what services they provide.

The public appreciates knowing that there is a Charity Regulator. Charities could speak more about how they are regulated by this body and what rules they abide by. For smaller organisations this could help to combat perceptions of amateurism as having a regulatory body and standards they must meet may exhibit professionalism. For large organisations this allows them to show the public that they are being held accountable. This is particularly important when considering how their funds are being used as the public is more likely to think large organisations are wasteful with their spending.

The significant gap in exposure to charities in media suggests that charities may be struggling to maintain a recognisable presence in traditional media, such as television, news, radio, and newspapers, which could limit their ability to influence public perception on a broad scale. People may also lack awareness of the many ways they interact with charity and community group initiatives and services. Greater exposure through paid and unpaid media channels may help to drive a positive narrative around the sector as a whole.

Lack of exposure to charities in the media may have less of an impact on the trust of the sector than exposure to negative press. For charities, the challenge lies in navigating these differing media landscapes to maintain and build trust across all age groups. With the media environment becoming increasingly fragmented, it is crucial for charities to engage effectively with both traditional and digital media. This means not only ensuring that their successes and positive impacts are communicated widely but also addressing any negative coverage proactively and transparently.

Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There are several limitations to our research that are worth addressing and for future research to consider inspecting.

First, our findings rely on self-reported data from respondents who might have interpreted the survey questions or statements differently. For example, when being asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement “being local to where I live is more important to me than the size of the charity / community group,” respondents could have understood the term “local” as referring to community-based and grassroots charities, or local centres of larger charities. Future research on this topic may consider providing further clarification or differentiating between these two types of “local” charities.

Another example of a topic to explore more in future research is how people define different sizes of charities and which charities they place in each category as individuals’ definitions of large, medium, and small organisations may differ. In the survey there is a brief definition based on the number of paid workers for charity sizes, but how do respondents define charities sizes themselves? Is providing one brief definition enough to redefine what these different charities sizes have been interpreted as for each respondent?

Respondents for this research are found through an online panel and is taken online. This may limit the perspectives in survey answers to be biased toward people who are more technologically literate. Response rate to the sector poll could also be impacted by the survey not being a priority to complete as well as people working and volunteering in the sector being very busy. As the sample is done by convenience, future iterations of this research could look to providing an incentive for sector members’ time.

From the Driver Analysis on Trust in the Irish Sector

What is it that drives trust or lack of trust, and what messages can organisations seek to put out to have their purposes better understood? Using driver analysis, a form of linear regression, we attempt to answer this question by making recommendations for charities and community groups.

This resulted in linear regression analysis through which we came back with five key statements, which between them explained a highly significant 16% of the variation in trust. While there are multiple factors which determine causation, these were the strongest correlating factors relating to trust in the dataset.

Driver 1: Agreement that “It is helpful to have a wide variety of charities and community groups working on a cause”

A common media and public criticism of the sector is that there are too many organisations working on a cause and they should all merge. While interestingly, agreeing that there are too many charities doesn't seem to negatively drive trust, when respondents recognised the value in having a diverse range of charities working on a cause, they were much more likely to trust charities in general. This suggests that promoting the benefits of a wide range of charities and community groups working on a cause may help to drive overall trust in charities.

Recommendation: Educate the public on the benefits of a diverse range of charities working on a cause

Driver 2: Agreement that “The charity sector works in partnership with the state to deliver services in areas such as health, disability and social services”

Another criticism of the sector is that it is providing services that should be provided by the state. Those in our sample who recognised the ability of state and charity and community groups to work together rather than crowding one another out, were more likely to trust charities. Our previous qualitative research suggests that there is generally low levels of understanding of how charities and government work together – messaging that emphasises the collaborative relationship may yield dividends in trust.

Recommendation: Emphasise partnership between state and sector in messaging

Driver 3: Confidence in explaining sector jargon

One question we asked our respondents was about their confidence in explaining terms such as “charity”, “non-profit”, and “NGO” to a friend or family member. Those with higher confidence were more likely to trust charities. Demystifying some of these terms and educating the public leads to the public better understanding the sector and what is happening in it and therefore likely to lead to higher levels of trust.

Recommendation: Educate the public on what sector terms actually mean and keep them informed of what is happening in the sector

Driver 4: Agreement that “Charities and community groups are more heavily regulated than most businesses”

Naturally, having confidence in a well-regulated sector is an important step in building trust for many. Previous research has suggested that there are overall low levels of awareness among the public about how many regulators a typical Irish charity might have to deal with – not just the Charities Regulator, but potentially a range of statutory regulatory bodies in health and social care as well (nfpResearch, 2018). Knowledge of this regulatory burden was a significant driver of trust in our research.

Recommendation: Show and promote level of regulation in communications

Driver 5: Personally knowing someone who has recently benefitted from the work of a charity or community group

Interestingly, personally benefitting from the work of a charity or community group did not significantly drive trust, however knowing someone who had did tend to increase trust. Here the challenge for Irish charities is to get the message out there about just how many people are benefitting from the work of the sector. In our most recent wave of research just 33% of the public agreed that they knew someone who had benefitted recently. In reality, given the range of services provided by charities and groups large and small, up and down the country, the real figure it is likely to be higher.

Recommendation: Educate the public on the ubiquitousness of benefitting from charity services

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