

General Information



KEY INFORMATION ABOUT SWEDEN

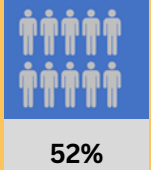
Capital: Stockholm
Official Language: Swedish
Population: 10 605 529*
Currency: Swedish krona (SEK)
Calling Code: +46

KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

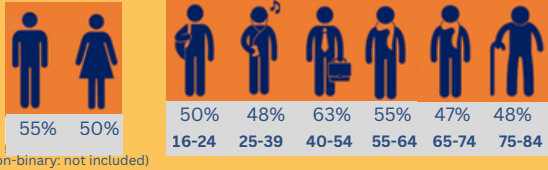
GDP per capita: 615 thousand SEK (Statistics Sweden)
Real GDP growth in 2025: 1.5%**
Unemployment rate in August 2025: 8.7%***

Statistics and Demographics

Volunteering rate of population***



Volunteer experience per gender and age group (percentage of the total population)****



Total number of volunteers: around 3.5-4 million

Annual economic value of volunteering:

€ 131 billion, 3.32% of GDP*****

Education Levels and Volunteering

Volunteer participation increases with education level. Around 37% of those with primary school education volunteer, compared to 45% of those with upper secondary education, and 60% of those with a university degree.*****

Motivation for Volunteering*****

There are many different reasons why people choose to get involved. This becomes clear when those who are engaged describe, in their own words, why they have chosen to participate. However, some themes recur.

Three main motivations dominate:

- The sense of community one becomes part of,
- The benefit one can bring to others, and
- Children's opportunities to take part in activities.

First, community and social interaction. Many people primarily see voluntary associations as a social arena where individuals meet around shared interests. This sense of community is particularly important for older people, which is consistent with previous findings.

Second, helping others. This is described in various ways, such as wanting to be of use, to help others in vulnerable situations, or to "give something back". The phrase "give back" appears frequently and suggests that individuals who have received support are also inclined to contribute themselves—whether to other people, the local community, or society at large.

Third, children. Parents become involved to ensure that their children have access to different kinds of activities. This is a practical and goal-oriented form of engagement that follows the child.

Volunteering in Sweden remains both high and stable over time. Around half of the population engages in voluntary activities each year, and this level of participation has been consistent for several decades. Despite social and economic changes, the willingness to contribute time and effort to civil society continues to be strong, highlighting the important role of volunteering in maintaining social cohesion and democratic participation.

DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING*****

A volunteer is someone who engages on a voluntary basis, driven by their own motivation and without financial compensation. By volunteer, we also include other common terms such as unpaid volunteer, voluntary worker, event staff, board member or active member.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VOLUNTEERING*****

During the first half of the 20th century, efforts began to establish many of the institutions we now take for granted in the welfare state: social security systems, public health, education, healthcare and social care. Prior to this, large parts of welfare were organised by what we today call civil society—initially through religious movements from the Middle Ages onwards, and later through various forms of solidarity movements.

Modern welfare policy and social services have emerged from voluntary social work combined with political reform efforts rooted in these same movements. Dedicated individuals in philanthropic associations, popular movements and self-help organisations have, throughout modern history, mapped social problems and developed methods to address them. When the concept of the "people's home" (folkhemmet) was introduced by an increasingly strong labour movement and subsequently expanded between 1930 and 1970, the state and municipalities created their own structures for the production and delivery of welfare. At the same time, voluntary action—channelled through trade unions, patient and user organisations, among others—remained a strong force for influence, innovation and support.

Over time, the image of Swedish welfare as being financed and organised by the public sector came to dominate. In the early 1990s, Swedish research began to reveal something that surprised international scholars: namely, that there was a great deal of voluntary work in Sweden—even within the welfare sector (see, for example, Wijkström and Lundström 2002, and von Essen and Svedberg (eds.) 2020).

