

# **Attitudes towards Development Cooperation in Ireland**

**Report of a National Survey of Irish Adults  
by Amárach Research**

**2015**

**our world  
our dignity  
our future**



**2015**  
European Year  
for Development

## Summary

The survey confirms the picture from earlier polls that a big majority of people support the principle of overseas aid.

Key findings from this research include:

- **Supporters of overseas aid outnumber critics three to one:** 54% of respondents are in favour of the Government spending money on overseas aid, compared with 19% who are against, and 23% who are neither for nor against. This is a significant level in the current economic climate.
- A big majority of people in Ireland (79% of respondents) feel overseas aid makes “some” or “a lot of difference” in poor countries. Yet **60% of people in Ireland don’t think the countries in Africa are any better off now than they were 20 years ago.**
- While the vast majority of people (73%) say they want to do their bit to change the world, half of us say it is “difficult to find opportunities to take action for positive change”. At the same time, 59% agree that “it is easy/convenient to donate to charities” and 37% say “it is easy/convenient to volunteer with a charity.”
- Despite a high level of awareness of the power of fairtrade products and ethical fashion, people in Ireland are 2.5 times more likely to agree rather than disagree with a statement that they “feel helpless in bringing about positive change”. Most worryingly, **very few people say they feel “confident” in their ability to bring about change:** Only 33% of people believe they have some degree of influence on events in their local community, dropping to 19% when asked if they had influence on decisions affecting other parts of the world.
- **A relatively pronounced absence of perceived linkages between people’s lives in Ireland and instances of global poverty.** Despite many public information campaigns by NGOs highlighting global linkages, the vast majority of respondents feel the causes of poverty reside within developing countries themselves. 49% of respondents agree with the sentiment that “my day to day actions don’t really affect people in the third world” (a slight drop from 53% in 2013). 25% feel there is nothing they can do personally to reduce poverty.
- **Strong concern about perceived levels of corruption in developing countries** is leading people to feel that aid is being wasted. 52% of respondents agree that corruption levels in developing country governments are so high that donating money is “pointless”, and 51% say that “most financial aid to poor countries is wasted”.
- **A clear relationship between the degree to which people have engaged with NGOs and the likelihood of them taking further action on poverty.** Irish NGOs and the internet are important sources of information for people on development issues, with NGO sources more likely to successfully prompt action. People who have volunteered or donate on a regular basis indicate higher levels of global solidarity activity than others.

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## Introduction and Background

Dóchas members commissioned research in 2013 on public attitudes to development aid and global poverty due to a lack of published data on levels of public support for Ireland’s overseas aid programme. The study aimed to gauge the knowledge, attitudes, information sources and engagement of Irish people in the context of overseas aid, in order to promote reflection among Dóchas members about the impact of their public communications strategies on those attitudes, and to explore ways to shift them.

2015 is the European Year for Development. Dóchas is coordinating activities in Ireland for the year, which aims to change the way people think about, talk about and act on global issues by establishing a new development narrative in Ireland that shifts beyond charity and aid to address issues of universality, engagement, individual and collective responsibility and global solidarity.

As part of its activities for EYD2015, Dóchas commissioned Amárach Research to conduct a follow-up attitudes survey to determine current public attitudes to development cooperation and global justice and to see if attitudes and behaviours had changed in the intervening 21 months.

## Methodology

An online methodology was used to gather responses from 1,000 Irish adults. Quotas were set on gender, age, region, and social class to ensure that the final sample was nationally aligned based on CSO Census 2011 figures.

The margin of error for this sample is +/- 3.1%. All facets of questionnaire scripting, hosting and data analysis were conducted in-house at Amárach Research. Interviewing fieldwork dates were March 11th-17th 2015.

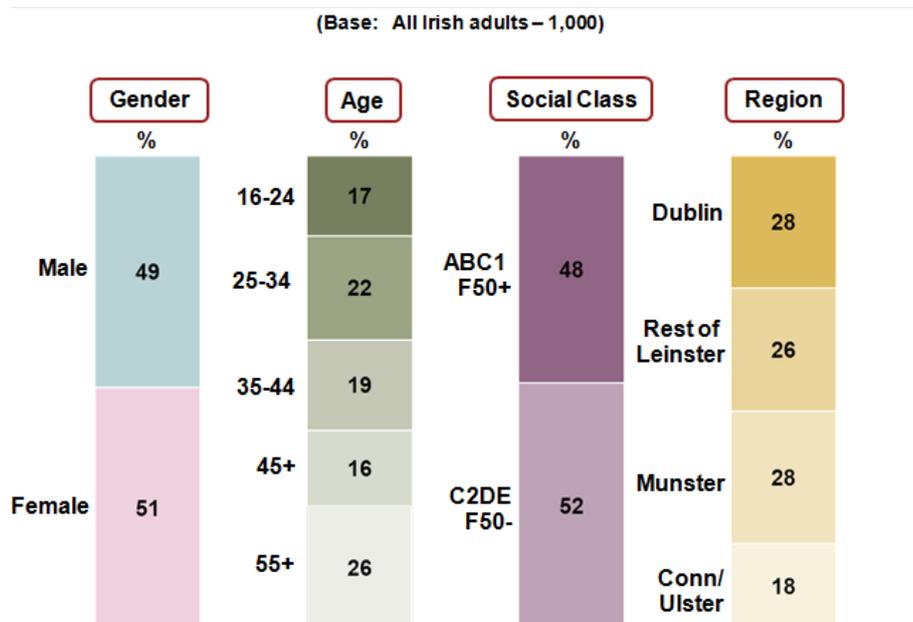


Figure 1: Profile of the Sample

## Survey Findings

One quarter of Irish adults claim to have above average knowledge of poverty, developing countries and global issues, while two-thirds are “concerned” about these issues (similar to the 2013 findings but a notable decline since 2002).

