

# Voluntary work in Switzerland



**2001  
International  
Year of  
Volunteers**



**Office fédéral de la statistique  
Bundesamt für Statistik  
Ufficio federale di statistica  
Uffizi federal da statistica**

Only when many people commit to helping others...

**One person in four does voluntary work. Volunteers are found in all social groups.**

Does your circle of acquaintances include such people? No? What about the member of your staff who heads a first-aid group? Or the colleague who trains the junior football team? The neighbour who does shopping for the handicapped man down the road? Your cousin who's on the school board? Your caretaker who's a member of the fire brigade? Or maybe even you work as a volunteer? This is more than likely, when you consider that every fourth person in Switzerland is involved in voluntary work. And it's gratifying to know that as many again would be prepared to do their bit. The fact that a quarter of adolescents and young adults take an altruistic view of helping others generates hope for the future.

**Volunteers are active in a wide variety of fields so benefit many**

Welfare work and education, sport and culture, religion and politics, socializing and entertainment are all sectors that rely on volunteers. Without their selfless work, there would be no local authority jubilee celebrations, no carnival capers, no referendums and no sports events. Volunteers create many opportunities for meetings and contacts, thus ensuring that the weak and disadvantaged are not relegated to the fringes of society and providing children, young people and the elderly with a wide choice of day-care and leisure activities.



**Voluntary work ...**

...creating a sense of community and solidarity...

### **Voluntary commitment is vital...**

Volunteers provide desirable services for people in our country and without them it would be a colder and less friendly place to live. In many areas, they even take on missions that are indispensable for society. All of us depend on such services because this high level of commitment, which comes free of charge, cannot be replaced by paid work.

### **...and will become even more important in future.**

Traditional ties and family networks are becoming increasingly fragile and are at risk of disappearing altogether. While people are first and foremost responsible for themselves, they should also feel responsible for others, in some form or other. This is why selfless commitment in a wide variety of fields is not only desirable but absolutely crucial for the future.

### **Civil society is based on volunteer work.**

In this vision, everybody does their best to do volunteer work in addition to their gainful employment. Essential services are provided by both types of activity, and appropriate forms of seeking and deploying personnel, qualifications and parallel further training need to be developed for both. Because everybody should be encouraged to make their know-how available for voluntary work at all stages of their lives.

### **What costs nothing is worth nothing**

That's the view frequently taken of voluntary work: it's great to know it exists, but people tend to take it so much for granted that they believe it needs little further encouragement. And that's why the importance of assistance to neighbours and relatives and unpaid services in institutions and clubs is not always duly acknowledged.

### **Public perceptions of voluntary work**

Work done in an honorary capacity is conducted in the public eye, and the incumbents are thanked for their contribution. In contrast, assistance to relatives and neighbours has a lower profile, so seldom receives public accolades. New forms of acknowledgement and appreciation are called for to thank volunteers, ranging from local media features through to events at neighbourhood level.

...is a contribution to a society based on solidarity...

...for which they deserve our appreciation...



**Gratitude is good. Support even better!**

Recognizing volunteer work as important means ensuring that it gives satisfaction and brings a «reward». Not in the form of money or «medals», but through easier access to courses, for instance. Or advice on how to find activities that promote personal development. Or generous release conditions on the part of employers. Or a gesture of appreciation for voluntary work through tax relief. Or professional advice and support for volunteers when things get on top of them. Because voluntary work is not always easy.

...and that's why we're grateful to all those who take on such a commitment...

...can we achieve a viable social network...

### **Networking focuses energies**

Networks link different resources to form viable structures that can be adapted to new tasks and requirements. Networks can be expanded to take on board fresh volunteers, making them a useful way of improving unpaid work.

### **Combined training courses**

These enlarge the experience and skills of volunteers who add to their capabilities in the interests of personal development and also with a view to possibly (re)joining the labour market. This is a task for all groups that deploy volunteers, as a way of showing their recognition and appreciation. By joining forces, they are better able to provide courses in line with requirements and with up-to-date knowledge.

### **Social service certificate**

Networking is already showing signs of success. For instance, all institutions that deploy volunteers are to issue a social service certificate that lists for the benefit of present and future employers the work done and skills acquired in carrying out voluntary work.

### **Coordination and placement offices**

These help to place volunteers looking for work in the right activity, while at the same time providing them with the necessary advice and support.