A strong welfare state proved to encourage, rather than hinder, initiatives for voluntary action within welfare. This referred to voluntary work that had existed and developed even during the period when state and municipal welfare structures were being built up and consolidated. It was not solely a matter of informal efforts—such as helping family, friends or neighbours—but also of unpaid contributions carried out not only through individuals' free choice in their spare time, but within the framework of some form of organisation.

As Jegermalm and Sundström (2014), among others, have shown, the Nordic "volunteer model" is characterised above all by a substantial public commitment that exists alongside widespread voluntary and family-based care. The fact that the public sector has traditionally provided strong support for civil society to operate—both practically, in the form of premises and other resources, and democratically, through dialogue, respect for its distinctiveness and constructive collaboration—has created the conditions for a high level of organisational engagement in Sweden.

Types of Volunteer Activities*****

In addition to these three main themes, many highlight a sense of meaning and the feeling of being needed as important personal drivers. For many, particularly older individuals, voluntary engagement fulfils a fundamental need for purpose in life. Others describe their involvement in terms of duty and responsibility. This is especially evident among those active in housing associations and smaller organisations where there is a shortage of active members. There is also an undertone of fatigue among those who feel they must always take the initiative to encourage others to get involved. The opportunity to influence is also emphasised as central to personal engagement.

Most volunteering roles reflect the way Swedish civil society is organised. Associations need both elected representatives to lead their activities and volunteers to organise events and carry out practical tasks. As sports clubs and housing associations account for a large share of civic engagement, many roles involve leadership, coaching, administration, and other responsibilities that keep these organisations running on a day-to-day basis. Volunteering as a night patrol to promote community safety, serving as a basketball coach, mentor to a young person, engaging in climate action initiatives, supporting the care and rehoming of stray cats or serving on the board of a non-profit organisation are common volunteer activities.

*Source: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/manniskorna-i-sverige/sveriges-befolkning/>

**Source: Statistics Sweden, <https://www.scb.se/en/fn/fn-finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/national-accounts/national-accounts/national-accounts-quarterly-and-annual-estimates/>

***Source: <https://www.scb.se/en/fn/fn-finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/labour-market/labour-force-supply/labour-force-surveys-ifs/peng/statistical-news/namnos2/>

****Source: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1941543/FULLTEXT03.pdf>

*****Source: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2018/svenskarna-arbeta-ideellt-for-131-miljarder/>, from 2018

*****Source: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1941543/FULLTEXT03.pdf>

*****Source: <https://www.volontarbyran.org/en/faq>

*****Source: https://issuu.com/volontarbyransverige/docs/volont_rinsatser_i_v_lf_rden_-_2023_webb

*****Source: https://issuu.com/volontarbyransverige/docs/svenskarnas_engagemang_2025?fr=xIAEoAT3_MzMz

Impact of Volunteering*

The value of voluntary engagement in civil society organisations. What, then, does voluntary engagement mean for our society and for the individual who chooses to get involved? Our annual survey, through Volontärbyrån, called Volontärbarometern, which examines, among other things, the drivers and motivations behind voluntary engagement, it becomes clear that such engagement generates distinct value for both individuals and society.

Voluntary engagement contributes to a sense of being seen and needed. It provides opportunities to pursue one's interests alongside others and to be part of a social community. Individuals who volunteer describe an increased sense of participation in society and a feeling that they contribute to positive societal development (Volontärbarometern, 2023).

There is also research indicating that individuals who participate in democratic civil society organisations develop mutual respect for one another (Nieminen et al., 2013; Putnam, 2000). Through processes of socialisation, taking on positions of trust, and being part of a community, trust is cultivated. Trust in others and in societal institutions is not only fundamental to a well-functioning democracy, but is also of significant importance for the individual's social well-being and health.

