

## Volunteers in Sports Clubs in Europe – Key demographics and characteristics

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# Volunteers in Sports Clubs in Europe – Key demographics and characteristics

## OBJECTIVE

### What is it about?

These Quick Facts will give a short overview of volunteer demographics and characteristics in sports clubs in Europe. The question to be answered is - who volunteers and how?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Who is a sports volunteer?

Multiple definitions of the concept of “volunteering” exist and the concept of volunteering depends on the cultural context. However, the following description is widely accepted: Volunteering is characterised by activities which are (1) carried out on a voluntary basis and which are (2) unpaid or paid for with only a symbolic amount. The voluntary activities must (3) be carried out for the benefit of other people outside the family and (4) have a formal character (i.e. organised or agreed). While this definition in general works well across the participating countries, previous research has shown that at least the issue of what is perceived as a symbolic or substantial payment is different in these countries. This can lead to the effect that voluntary commitment being over- or underestimated in a country by country comparison.

## RELEVANCE

### Why should local sports clubs be concerned about volunteer demographics and characteristics in sports clubs in Europe?

Sports clubs of course already know best who their volunteers are - in much detail and on a personal basis. However, generalised data regarding the demographics and characteristics of volunteers in sports clubs in Europe can help to compare the specific situation at club level to the larger picture. Are certain developments (e.g. an increase in young volunteers) spe-

cific to the club or do they just mirror a more general development? In particular the differences to the general situation, may then point towards potential strength and weaknesses of the individual club.

## METHOD

### How was the information on volunteer demographics and characteristics collected?

Comparative data was collected for the “*Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe*” - Project (SIVSCE). As part of this research two major surveys were implemented. The first one was answered by more than 35,000 sports clubs from 10 European countries. The second survey was designed as a follow-up in which more than 13,000 club members were interviewed. These club members were recruited from almost 650 clubs that were selected from the initial club survey → [Quick Facts N°1](#).

Most of the quantitative data (e.g. how many members also volunteer) was collected through the club survey and is based on estimates made by the persons that have filled in the questionnaire. More qualitative information (regarding e.g. the frequency or nature of the involvement) was taken from the member survey where respondents refer to their own individual situation.

## RESULTS

### How many members are volunteering for their club?

In all ten countries integrated in the study volunteering is a central element of sports clubs. The relative share of volunteers in fixed position compared to all members of the club is between 23% in Spain and 22% in Hungary on the one hand and 14% in Switzerland and 13% in Germany on the other hand. However, in Switzerland and Germany a low rate of volunteers in fixed positions is accompanied by a comparably high share of volunteers who support the club on a more flexible basis (helping hands). Thus, altogether, there are no big differences between the ten countries with regard to the overall number of volunteers relative to the number of members per club → [Tab.1](#).

*Tab 1: Volunteers in fixed and no fixed positions (share relative to members, sorted descending by the share of volunteers).*

	ALL	ESP	HUN	NED	DEN	ENG	BEL	NOR	POL	SUI	GER
Volunteers in fixed positions (Share relative to all members in %)	19	23	22	21	20	20	19	19	18	14	13
Volunteers not in a fixed position (Share relative to all members in %)	19	18	16	13	14	6	18	16	13	25	17

## Has voluntary commitment in sport increased or decreased over the last 5 years?

In the past, a “crisis of volunteering” has frequently been declared in connection with sports and sports club development and actually the SIVSCE survey also reveals that having enough human resources is one of the main challenges of many sports clubs (see below).

However, the sports club survey also shows that sport-volunteering has been relatively stable. In most countries, 60 percent or more of all sports clubs report that within the last five years the number of volunteers in their club has been roughly the same.