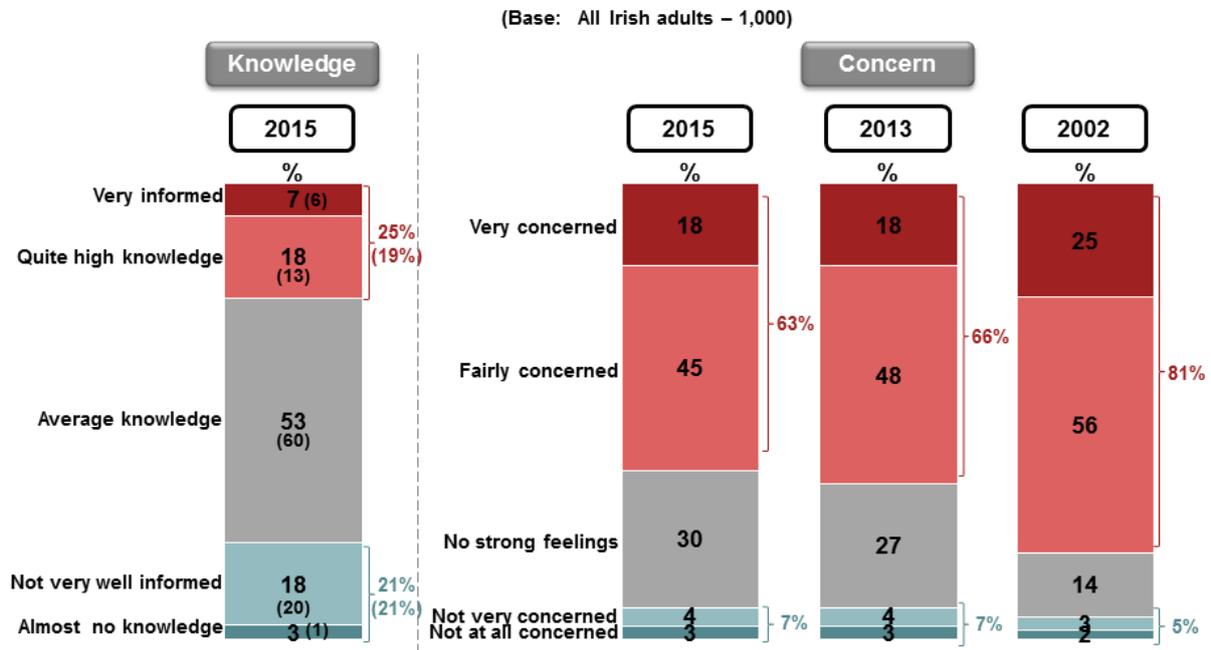


Figure 2: Knowledge & Understanding of Poverty, Developing Countries & Global Issues

### 1. Perceived Effectiveness of Aid

Supporters of overseas aid outnumber critics three to one. Just over half of Irish adults (55%) don't just say that they are in favour of overseas aid in general, they want the Government to spend money on overseas aid. This compares with 19% who are against, and 23% who are neither for nor against. This is a significant level in the current economic climate.

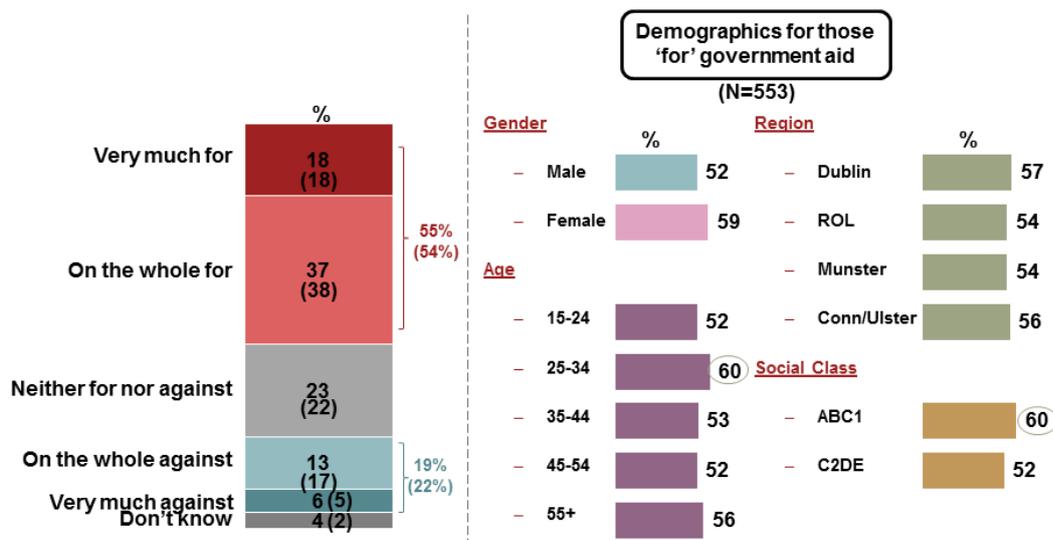


Figure 3: Attitudes towards Government Aid to Developing Countries

Almost 8 in 10 people in Ireland (79% of respondents) feel overseas aid makes “some” or “a lot of difference” in poor countries, with older people being more sceptical.

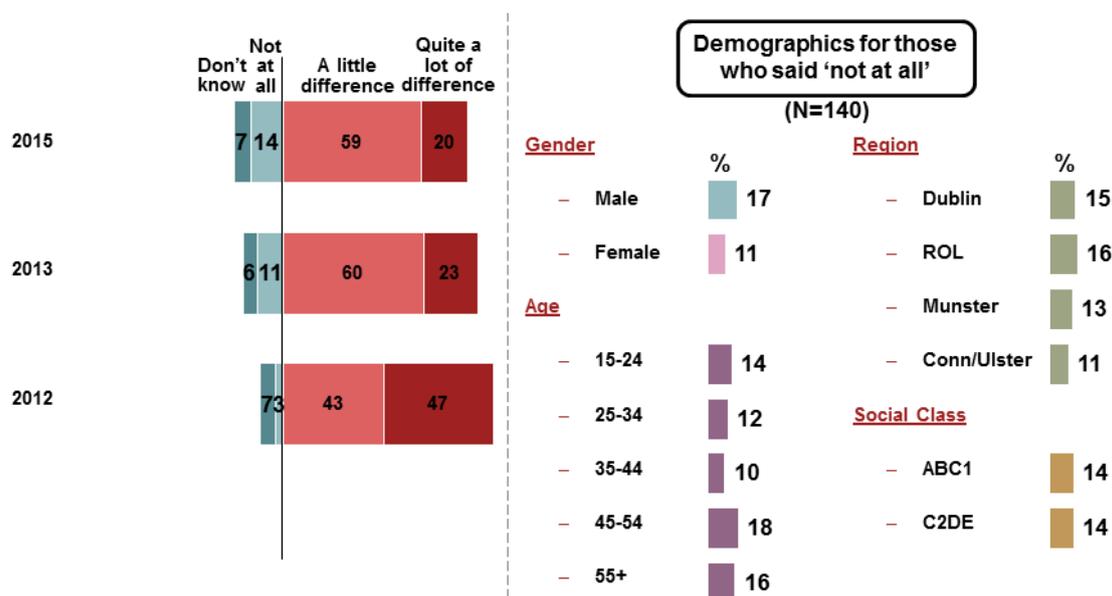


Figure 4: Perceived Impact of Aid from Ireland

Many of the arguments used by Development NGOs on why aid is important have only limited appeal to people in Ireland.

