

Section 1

Introduction



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The 'Road to Recovery' report explores the actual and projected impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in Scotland during the pandemic and over the longer term. Research evidence was drawn from the period March 2020 – May 2021. This Scottish Report forms part of a UK-wide research study involving a wide range of academic and practitioner partners.

To help the reader understand the scope of the 'Road to Recovery' research, its linkage to other research work, the evidence base examined, and how this has been analysed and reported, Section 1 describes the following:

- 1.1 Research context
- 1.2 'Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK' research study
- 1.3 Definitions
- 1.4 Methodology
- 1.5 Scottish evidence base
- 1.6 Report structure and navigation
- 1.7 Next steps.

1.1 Research context

Volunteering in Scotland, as in all nations of the UK, has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. As restrictions and subsequent lockdowns were implemented, the volunteering landscape changed at pace with an increase in neighbourly help and other forms of informal volunteering, and the emergence of hundreds of mutual aid groups. At the same time formal volunteering, through groups, clubs and organisations, saw a significant contraction, with face-to-face volunteering significantly constrained.

The demographic profile of volunteering also changed. Older volunteers and those with underlying health conditions were asked to shield at home. As a result, many pre-existing volunteers became the beneficiaries of voluntary services, with younger adults stepping into new volunteer roles. Rural communities came together to support each other in harder to reach geographies, and many volunteer roles were moved to digital or telephone delivery.

As a consequence of these dynamic shifts in volunteering engagement, and given the importance of volunteering as an integral element of society's multi-layered response to the COVID-19 crisis, Volunteer Scotland re-focused 100% of its research effort in April 2020. Its focus was concentrated on improving public knowledge on the contribution of volunteering and the voluntary sector in helping to address the challenges presented by the pandemic. At pace, we started to build up our COVID-19 evidence base in conjunction with research partners in academia and in the voluntary and charitable sector. Section 1.5 profiles a number of the research outputs developed by Volunteer Scotland with our partners, which have been drawn upon in this research report. Volunteer Scotland's repository for all of its COVID-19 related research can be accessed via this [Link](#).

1.2 Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK

The 'Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK' project explores and compares voluntary action responses to the pandemic across the UK. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant no. ES/V015281/1), as part of the UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19, the research commenced in late autumn 2020. For the purposes of this report this research is referred to as 'Mobilising Voluntary Action' (MVA).

Volunteer Scotland was responsible for the MVA research in Scotland, which included the production of this 'Road to Recovery' report. It is one of a suite of MVA research outputs which includes country reports for the other home countries; a UK-wide overarching report (pending); a book to be published by Policy Press in the autumn of 2022 sharing the UK-wide evidence; an interpretation of the policy context across the UK jurisdictions; and a quantitative study based on data from two UK volunteer matching services (see <https://www.mvain4.uk/>).

The 'Road to Recovery' research objectives were focused on:

- Understanding the volunteering response to COVID-19 in Scotland with a specific focus on volunteering;
- Comparing this response with the wider UK evidence base;
- Learning lessons to inform the voluntary sector's response to future crises; and
- Identifying and capitalising upon positive legacy outcomes to support recovery and post-recovery in Scotland.

1.3 Definitions

1.3.1 Classification of volunteering types

The Scottish Household Survey definitions for formal and informal volunteering are used throughout the report:

- Formal volunteering is defined as "*..... Giving up time to help any groups, clubs or organisations in an unpaid capacity*".
- Informal volunteering is defined as "*Any unpaid help individuals have given to other people or to improve your local environment, that is apart from any help given through a group, club or organisation, excluding help given to a relative*".

Mutual aid is considered to be a subset of formal volunteering and was defined by Volunteer Scotland for the Ipsos MORI omnibus survey as:

- A category of unpaid help "*....through an informal group set up by people in your area to support and help others in your local community (the key distinguishing feature is that the volunteering is provided through non-constituted groups without legal/charitable status. This category refers specifically to groups on Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. set up to support communities or issues in society).*"

Due to the differences in the formality and legal/charitable status of mutual aid groups, they are analysed separately within this report.

1.3.2 Classification of organisational types

- **Infrastructure organisations** are involved in supporting or coordinating volunteering across an area or sector. This term was used in the Scottish Government survey and focused on Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), local authorities and other relevant partners such as Health and Social Care Partnerships and national umbrella bodies.
- **Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs)** refers to any organisations which engage volunteers in the delivery of their organisation's functions or service delivery. Although the main focus in the MVA research relates to VIOs in the third sector, the term applies equally to organisations in the public and private sectors.
- **Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs)** provide a single point of access for support and advice for the third sector within local areas. There is a TSI in each local authority area in Scotland.
- **TSI Scotland Network** is the network of 32 TSIs across Scotland and is supported to carry out its main functions by the Third Sector Unit of Scottish Government.