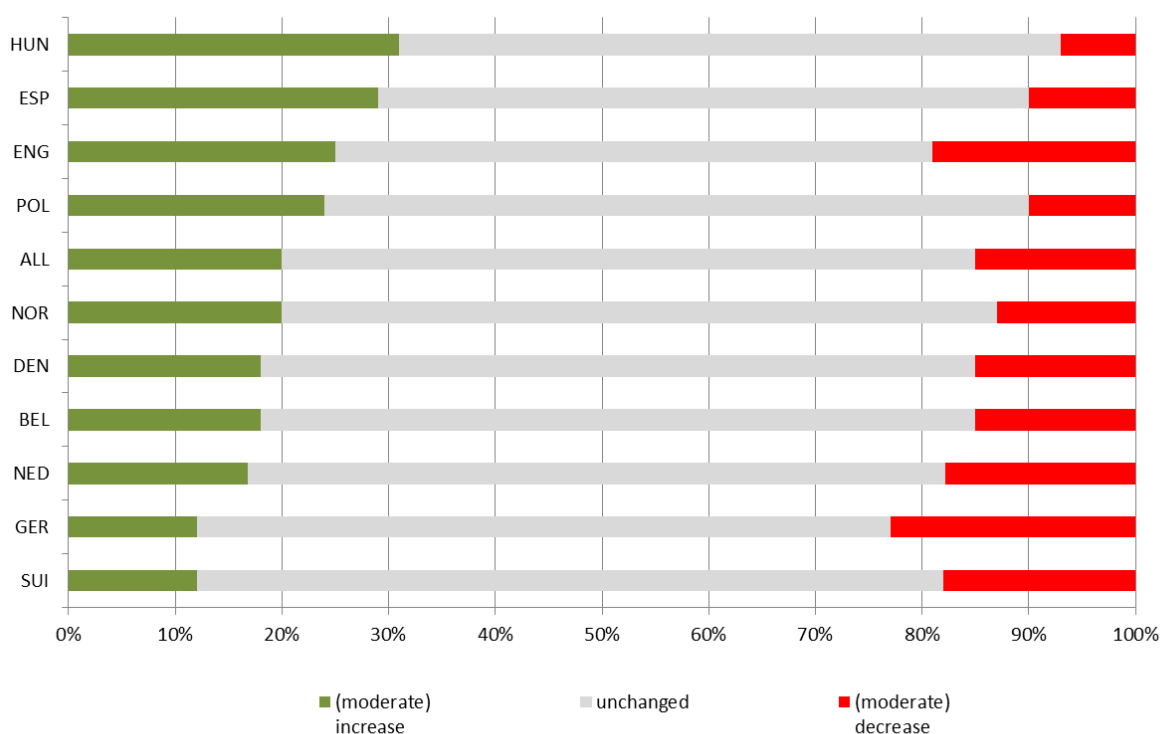


Fig. 1: Development of volunteers in sports clubs in Europe

Of course there are clubs that have experienced an increase of volunteers and clubs that have experienced a decrease. However, in nearly all countries a higher share of sports clubs mention a (moderate) increase than a (moderate) decrease, except for Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands → Fig .1.

Although the challenge of sports clubs to recruit and retain volunteers must be taken seriously, the figures above do not support the general thesis that voluntary engagement is in steady decline.



## What are the volunteers' main tasks and areas of activity?

As part of their role in fixed positions, volunteers fulfil different tasks within the sports club that can be assigned to four main areas: (1) Administration and management (e.g., board and committees, club leaders); (2) Sport and training (e.g., coaches, instructors, group- and team leaders); (3) Sport and competition (e.g., referees, officials) and (4) Other tasks (e.g., maintenance, facilities).

Looking at the distribution of volunteers between these four areas the data shows that in relation to the total number of volunteers in fixed positions, the largest share of volunteers fulfils administrative or management tasks → Fig .2.. These volunteers are mostly volunteers on the board level.

In Germany, two thirds (67 %) of all volunteers are engaged in this area, whereas roughly half of all voluntary positions belong to administration and management in Denmark, Hungary or Spain and only 30 percent of the volunteers are concerned with administration and management in the Netherlands.