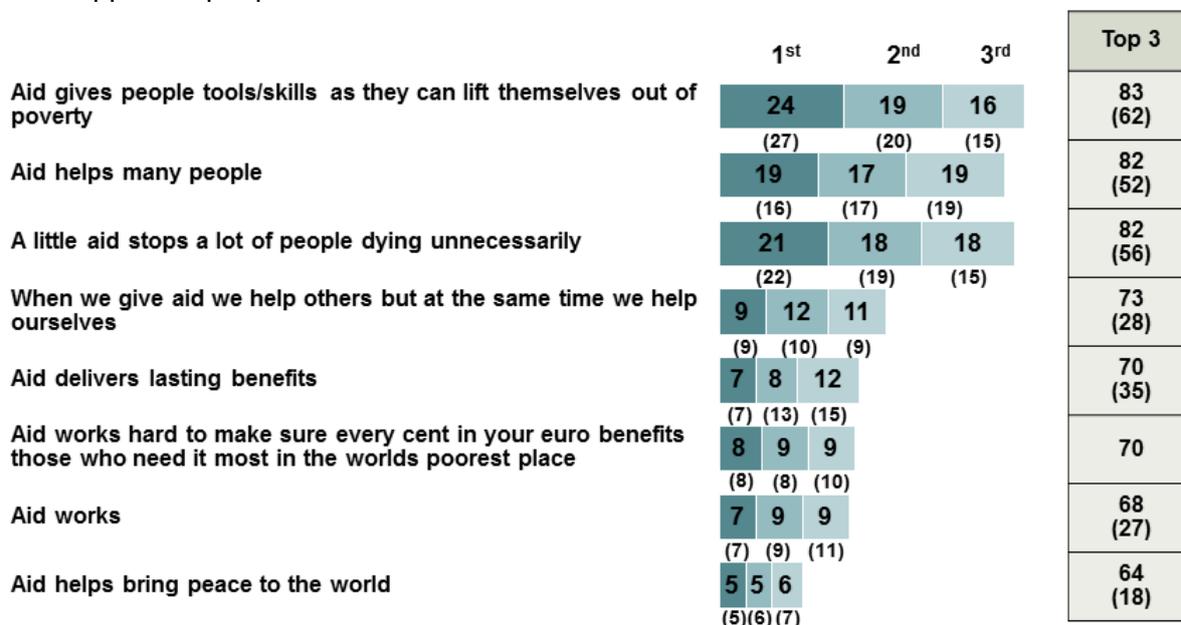


Figure 5: Perceived Effectiveness of Aid Statements

When it comes to solutions to extreme poverty, people in Ireland seem to suggest that ‘every little bit helps’, with no big differences between the various suggestions. This hints at an opportunity for Development NGOs to be clearer in their proposed solutions.

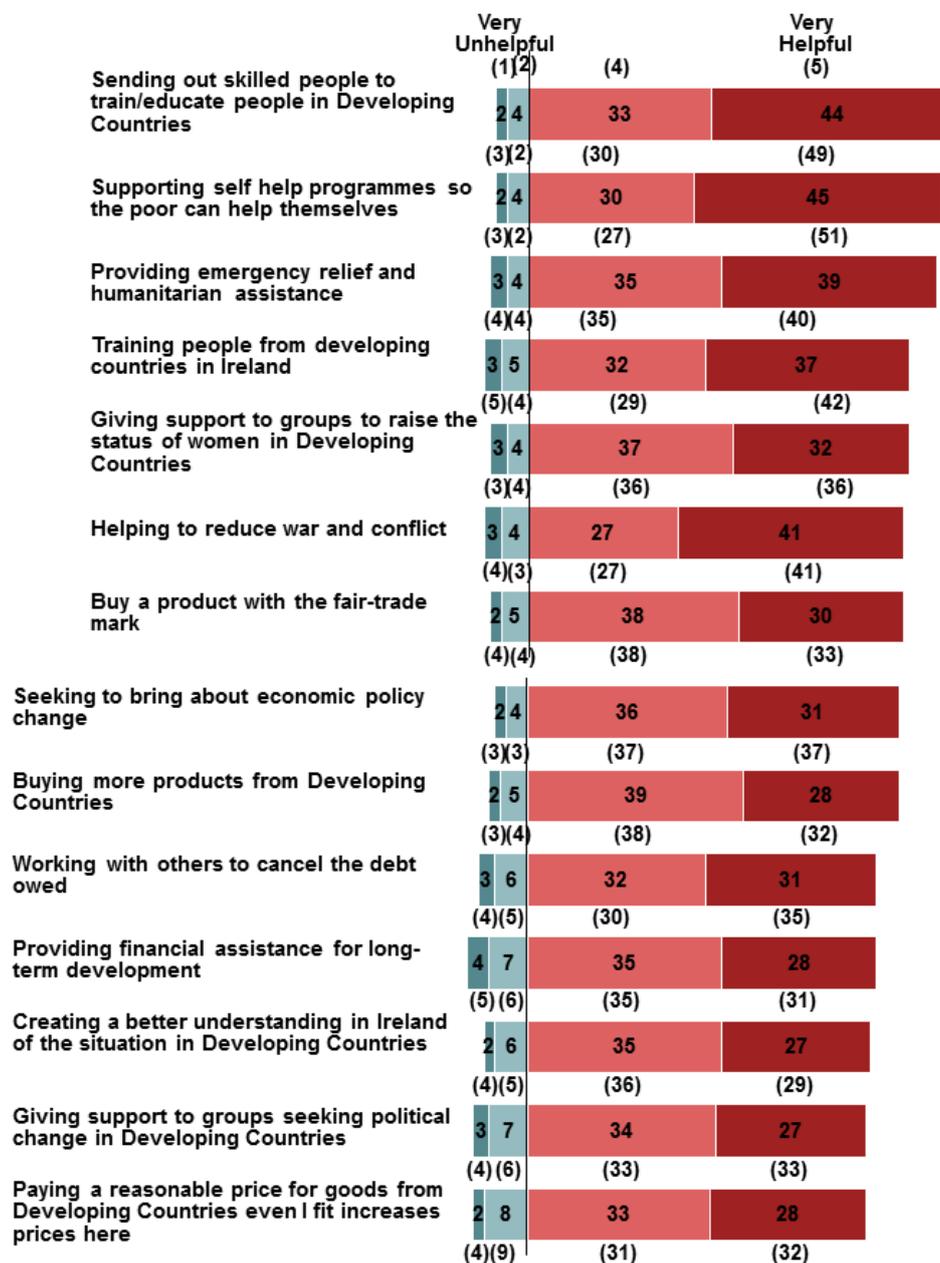


Figure 6: Perceived Effectiveness of Ways in which Ireland Can Help Developing Countries

Approximately 1 in 3 people think that the situation in “Africa” has improved over the last 20 years (35% compared to 43% of people in 2013). However, 60% of people in Ireland don’t think the countries in Africa are any better off now than they were 20 years ago. Women and over 55’s in particular are less convinced that there is progress.