### **Service centres**

These help to speed up administrative and organizational tasks. Paperwork must not be allowed to stifle volunteer motivation.

### **Voluntary commitment enhances the quality of life of those who benefit from it.**

Thanks to volunteer work, many social groups enjoy a better life. Variety, entertainment, meaningful leisure pursuits and access to culture can enrich their daily routine, open up new horizons and inject a fresh sense of purpose. What is more, voluntary commitment plays a vital role in helping the disadvantaged and weak to cope with day-to-day life.

...because in so doing, they build relationships between people.

...and thus improve the quality of life

**Voluntary commitment also enhances the quality of life of the volunteers themselves.**

Voluntary work encourages social contacts, and hence strong personal ties to the volunteer's village or district, as well as building contacts with fellow helpers. It gives many people a way of structuring their time, a mission and often a meaning to their lives because being needed is an important ego booster. The labour market of the future requires all of us to commit to life-long learning. Through tasks that expand existing skills, volunteer work can help us rise to this challenge.

**You too have something valuable to offer!**

Many people and institutions pin their hopes on the assistance of women and men from many different backgrounds who are curious about unfamiliar areas of experience and want to discover and develop new personal skills.



**What about you? How can you contribute in future?**

Since 1997 the Swiss Federal Statistical Office has collected data about voluntary work every three years as part of its «Living Conditions» project, taking account of both organized and informal (i.e. based on individual initiative) volunteers. The latest information dates from the year 2000 and refers to the resident population aged 15 and over<sup>1</sup>.

### Organized voluntary work

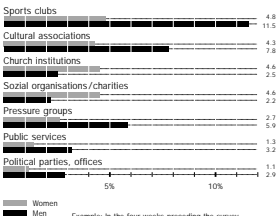
Honorary and voluntary activities on behalf of organizations or institutions play an important role in Switzerland. One person in four (i.e. some 1.5 million people) carries out at least one such unpaid activity, with men showing rather more commitment in this area than women (29% compared with 20%).

### Informal voluntary work

In addition, however, there are also so-called informal unpaid activities, such as assistance to neighbours, looking after other people's children, transport services, gardening, etc. Involvement in this field of unpaid work is virtually as great as for honorary and voluntary activities on behalf of institutions and organizations: 23% of the resident population (i.e. roughly 1.4 million people) provide unpaid services for third parties, with women doing more in this respect than men: 29% compared with 17%.

### Type of organization for which voluntary work is done

#### Participation by type of organization in %



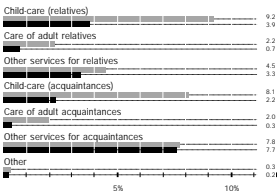
Example: In the four weeks preceding the survey, 4.8% of all women did honorary or voluntary unpaid work for a sports club at least once.

Men and women do not take on voluntary commitments in the same areas: men do far more honorary and voluntary work for sports organizations or clubs. This is followed by their involvement in cultural associations, pressure groups and in political offices and public services. Men participate least in social/charitable or church institutions. Among women, the level of involvement in sports and cultural associations is about the same as that for church and social/charitable institutions, but they participate far less in pressure groups, and only between 1.1 and 1.3% of women are involved in political offices and public services.

### In what areas do people carry out informal voluntary work?

One quarter of the resident population of Switzerland carries out informal unpaid work. Women most frequently look after the children of relatives and children they know, an area in which men are much less active. Men tend to concentrate on services for acquaintances such as work around the home, transport services, or gardening work. about 2% of women and 0.5% of men provide care services for relatives or acquaintances who do not live in the same household.

### Participation for informal activities in %



Example: 9.2% of all women provided unpaid child-care services for relatives' children in the four weeks preceding the survey.

<sup>1</sup> Source: SFSO, Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS): Unpaid work, 2000



## Who does voluntary work?

### T1 Participation rates for voluntary work in %

	organised	informal
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>by gender</b>		
Women	20	29
Men	29	17
<b>by nationality</b>		
Swiss	28	25
Foreign	10	15
<b>by age group</b>		
15 – 24	23	14
25 – 39	26	24
40 – 54	30	24
55 – 61/64	27	27
62/65 – 74	19	32
75+	9	13
<b>by level of education</b>		
Compulsory education	14	19
Upper secondary	26	25
University level	35	23
<b>by main activity</b>		
Economically active	28	20
Job hunting	12	19
In training/education	24	15
House and family work	29	41
Retired	15	25
<b>by family situation</b>		
living alone	19	23
Partner in 2-person household	22	24
Partner (youngest child 0-14)	33	28
Partner in different situation	29	21
Single parent (youngest child 0-14)	19	36
Sons/daughters living with parents (15-24)	24	14

Example: 25% of Switzerland's resident population carried out organized voluntary work at least once in the four weeks preceding the survey; 23% carried out informal voluntary work at least once.