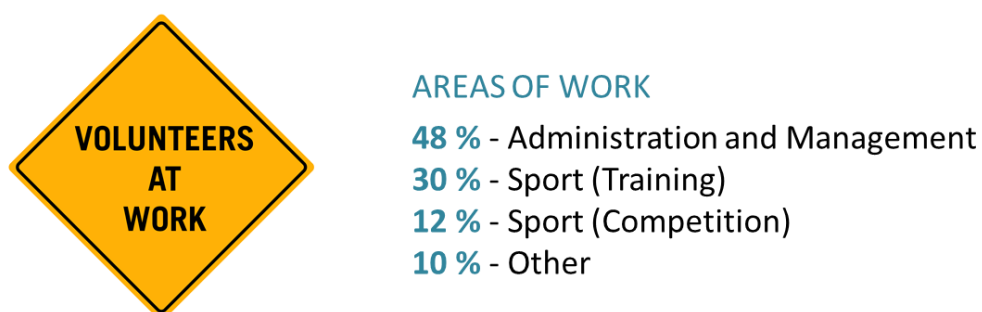


Fig.2: Club areas being operated by volunteers in fixed positions (share of volunteers in the four areas relative to all volunteers of the club, in %).

On average only a bit more than 40 percent of volunteers have tasks that are directly related to the provision of sport (training and competition). These figures are highest in Switzerland, Norway and England (50 %) and lowest in Germany (31%).

A more detailed analysis of the tasks taken over by volunteers is given in table 1. When these figures are compared to the clubs' estimate of how many volunteers contribute to the different working areas some inconsistencies appear: While German clubs have reported the lowest shares of volunteering directly linked to the provision of sports (see above), the data from Germany also shows the highest number of volunteers who say, they work as a coach or instructor. However the table also reveals a few other interesting figures which may be worth

to be studied in more detail: Why for example only 6 percent of the Danish volunteers work as a referee compared to 21 percent in the Netherlands. What can we learn about different approaches to club democracy if we compare the figures for volunteers on the board, the management and the committees? → [Tab .2](#).

Tab 2: 'Which of the following tasks come closest to describing the work you do in the club?'  
(multiple answers, in percent of all volunteers).

	ALL	BEL	DEN	ENG	GER	HUN	NED	NOR	POL	ESP	SUI
<b>Tasks connected to the sports activity</b>											
Coach/instructor	31	31	31	28	39	18	31	32	31	37	34
Referee/official	12	8	6	14	10	10	21	15	16	10	9
Other tasks connected to the sports activity	19	9	20	25	18	17	11	27	23	16	16
<b>Tasks connected to club leadership</b>											
Board member	24	26	17	13	29	18	16	29	33	39	25
Member of one or more committee(s)	16	11	22	29	15	7	25	20	6	9	13
Other forms of club leadership/management	10	10	6	16	6	14	7	11	15	14	4
<b>Episodic and irregular tasks</b>											
Organisation of events, tournaments etc.	38	39	25	38	38	55	28	30	49	43	33
Driving to matches, events, tournaments	23	13	29	27	24	24	18	37	17	17	17
Administration, office work etc.	15	15	9	17	16	18	9	14	22	17	12
Communication	14	12	10	14	17	12	10	13	18	18	11
Technical work and services	13	25	19	12	13	13	14	19	12	8	8
Funding activities	12	7	11	12	7	14	4	15	20	14	7
Other tasks	10	8	11	15	10	5	11	10	8	9	13

## Who are the Club's volunteers?

Tables 3 – 6 provide a quick overview of demographics of both, volunteers and non-volunteers. To keep things simple, the volunteers section includes all volunteers, i.e. those in regular positions as well as the occasional volunteer. However, if regular volunteers in fixed positions are compared separately, the identified differences are still more evident.