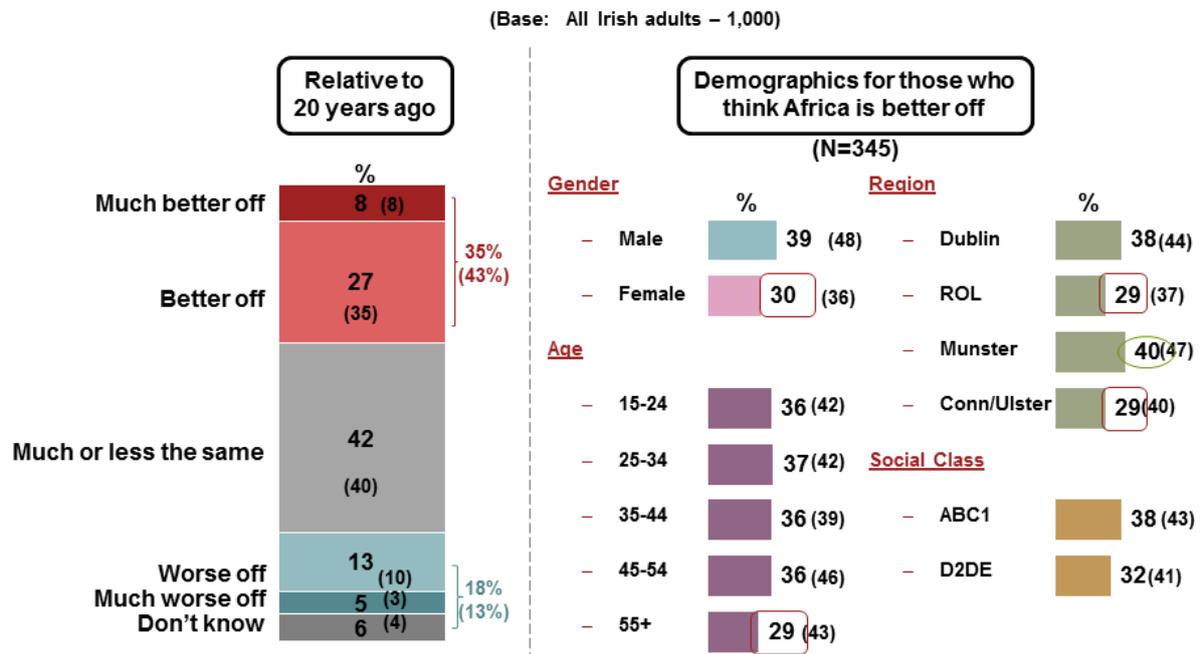


Figure 7: Perceived Change of Situation in Africa versus 20 Years Ago

## 2. Attitudes towards Change

While the vast majority of people (73%) say they want to do their bit to change the world, half of us say it is “difficult to find opportunities to take action for positive change”. The research suggests people feel that it is possible for them to make a difference through such things as shopping (63%) and voting choices (60%).

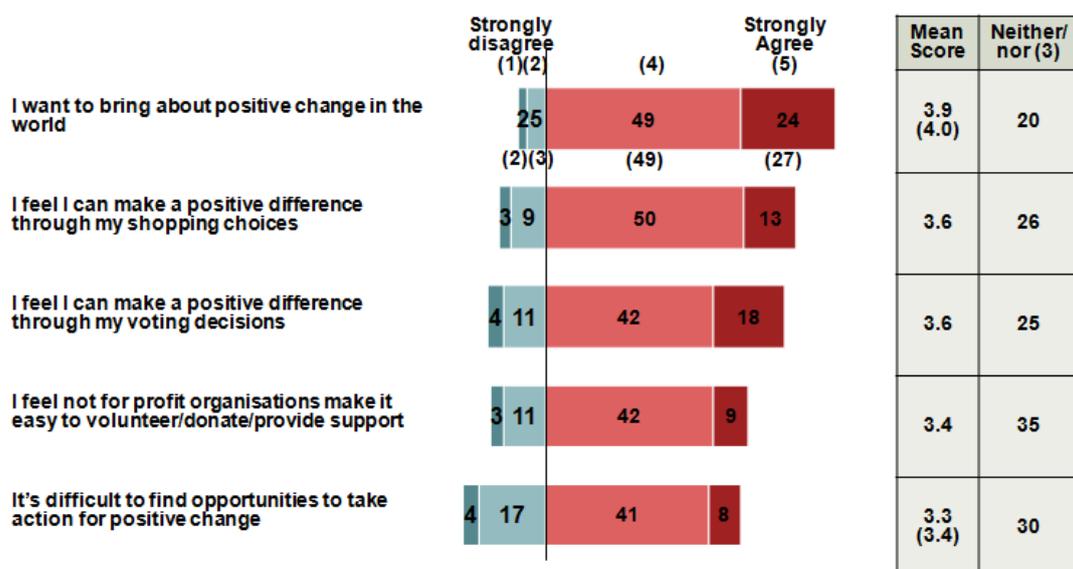


Figure 8: Personal Attitudes to Change

At the same time, 59% agree that “it is easy/ convenient to donate to charities” and 37% say “it is easy/convenient to volunteer with a charity.”