1.3.3 Time Periods

Analysis within this report is often linked to specific time periods in COVID-19, for example:

- **First Lockdown** – refers to 24th of March 2020 to 29th May 2020
- **Second Lockdown** – refers to 5th January 2021 to 2nd April 2021.

However, it is critical to note that between lockdowns there was a spectrum of restrictions being relaxed and then tightened, which also varied by local authority area. So, the boundaries of what actually comprised 'lockdown conditions' needs to be interpreted flexibly. The Scottish Parliament Information centre provides a detailed timeline of restrictions, funding and policy changes over the course of COVID-19.¹¹

1.4 Research methodology

In line with the wider MVA project the Scottish research adopted a mixed methods approach based on the following research elements:

- Desk research – which mapped relevant secondary data in Scotland – see a description of the primary evidence sources used in this report in section 1.5.
- Policy review – which examined the policy context specific to Scotland.
- Survey – which was undertaken in partnership with the Scottish Government – see further details below.
- Interviews (x4) – which were conducted with senior level representatives in the Scottish Government and Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

- Mid-project briefing – a Scottish knowledge exchange seminar was held in June 2021 in partnership with the MVA team in the UK and the Scottish Government: '[The Road to Recovery Expo](#)'.

Scottish Government Survey Report – a survey of infrastructure organisations and VIOs was undertaken by Scottish Government in partnership with Volunteer Scotland. It was designed to deliver research outputs fully congruent with the research objectives and methodology of the MVA study. Core tasks were shared across both organisations:

- Questionnaire design and survey distribution were shared responsibilities
- The majority of the quantitative and qualitative analysis was undertaken by Volunteer Scotland
- Scottish Government was responsible for development of the survey report and its publication. Entitled 'Scottish Third Sector Perspectives on Volunteering during COVID-19: Survey Report', the Scottish Government report should be viewed as a 'sister publication' to this MVA report.

Volunteer Scotland has drawn extensively upon this deep evidence base throughout its own report. See further details on the scope of the Scottish Government Survey Report in section 1.5.

Research limitations – the interpretation of this report's findings must be caveated with the following limitations:

- The research evidence that could have been drawn upon within and outside Scotland was significantly wider than that which has been used. However, a conscious decision was taken to focus on the most robust and relevant data sources to ensure that the research effort was feasible and cost-effective within the deadline for conclusion of the MVA country reports (February 2022).
- The window of time during which the evidence was drawn from (March 2020 – August 2021) means that by the date of this report's publication six months had elapsed. So, for example, subsequent impacts due to Omicron are omitted.
- The research evidence was heavily dependent on surveys of volunteer-involving organisations and infrastructure organisations at discrete time periods – May/June 2020, November 2020 and May 2021. Also, there was only one survey of adults aged 16+ undertaken in June 2020 by Volunteer Scotland and Ipsos MORI.
- However, the Scottish Household Survey 2020 results were published on 31st January 2022, which provided data on adults' volunteering participation for the period October 2019 – January 2021. This was only available at the conclusion of the report, so only headline statistics are reported.
- The MVA research methodology only allowed up to five stakeholder consultations. Hence, a number of important stakeholder perspectives are missing, such as funders, umbrella organisations and national bodies with expertise relevant to key themes such as community engagement and inclusion.

1.5 Scottish Evidence Base

The principal evidence sources that Volunteer Scotland has drawn upon for this report are listed below.

1.5.1 Pre COVID-19 volunteering evidence – to establish the baseline

To understand volunteering participation in Scotland pre-COVID-19, the ‘gold standard’ for robust evidence is the Scottish Household Survey (SHS).¹ This is an annual survey undertaken by the Scottish Government based on a random sample of the Scottish Adult population aged 16+ (9,700 in 2018). To establish the pre-COVID-19 volunteering baseline the 2018 SHS was used.

1.5.2 During COVID-19 volunteering evidence – to understand volunteering and its contribution

In addition to the Scottish Government survey Volunteer Scotland had access to a series of surveys conducted at different points in the pandemic – see details of the principal research evidence below. This allowed for triangulation of evidence between sources; a comparison between specific types of third sector organisations, for example charities compared to the wider third sector; and longitudinal analysis based on evidence in May/June 2020, November 2020 and May 2021. The longitudinal aspect was important because it showed how issues either changed or remained constant during the course of the pandemic. As this evidence has been drawn upon extensively in this report, a brief profile of each survey is described in chronological order.