Measuring the Impact of Volunteering*****

The studies that we've mentioned above use a variety of methods, for example interviews and in-depth surveys. Some methods that researcher's are using are:

Quantitative metrics

Measurement of outputs such as:

- Number of volunteers
- Hours contributed
- Activities delivered

"The replacement cost"-method

The method is used to estimate the total economic value of all volunteer hours worked in Sweden over the course of a year, expressed as a share of the GDP for the same year. The replacement cost method values volunteer work by estimating what it would cost to pay someone to perform the same work at market wages. In other words, it assigns a monetary value to unpaid labour based on the average wage for comparable work.

Quality Standards in the Field of Volunteering*****

There are no formal, national "quality standards" specifically governing volunteering in Sweden. However, certain frameworks can be understood as indirectly fulfilling a similar function. In particular, government grants to civil society organisations come with a set of requirements that can be seen as establishing baseline quality criteria.

Organisations receiving public funding are generally required to be democratically structured, transparent in their governance, and aligned with fundamental democratic values and human rights. These so-called "democracy conditions" include, for example, having statutes, an elected board, and internal accountability mechanisms, as well as ensuring that the organisation's activities do not contradict the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

While these requirements are not designed specifically as standards for volunteering, they contribute to ensuring that volunteer-based activities take place within stable, responsible, and value-driven organisational contexts.

National E-platform for Volunteering



Volontärbyrån helps committed individuals and non-profit organisations find each other. We connect volunteers with opportunities and offer training and support to associations on matters related to volunteer work and engagement.

Volontärbyrån is a non-profit initiative within Ideella Sverige (The National Forum for Voluntary Organisations).*****

Challenges to the Development of Volunteering**

Limited accessibility remains a key challenge, as certain groups (such as newcomers and young people) struggle to find entry points into voluntary engagement.

Inclusion is not yet fully achieved, with barriers still present for individuals with disabilities and diverse backgrounds.

Time constraints and changing lifestyles mean that many people prefer flexible, short-term volunteering rather than long-term commitments.

Many organisations lack sufficient resources and structures to effectively recruit, manage, and retain volunteers.

There is a significant gap between people's willingness to volunteer and their knowledge of how to get involved, particularly in times of crisis.

Engaging younger generations is challenging due to limited awareness of opportunities and perceptions that volunteering requires substantial time commitments.

Volunteers may face risks such as hostility or threats, which can discourage continued engagement.

Participation in volunteering is unevenly distributed, with higher involvement among individuals with greater socio-economic resources.



Institutional and Legal Framework for Volunteering****

Freedom of association in Sweden is a fundamental right protected by the Constitution. It is enshrined in the Instrument of Government, one of Sweden's four fundamental laws, which guarantees individuals the right to form, join and participate in associations for both public and private purposes.

This constitutional protection means that people are free to organise collectively without undue interference from the state. It has been a cornerstone of Sweden's democratic development and has enabled a strong and diverse civil society to flourish.

The institutional framework for volunteering in Sweden is characterized by a lack of specific, centralized legislation governing volunteer activities, relying instead on a strong tradition of civil society autonomy, freedom of association, and indirect government support. Volunteering is deeply rooted in the "ideell sektor" (non-profit/civil society sector), with high participation rates often focused on sports, leisure, and social causes.

National Award and Recognitions for Volunteering**

Volunteer of the Year (Årets Volontär) is an annual award presented by our organisation since 2017 to recognise and celebrate the millions of people in Sweden who engage in voluntary work and contribute to society every day.

The award highlights one individual whose voluntary efforts have made a meaningful difference within their organisation and community, while symbolically honouring all volunteers across the country.

Non-profit organisations can nominate a volunteer. Whether they are new, long-standing, or have made an exceptional contribution during the year. From all nominations, a group of finalists is selected, and one person is chosen as Volunteer of the Year.

The winner is announced and celebrated on the United Nations' International Volunteer Day on 5 December, as part of our efforts to raise awareness of and appreciation for voluntary engagement in Sweden.

Financial Support for the Development of Volunteering*****

Governmental support;

Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society is distributing funds to the civil society in the form of support for organisations, projects and international cooperation. All the support we distribute is given on behalf of the Swedish government.