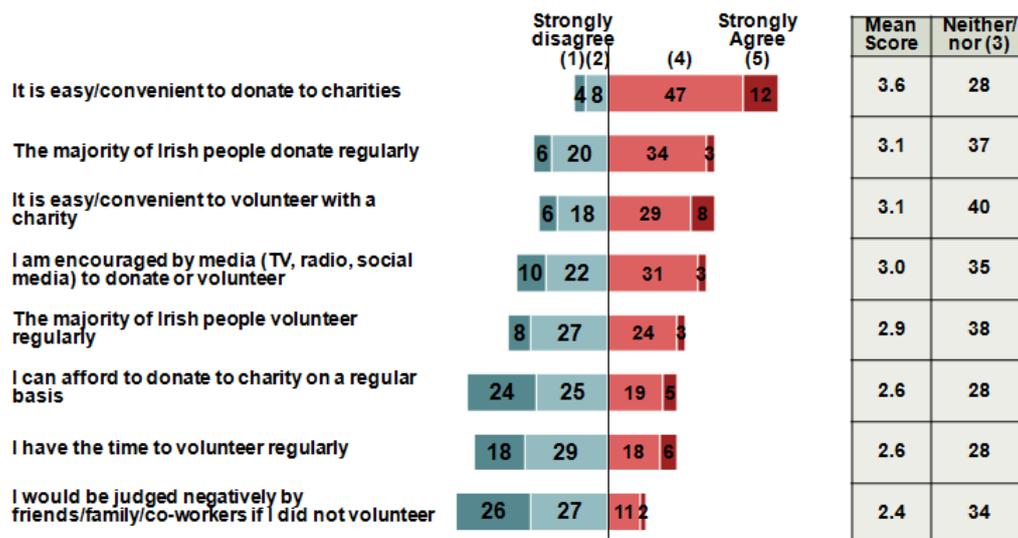


Figure 9: Attitudes to Donating and Volunteering

Yet, as with the 2013 survey, the findings indicate that people feel powerless to affect change. Respondents were two-and-a-half times more likely to agree rather than disagree with the statement “I feel helpless in bringing about positive change.”

When asked about their ability to influence decisions, it is worrying that just 33% felt confident to influence decisions locally and only 19% felt confident to influence decisions affecting other parts of the world.

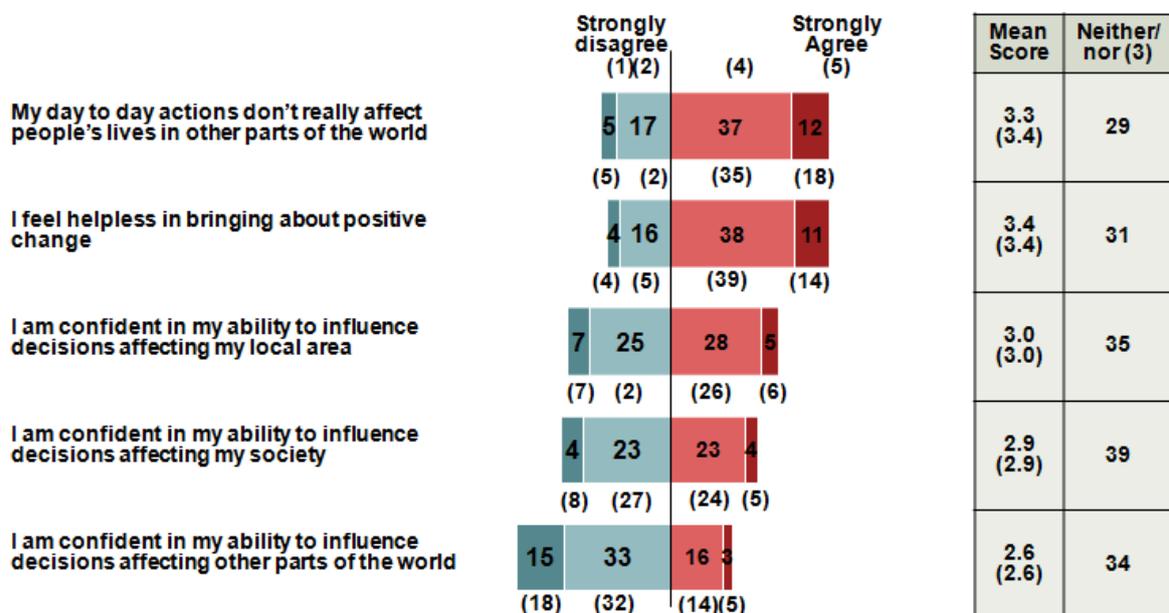


Figure 10: Personal Attitudes to Change

People don't make the link between their own lives in Ireland and instances of global poverty. 49% of respondents agree with the sentiment that “my day to day actions don't really affect people in the third world” - a slight drop from 53% in 2013, while at the same

time the percentage of people who disagreed with this statement rose from 9% in 2013 to 22% in 2015.

A quarter of respondents feel that there is nothing they can do personally to reduce poverty. This is consistent with the finding that a big majority of respondents feel the causes of poverty reside within developing countries themselves. As in 2013, the main causes of poverty are perceived to be related to bad governance in developing countries: corruption, war and incompetent or unwilling governments.