### Who carries out organized voluntary work?

It is mainly 40- to 54-year olds, well-educated people, persons living in partner households with children, the economically active and housewives who are involved in honorary or voluntary work on behalf of an organization or institution. This profile applies to both men and women, though the latter have lower participation rates across the board. The fact that foreign residents are less committed in this respect probably has to do with the complex issues involved in integration.

Those involved in organized voluntary work are therefore usually not those sectors of the population with a lot of leisure time but, on the contrary, mainly people who – on the basis of their age, education or family and earning situation – have good qualifications and are socially integrated.<sup>2</sup>

### Who carries out informal voluntary work?

It is mainly older people up to the age of 74, housewives and women with families as well as people in family households who look after the children of other people and help their neighbours or provide other unpaid assistance to households consisting of non-relatives. This picture indicates that the structure of informal unpaid activity is a network of (partly mutual) assistance in people's immediate environment. The level of education does not appear to have an obvious impact on participation rates in this field. The economically active, job-hunters, persons in education/undergoing training and foreign residents are much less involved. As regards the family situation, what is striking is the high participation rates of single parents, on the one hand, and the extremely low representation of daughters and sons aged 15 to 24, on the other.



## How much time is spent on voluntary work?

On average, the resident population as a whole spends approximately three hours a month on organized unpaid work in clubs or associations and about 4 hours a month on helping neighbours and providing other assistance on their own initiative.

For honorary or volunteer workers, this means spending almost half a working day per week on average (14 hours a month) on such activities. Those who are active in an informal context spend about 18 hours a month on providing unpaid assistance.

This corresponds to an estimated total of 44 million hours a month, which is the equivalent of approximately 248,000 full-time posts.

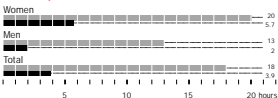
A monetary evaluation of unpaid work was carried out for 1997. If all hours spent on voluntary work in that year were paid, they would represent a monetary value of 19.4 billion Swiss francs.<sup>2</sup>



### Average time spent on voluntary work in hours per month

#### Honorary and voluntary activities



#### Informal unpaid activities



-  Volunteers: All people who pursue at least one organized or informal voluntary activity.
-  Total population: all Switzerland's resident people whether they carries out voluntary work or not.

<sup>2</sup> In this connection, see Beat Schmid's *Determinanten der Freiwilligenarbeit in: Nonprofit-Organisationen im Wandel*, published by R. Schauer, E.-B. Blümle, D. Witt, H.K. Anheier, Linz 2000, pp. 231 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> See: SFSO, *Monetäre Bewertung der unbezahlten Arbeit*. Neuchâtel, 1999 and SFSO, *Unbezahlt – aber trotzdem Arbeit*. Neuchâtel, 1999.

As part of its Living Conditions project, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office has regularly collected data on voluntary work since 1997. These are published in the Sozialberichterstattung Schweiz (Social Reporting Switzerland) series.

A set of questions about unpaid work which take up about 5 minutes of interview time are incorporated every three years into the Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS). These questions are designed to collect data about work in and around the home and family work, honorary and voluntary activities for organizations and institutions as well as about informal, unpaid work.

The SLFS is an annual random sample survey with the primary objective of collecting data about the employment structure and behaviour of Switzerland's resident population aged 15 and over. This survey consists of a telephone interview lasting about 20 minutes. In 2000, roughly 17,800 interviews were conducted.

### **2001 — International Year of Volunteers**

This folder is the result of a joint project of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, the International Year of Volunteers Forum Switzerland and the «Schweizerische Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft».

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### **Orders**

Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO)

→ order number 426-0000, phone 032 713 60 60

### **Information about voluntary work**

[www.iyv-forum.ch](http://www.iyv-forum.ch)

→ phone 0848 820 002 sfr. 0.12/min.