Tab 3: Demographics of Volunteers and Non-Volunteers in Sports Clubs in Europe - Gender

Gender		BEL	DEN	ENG	GER	HUN	NED	NOR	POL	ESP	SUI	ALL
Volunteers	Male in %	62	56	62	62	59	66	62	56	80	66	63
	Female in %	38	44	38	38	41	34	38	44	20	34	37
Non-Volunteers	Male in %	56	48	70	47	53	55	61	51	70	66	58
	Female in %	44	52	30	53	47	45	39	49	30	34	42

Tab 4: Demographics of Volunteers and Non-Volunteers in Sports Clubs in Europe - Age

Age		BEL	DEN	ENG	GER	HUN	NED	NOR	POL	ESP	SUI	ALL
Volunteers	16-25 in %	15	8	8	14	15	10	23	29	18	23	16
	26-40 in %	21	19	18	23	18	18	20	29	43	29	24
	41-64 in %	54	55	58	49	56	57	48	37	38	40	49
	65 + in %	10	18	16	14	12	15	8	5	1	8	11
Non-Volunteers	16-25 in %	12	7	11	11	19	15	27	54	11	24	19
	26-40 in %	26	12	15	27	28	20	29	21	47	28	25
	41-64 in %	49	50	54	44	46	46	31	20	41	36	42
	65 + in %	13	31	20	17	7	19	12	4	0	12	14

Tab 5: Demographics of Volunteers and Non-Volunteers in Sports Clubs in Europe - Education

Education		BEL	DEN	ENG	GER	HUN	NED	NOR	POL	ESP	SUI	ALL
Volunteers	Low in %	4	7	1	9	9	16	3	6	7	1	6
	Medium in %	31	42	40	52	43	32	35	28	60	41	40
	High in %	64	51	59	39	48	52	62	66	33	58	53
Non-Volunteers	Low in %	6	9	4	16	16	19	4	18	9	4	11
	Medium in %	32	36	40	51	39	30	29	34	49	41	38
	High in %	61	55	55	33	45	51	67	48	42	54	51

Tab 6: Demographics of Volunteers and Non-Volunteers in Sports Clubs in Europe – Migration Background

Migration Background		BEL	DEN	ENG	GER	HUN	NED	NOR	POL	ESP	SUI	ALL
<b>Volunteers</b>	Born in other Country in %	3	3	8	2	1	2	6	1	4	7	4
<b>Non-Volunteers</b>	Born in other Country in %	2	3	9	7	4	4	10	0	8	11	6

Data shows, that the differences between volunteers and non-volunteers are rather small if averages are compared for all 10 Countries. However if figures are compared at the national level some interesting findings can be made. This includes for example the relatively high number of volunteers with a low formal education level in the Netherlands compared to Poland, where the level of education is much higher among volunteers than non-volunteers. It could also be interesting to further analyse why share of people that were not born in the country is similar amongst volunteers and non-volunteers in the UK while there are differences in most other countries. Another evident finding is that men are strongly overrepresented among volunteers in Germany, while this is not the case among non-volunteers.

## STARTING POINTS FOR PRACTICE

What are practical action points that can be derived for clubs and federations?

Sports clubs may want to compare their own membership data to the figures described in this fact sheet. Although, some of the demographic data that is presented here will not be available at club level, the result can be used to evaluate the club's volunteer demographics. Which groups within the club's membership are underrepresented amongst the club's volunteers? Does this difference correspond with findings for other clubs in the Country? Is there a reason why some groups are less involved in volunteering and can this be changed? How much time and effort do volunteers spend on administration, training and competition? Is this a good distribution of resources or should it be changed?



## QUICK FACTS FOR SPORTS CLUBS

Research on sports clubs should also be research for sports clubs. With the "Quick Facts for Sports Clubs" series, the partners of the "SIVSCE-Project" want to take this claim into account.

Selected results of the study are represented in this series in such a way that they provide the responsible persons in the clubs and federations with a quick overview of the gained insights, and highlight the most relevant points for the sports sector.

The description deliberately follows the principles of clear language and systematic presentation and limits itself to only the most important aspects and insights.

Readers who are interested in the complete and detailed results of the study can refer to the website for the corresponding research reports, scientific publications and quick facts on other topics → [www.sdu.dk/sivsce](http://www.sdu.dk/sivsce)

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