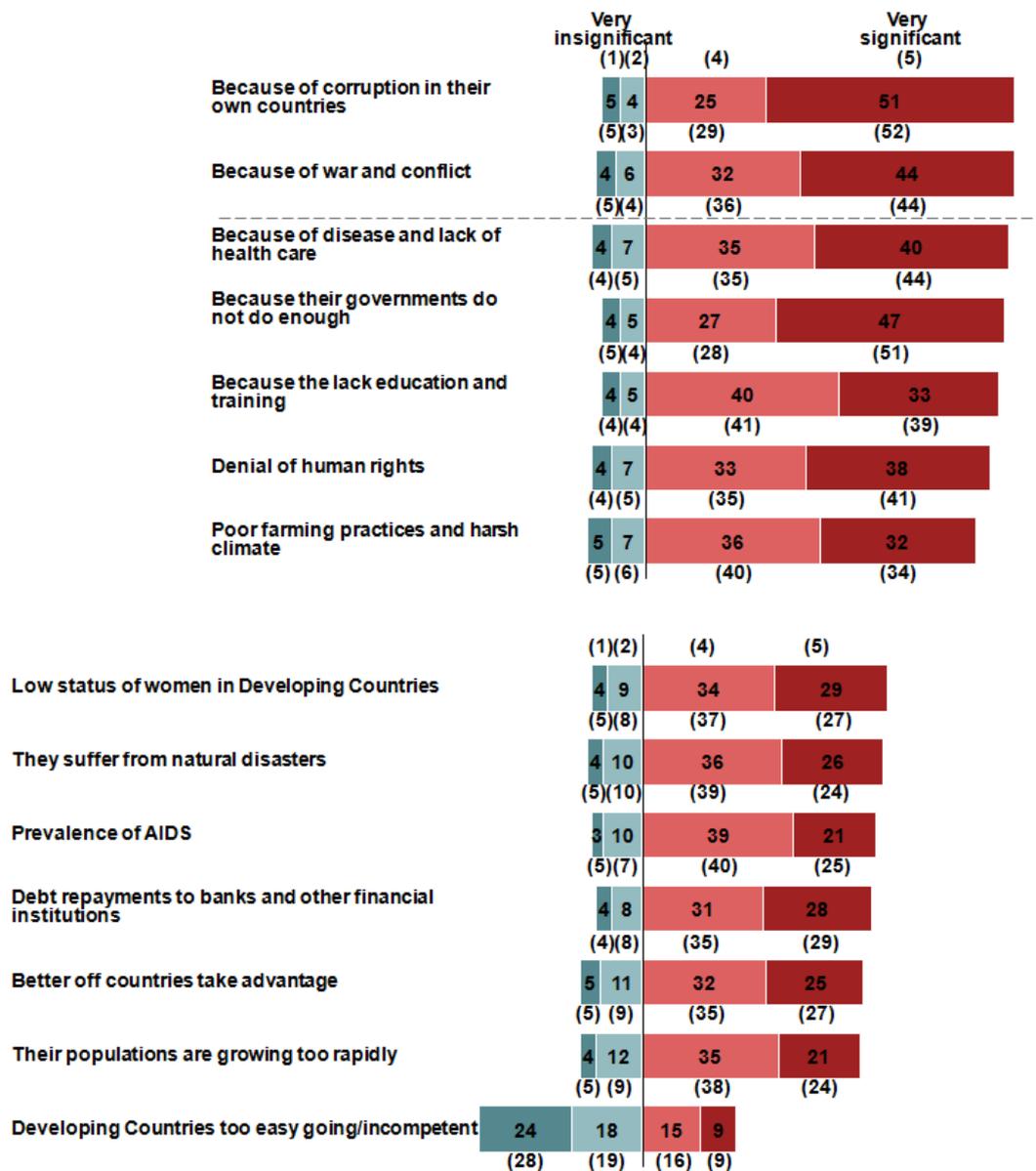


Figure 11: Perceived Reasons for Poverty in Developing Countries

Half of adults (49%) say they would like to hear more about how they can help to reduce poverty. However, one quarter say they feel there is nothing they can personally do to reduce global poverty – people feel they want to make a change, but they don't know how!

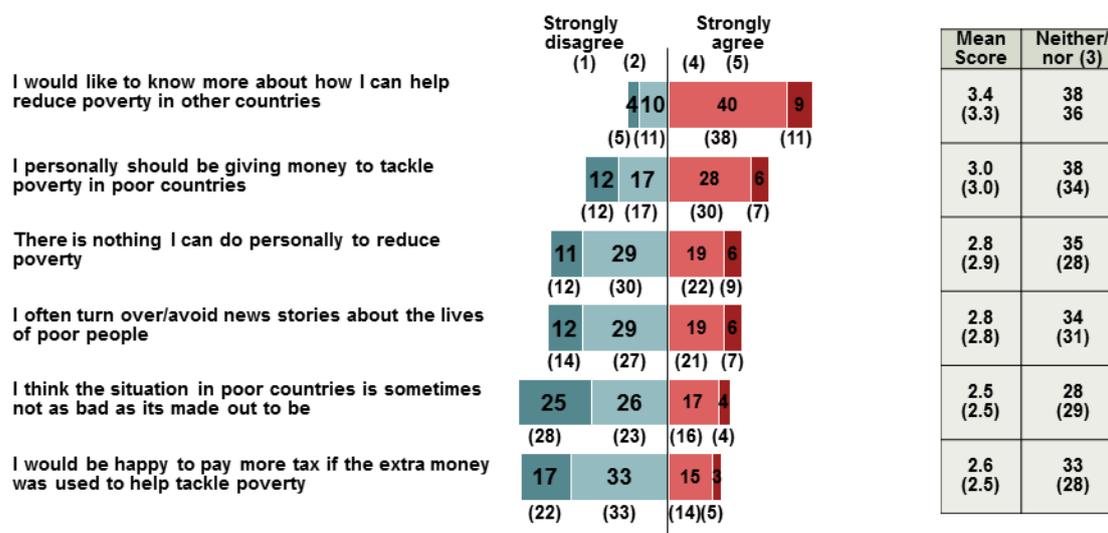


Figure 12: Personal Views on Creating Change

There is a strong perception that there are high levels of government corruption in developing countries. This is leading people to feel that aid is being wasted. More than half (52%) of respondents felt that corruption levels in developing countries are so high that donating money is pointless. Likewise, 51% feel that “most financial aid to poor countries is wasted.”

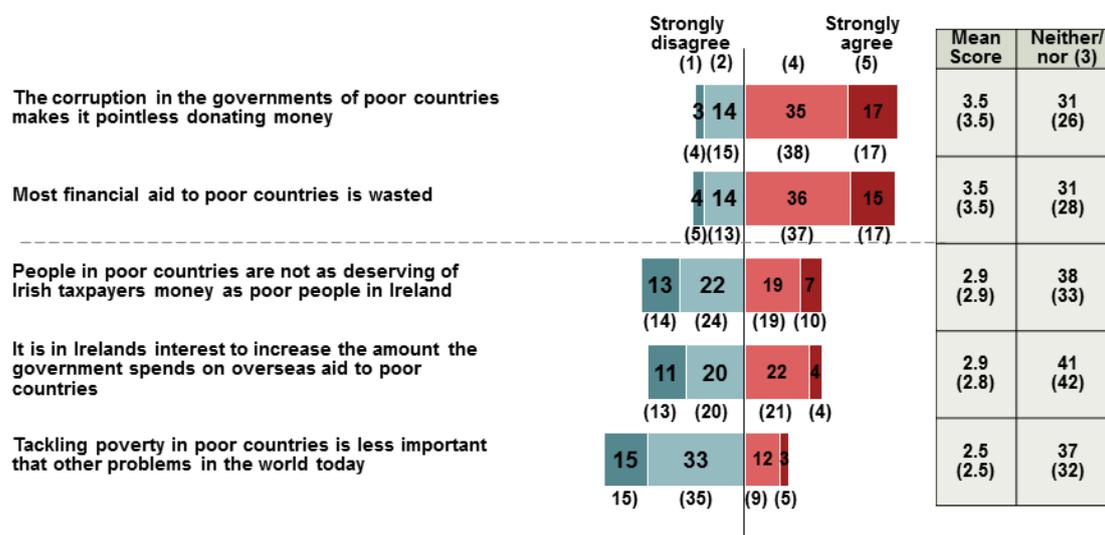


Figure 13: Broader Views on Issues Related to Change

### 3. Sources of Information & Messaging

Irish NGOs and the internet are important sources of information for people on development issues. They are not only the most used sources to find out information on the issues facing developing countries but the most reliable, with 75% and 79% respectively identifying them as reliable sources. The fact that the internet is seen as the most reliable source of information is possibly linked to the online approach employed in the survey. Of more significance is that NGOs are still a very reliable source of information (75%) and most people are happy with the amount of information they provide (49% felt that the amount of information was just right).