Principal surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in Scotland

TSI Scotland Network Survey – June 2020.²

Online survey conducted during April – May 2020 of 1,189 third sector organisations with representation from all 32 Scottish local authorities, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the third sector in Scotland. The survey included five categories of organisation: voluntary organisations, community groups, social enterprises, intermediaries, and non-voluntary sector. Volunteer Scotland undertook its own analysis of the data specific to volunteering: [Link](#)

Ipsos-MORI Survey – June 2020³

Research commissioned by Volunteer Scotland. Telephone survey of 1,014 adults aged 16+ in Scotland, conducted between 22 – 29 June 2020 (the only survey to take an individual rather than organisational perspective). The survey focused on volunteering participation before COVID-19 (March 2019 – Feb 2020), during first lockdown (March – June 2020), and post COVID-19 (once the crisis is over and we are no longer in a pandemic). The survey was modelled on SHS participation questions with the addition of a Mutual Aid category. [Link](#)

Impact of COVID-19 on charities in Scotland - May 2020 (OSCR I) ⁴

The first online survey undertaken by OSCR, the Scottish charities regulator, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown measures on charities in Scotland'. Survey conducted by 'Breaking Blue' on behalf of OSCR during 5 - 15 May 2020. 4,827 responses from a large number and representative cross-section of registered Scottish charities. Volunteer Scotland undertook its own analysis of the data specific to volunteering: [Link](#). When interpreting the results from both OSCR surveys it is important to note that while responses, particularly qualitative responses, do not explicitly refer to volunteers the majority of Scottish charities are run exclusively by volunteers, meaning that interpretation of results that refer to organisational issues and changes refer implicitly to volunteers and trustees. SCVOs report on Scottish Charities 2021 shows that 68% of charities report that they are run entirely by volunteers.¹⁰

Impact of COVID-19 on charities in Scotland - Nov 2020 (OSCR II) ⁵

The second online survey undertaken by OSCR, the Scottish charities regulator, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown measures on charities in Scotland in November 2020, along with a comparison to the impacts that COVID-19 had on charities in May 2020. The survey was conducted by 'Breaking Blue' on behalf of OSCR during 3 – 15 November 2020. 2,548 responses from a large number and representative cross-section of registered Scottish charities. Volunteer Scotland undertook its own analysis of the data specific to volunteering: [Link](#). OSCR also published a separate report on 'Volunteers and Trustees Supplementary': [Link](#)

Scottish Government Survey on impact of COVID-19 – May 2021 ⁶

Online survey co-produced by the Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland. The research was conducted between 30 April – 6 June 2021. The survey was targeted at two audiences: volunteer-involving organisations (278 responses) and infrastructure organisations: Third Sector Interfaces, local authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships and sectoral bodies (52 responses) to gather insights into the experiences of Scottish third sector organisations and other stakeholders involved in supporting volunteering during the pandemic. There are some instances in this report where the quantitative data differ slightly from the Scottish Government published results. This is due to a methodology difference where Volunteer Scotland excluded 'don't know' and 'not applicable' responses. Volunteer Scotland has used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge and experience to provide insights in the topics being considered. [Link](#)

Other evidence which supplements these surveys includes:

- **Mapping of press and social media coverage: March 2020 – September 2021.** Volunteer Scotland collated a qualitative evidence base of over 800 press and social media articles throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This diverse evidence base covers all types of volunteering and provides insights into the tasks undertaken, the appeals that were made, recognition of volunteers and emerging societal needs during the course of the pandemic.⁷

- **Working Paper 4: Volunteering in the Pandemic Evidence from Two UK Volunteer Matching Services.** As part of the MVA project, the University of Stirling led a quantitative time series analysis of volunteer application data (Team Kinetic app data for England, Wales, Scotland and BeCollective app data for Northern Ireland). The working paper analyses volunteer and opportunity data from pre-COVID-19 to May 2021, focusing on demographic characteristics of volunteers, how the demographic characteristics changed over time and between nations. This working paper analyses formal volunteering only.⁸
- **Research on mutual aid in Scotland by Glasgow Caledonian University.** ‘Solidarity in a time of crisis: The role of mutual aid to the COVID-19 pandemic’.⁹
- **Scottish Third Sector Tracker.** The Wave 1 survey of 585 third sector organisations was conducted during June – August 2021, and gives insights into the state of the sector, key trends, and developments at that time.¹²

1.6 Report structure and navigation

This report for Scotland spans pre-COVID-19 to August 2021 and encompasses a substantial body of evidence. However, it does not include evidence from September 2021 onwards and, in particular, the impact of the Omicron variant and its adverse impact on Scotland’s recovery.

The report is structured into seven sections covering three broad time periods – before, during and after COVID-19:

- **Section 1 – Introduction:** MVA context, research methodology, the Scottish evidence base, definitions, report structure and navigation.
- **Section 2 – Pre COVID-19 – The Scottish context:** contextual information on baseline volunteering data; and the policy landscape in Scotland pre COVID-19; and resilience partnership structure and support.
- **Section 3 – During COVID-19 – The Volunteer response:** impact of COVID-19 on volunteer participation in Scotland, mutual aid and informal volunteering.
- **Section 4 – During COVID-19 – The Volunteer Involving Organisations’ response:** business impacts of COVID-19 on VIOs; impact on formal volunteering and number of volunteers; organisational challenges facing VIOs in the involvement of volunteers; VIOs’ response to these challenges; understanding societal needs during COVID-19; the VIO response in meeting these needs; VIOs’ ability to meet societal needs.

