NGOs in Ireland: Definitions and Profile of NGOs

Definition 1:

NGOs [non-governmental organisations] campaign to change government policies and share information to encourage people to improve things. For example, the World Wildlife Federation gives information about climate, food, forests, fresh water, and oceans. Greenpeace shows ways to improve energy use and help protect the oceans and forests.

NGOs have more influence with the government than a single person would have. When an NGO writes a letter to the councillor, they are backed by all their members – so it makes a stronger impression than a letter from just one person. NGOs influence with politicians is limited for two reasons: they have no legal power and they are funded from voluntary donations from their members.

Environmental NGOs raise awareness and educate the public, and campaign and lobby to change environmental policy. In Ireland, the following are examples of Environmental NGOs that perform this role:

- o Taisce - a charity working to preserve and protect Ireland's natural and built heritage.
- o Environmental Sciences Association of Ireland (ESAI) - facilitates communication and interaction between persons interested in the environment through colloquia, seminars, workshops and publications.
- o Irish Environmental Network – comprises 34 Irish Environmental NGOs that work individually and, as appropriate, jointly to protect and enhance the environment, and to place environmental issues centre state in Ireland and internationally.

(Source: http://www.askaboutireland.ie/enfo/irelands-environment/environmental-governance/ngos-role-in-governance/)

Definition 2:

The work of NGOs in articulating and representing the interests of groups experiencing inequality is important. The work of NGOs:
1. calls attention to situations and experiences of inequality and discrimination,
2. provides knowledge, information and awareness that is key to devising effective responses to this inequality and discrimination, and
3. provides the stimulus and builds the demand for change to create a more equal society.

NGOs performing this role in Ireland include:

- o Center for Independent Living - who empower and enable people with disabilities to achieve independent living, choice and control over their lives and to achieve full and active participation as equal citizens in society.
- o Irish Refugee Council - an independent, non-governmental organisation that works on a national level in the areas of policy, research, legal, networking and information components to promote inter-culturalism, to facilitate the participation of refugees and asylum seekers at all levels in the organisation and to follow the principles of community development.
- o Age Action Ireland - a national independent organisation supporting aging and older people. It acts as a network of organisations and individuals including older people and carers of older people, and works to promote better policies and services for older people in society.

(Source: https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/download/pdf/the_role_and_aspirations_of_the_non_governmental_sector_in_a rticulating_and_representing_the_interests_of_groups_experiencing_inequality.pdf)

Definition 3:

A non-governmental organisation (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organised around specific issues, such as human rights, environment or health; but most have a role in encouraging participation in civil society.

NGOs in Ireland who perform this role of encouraging civic participation and the protection of individual rights include:

- o National Youth Council of Ireland – the representative body for national voluntary youth work organisations in Ireland. It uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people and seeks to ensure that all young people are empowered to develop the skills and confidence to fully participate as active citizens in an inclusive society.
- o Transgender Equality Network Ireland – a non-profit organisation supporting the trans community in Ireland. TENI seeks to improve the situation and advance the rights and equality of trans people and their families. Their vision is an Ireland where trans people are understood, accepted and respected, and can participate fully in all aspects of Irish society.
- o The Disability Federation of Ireland – the national umbrella body for organisations of and for people with disabilities, which provide a comprehensive range of services to people with a disability, such as information and support services, education, training, housing, accommodation, respite care, para-medical and other professional services.

(Source: http://www.ngo.org/ngoinfo/define.html)

NGOs in Ireland

A report published by Benefacts in April 2018 stated that there are currently 29,000 NGOs registered and operating in Ireland today. This figure grew from 20,000 in 2015, and the rise in registered NGOs can be explained through the expansion of the non-profit sector in Ireland thanks to the growth in regional Public Participation Networks (PPN). PPNs were established following the Local Government Act in 2014. PPNs are public forums that aim to improve civic participation by giving citizens a greater say in local government decisions which affect their own communities. NGOs and civil society organisations sit on regional PPNs, of which there are 31 in Ireland to date.