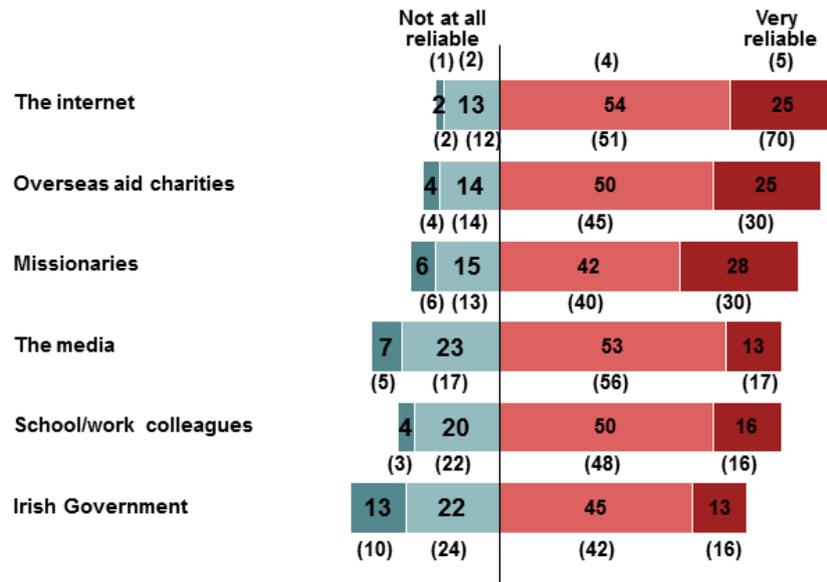


Figure 14: Reliability of Sources of Information on Developing Countries

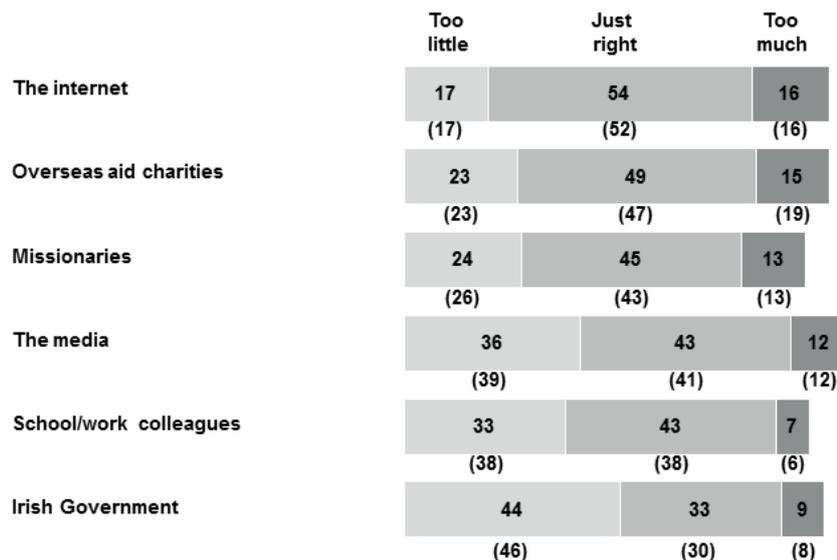


Figure 15: Amount of Information Provided by Sources

The majority of respondents have a positive opinion of charitable advertisements. 49% of respondents feel NGOs that provide success stories indicate that they are working well and deserve to be funded – versus only 12% who came to the opposite conclusion. Success stories prompted 18% of respondents to conclude that the charity’s job was done, whereas 49% disagreed that success means the organisation should no longer be funded.

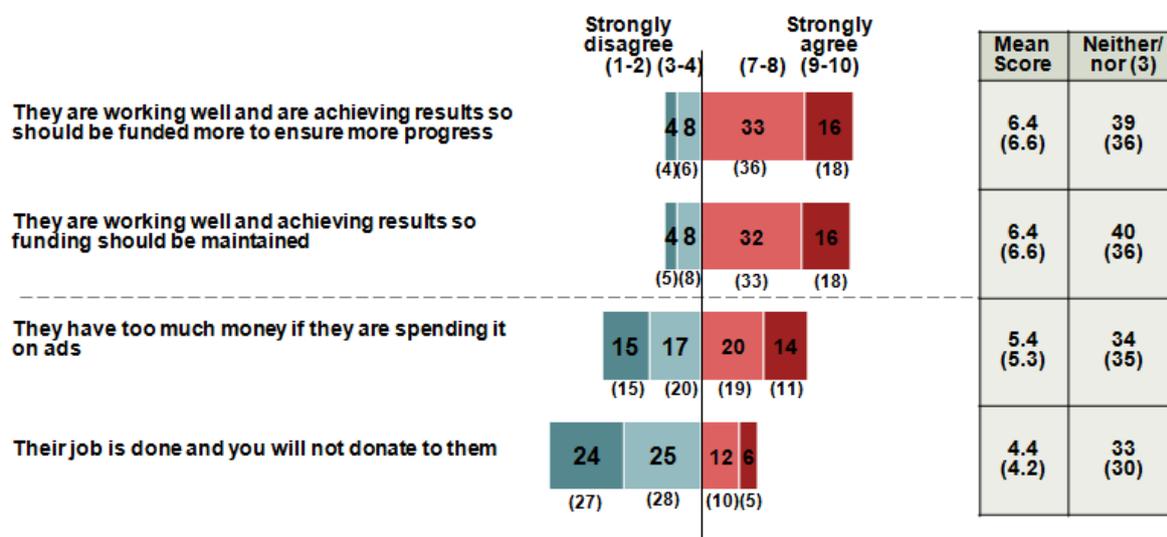


Figure 16: Attitudinal Statements Regarding Charity Ads which Highlight Improvements

A comparison of “positive” images with more traditional NGO fundraising images showed that there was little difference in how respondents reacted. In other words, the traditional messages are not necessarily more effective at triggering a donation.



Figure 17: Comparison of Personal Behaviour in Response to ‘Negative’ or ‘Positive’ Images

#### 4. Personal Actions Taken to Bring about Change

There is a clear relationship between the degree to which people have engaged with NGOs and the likelihood of them taking further action on poverty. Indeed, NGO sources of information were more likely to successfully prompt action (56%).