- Section 5 – During COVID-19 – Scottish Government and Infrastructure Organisations’ response:** Voluntary and community sector’s integration into Scotland’s resilience partnership structure; voluntary sector resilience response; role of infrastructure organisations; coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations; ‘Scotland Cares’ campaign; support provided by infrastructure organisations.
- Section 6 – Beyond COVID-19 – Long-term recovery:** projected adult volunteering participation rates after COVID-19; VIO priorities for Scotland’s long-term recovery; support that VIOs require; infrastructure organisations’ priorities for longer term recovery; stakeholder support required by infrastructure organisations; comparison of priorities between VIOs and infrastructure organisations.
- Section 7 – Lessons learned and next steps:** suggestions on how to improve Scotland’s voluntary response for future crises; how to build on the positive legacy from COVID-19; and how to turn evidence into action.

Given the wide range of evidence in the report, a ‘Navigation Guide’ has been developed to assist the reader navigate their way to the sections which will be of most interest to them.

Navigation Guide	
Themed areas	Sections
Community resilience and engagement *	6.4, 7.2
COVID-safe volunteering – challenges and VIO responses	4.2-4.4, 6.2, 6.3
Demographic impacts of COVID-19 *	3.1, 3.2, 4.5, 6.1-6.3
Digital communications	4.3, 4.4, 6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 7.2
Formal volunteering	3.2, 4.2-4.7, 5.3, 6.2-6.4, 7.2
Funding provision	5.6, 6.3-6.6, 7.1-7.2
Inclusive volunteering *	4.3, 4.5, 6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 7.2
Informal volunteering	3.2, 3.4, 5.3, 6.4, 7.1-7.2
Information and guidance	4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.1
Infrastructure organisations	5.3, 5.4, 6.4-6.6, 7.1-7.2
Mutual aid	3.2, 3.3, 5.3, 6.4, 7.1
Partnership, collaboration and coordination	5.4, 6.3-6.5, 7.1-7.2
Policy, strategy, and action planning *	2.2-2.3, 6.4, 7.3
Priorities for long-term recovery	6.1-6.6
Recognition and celebration of volunteers/volunteering *	6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 7.1-7.2
Resilience planning, response and enhancement	2.3, 2.4, 5.1, 5.2, 6.4, 7.1
Scotland Cares campaign	5.5, 7.1
Societal needs during COVID-19 – health, poverty, etc.	4.5, 4.6
Training provision	4.4, 6.3, 6.4, 6.6
VIOs’ business operations – impact of COVID-19	4.1
Volunteering participation rates: before, during & post COVID	2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 4.2, 6.1, 7.2
Volunteers’ health and wellbeing	4.3, 4.4, 6.2, 6.3, 6.6
Note: * Themed areas relevant to the Outcomes of the ‘Volunteering for All’ Framework	

Also, the contents page is hyperlinked to all of the sections and sub-sections.

1.7 Next steps

This report is entitled 'The Road to Recovery' as its core function is to help support Scotland's volunteering response to the challenges of COVID-19: both during the pandemic, and in the post-recovery period. A summary of the 'lessons learned' is presented in [Section 7](#) and the [Executive Summary](#), entitled 'Routemap to Improvement', presents an overarching analysis of the evidence and the key implications. Volunteer Scotland will be working closely with the Scottish Government and key partners to facilitate our 'evidence into action' philosophy.

Central to this knowledge exchange approach will be the integration of the report's findings into the development and implementation of Scotland's 'Volunteering for All Action Plan'. The navigation guide above has highlighted themed areas that are directly relevant to the five Working Groups: lifelong engagement, policy, recognition and celebration, places and spaces and inclusive volunteering.

References

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3. Ipsos-MORI Survey – June 2002: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/research-and-evaluation/publications/covid-19-research/impact-of-covid-19-on-volunteering-participation-in-scotland/>
4. Impact of COVID-19 on charities in Scotland - May 2020: <https://www.oscr.org.uk/media/3925/oscr-covid-19-research-summary-report-020620-002.pdf>
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12. SCVO – Scottish Third Sector Tracker: December 2021: [https://storage.googleapis.com/scvo-documents-evidence/0693z00000L239bAAB-Scottish Third Sector Tracker Waveone Report.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/scvo-documents-evidence/0693z00000L239bAAB-Scottish%20Third%20Sector%20Tracker%20Waveone%20Report.pdf)