The Swedish Inheritance Fund (Allmänna arvsfonden) is a state fund established in 1928. It receives assets from people who pass away in Sweden without a will and without close relatives such as a spouse, children or siblings.

The purpose of the fund is to support non-profit organisations and other voluntary associations. It provides funding for innovative projects that benefit groups such as children, young people, older people and persons with disabilities. Through this system, resources that would otherwise lack a legal heir are redistributed to strengthen civil society and develop new forms of social activities and services in Sweden.

In addition to governmental funding, volunteer-driven organisations in Sweden can also access financial support from private foundations and charitable trusts, many of which provide grants for specific causes or target groups.

Funding can further be secured through private donations from individuals, as well as through corporate sponsorships and partnerships, where companies contribute financially or in-kind as part of their social responsibility efforts.



Key Stakeholders in the Development of Volunteering

Government: Strengthen conditions and frameworks of national grant systems. Develop a national strategy for volunteering, assign targeted responsibilities to public bodies, and ensure funding for knowledge-building, such as research. Make regulations simpler and more accessible.

Municipalities and regions: Improve local and regional grant systems. Create supportive structures for collaboration and facilitate local activities. Promote local conditions that enable volunteering.

NGOs: Share knowledge and collaborate broadly. Find new ways to include more people and ensure that internal structures do not reinforce or reproduce exclusionary norms.

Public and private sectors: Actively engage in dialogue and partnerships with civil society to elevate the value of engagement.

Private funders: Strengthen the terms and conditions of private funding.

Media: Highlight the diversity of volunteering and amplify voices from civil society in public discourse. Show that volunteering exists in many forms and is open to all.

Trends in the Development of Volunteering

- Volunteering levels in Sweden remain relatively stable over time, with around half of the population engaging in voluntary activities each year.
- There is an increasing preference for flexible and short-term volunteering, rather than long-term commitments.
- Crisis-driven engagement is growing, with significant spikes in volunteering during events such as the refugee situation (2015), the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine.
- Digital volunteering and remote engagement have expanded, particularly during and after the pandemic, lowering barriers to participation.
- There is a growing demand for volunteers, with many organisations reporting increased needs for voluntary support.
- Volunteering is increasingly linked to personal development and well-being, with participants reporting improved mental health, skills, and sense of purpose.
- Demographic shifts are visible: younger participation has slightly declined in recent years, while engagement among older groups has increased post-pandemic.
- Barriers to entry remain, particularly for young people and underrepresented groups, despite high willingness to engage.
- There is a continued shift towards issue-driven engagement, especially in areas such as social welfare, integration, and crisis response.

Research in the Field of Volunteering

The biggest study conducted is Marie Cederschiöld University's long-term population based study, that has been carried out since 1992.

The most recent one can be found here: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1941543/FULLTEXT03.pdf>

Apart from that, the following institutes conduct studies in the field:

- Stockholm School of Economics
- University of Gothenburg
- Lund University
- Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF)
- Statistics Sweden (SCB)
- Public Health Agency of Sweden
- Ideella Sverige/Volontärbyrån (The National Forum for Voluntary Organisations)
- Giva Sverige (Swedish Fundraising Association)

*Source: https://issuu.com/volontarbyransverige/docs/volontar_barometern_2025

**Source: <https://www.volontarbyran.org/arets-volontar>

***Source: https://issuu.com/volontarbyransverige/docs/volontar_barometern_2025

****Source: Swedish law, <https://lagen.nu/1974:1352#K2P1S1>; European Commission, Study on Volunteering in the European Union Country Report Sweden, https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/national_report_se_en.pdf

*****Source: <https://www.mucf.se/en/grants>, <https://www.arvsfonden.se/>

*****Source: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2018/svenskarna-arbetar-ideellt-for-131-miljarder/>

*****Source: <https://www.mucf.se/bilagor/statistik/artiklar/projektbidrag/motivera-rasism-och-intolerans/demokrativillkor>

*****Source: <https://www.volontarbyran.org/en>