	Unsure	To some extent	To a great extent	N/A	To a great extent 2002
Overseas aid charities	23 (23)	40 (41)	16 (15)	22 (21)	19
Missionaries	26 (29)	31 (31)	14 (12)	22 (22)	16
The Internet	27 (27)	39 (40)	13 (12)	28 (29)	15
School/work colleagues	27 (28)	35 (31)	12 (11)	27 (30)	16
The media	24 (24)	45 (47)	9 (10)	20 (19)	12
Irish Government	38 (37)	28 (39)	7 (9)	27 (28)	9

Figure 18: Prompted to Take Action based on Source of Information Received

In response to information received, the most common actions were to make a monetary donation (50% of respondents) and purchasing fair trade products (47%).



Figure 19: Action Taken Based on Information Received

People who have volunteered or donate on a regular basis indicate higher levels of global solidarity activity than others.

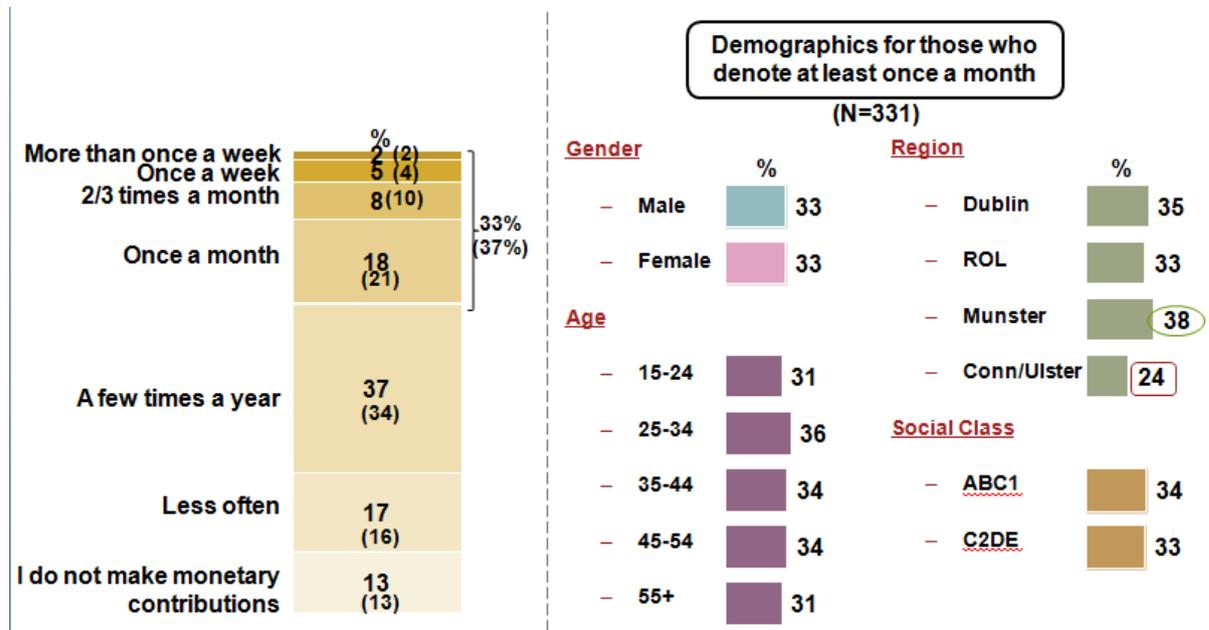


Figure 20: Frequency of Making Monetary Donations

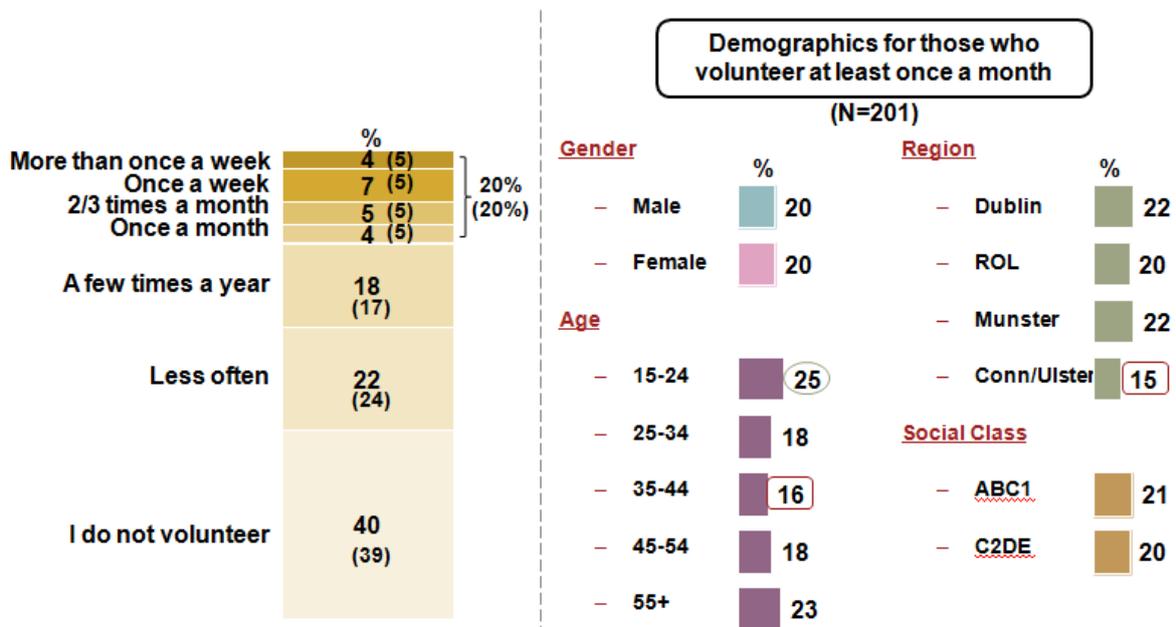


Figure 21: Frequency of Volunteering

## **5. Conclusion**

The research findings were broadly in line with those from 2013. It is encouraging to see that three times as many people support overseas aid as are against it. However, the fact that 6 out of 10 people don't feel that Africa is better off now than 20 years ago is of concern. Likewise, the lack of a connection between people's lives and global poverty is worrying, as is the low degree of influence people feel they have on decisions affecting other parts of the world.

The findings in relation to information received suggest that charitable organisations are providing the right amount of information, that it is trusted and that the public would support those organisations that show they are making an impact.

Development NGOs are encouraged to use the findings from this research to inform their work. It will also be used to influence Dóchas's delivery of the European Year for Development 2015.