

VOLUNTEERING
INFRASTRUCTURE IN EUROPE
PUBLICATION

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Europe
for Citizens

CEV



European Volunteer Centre

1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE CONCEPT DEFINITION

Volunteering infrastructure is the series of basic organisational systems, mechanisms and tools necessary to provide a setting in which volunteering can be carried out in an efficient and safe manner, while contributing to the positive development of society.

A proper volunteering infrastructure should operate with a clearly defined and established legal framework, proper funding and an organised and balanced network of volunteer centres, which are readily accessible to the public on all levels. In addition, it ought to have an active role in government policies in order to be able to defend and support the rights and duties of volunteers.

The infrastructure should promote, aid and facilitate volunteering.

Volunteering in Switzerland is quite popular and generally perceived as a positive quality in society and in a person. Herbert Ammann, Director of the Swiss Society for Public Good (www.sgg-ssup.ch), which helps promote volunteering in Switzerland, has said that the Swiss could be designated as a nation of volunteers. The concept of volunteering in Switzerland is very deeply rooted[1].

However, Switzerland still has progress to make in order to achieve the quality standard and participation rates of other countries. Whilst it has overtaken some nations, such as the United States of America in terms of percentage of the population who volunteer[2], it must increase numbers further to achieve the levels of Sweden, Holland and Norway.

2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

From a governing point of view, Switzerland is a direct democracy with a federal government system. This means that decisions regarding social work and local organisations are typically made locally and not at the federal level. The local approach is reinforced even more by the fact that Switzerland has four official national languages and four linguistic regions for a population of just about 8.4 million inhabitants. German is spoken by 63% of the population, French by 22.7%, Italian by 8.1%, and Romansh by 0.5% respectively[3]. While English is not an official national language, its use has grown in importance over the past few years.

[1] Leybold-Johnson, I., 2011, 'Swiss Remain a nation of volunteers'. www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss_news/Swiss_remain_a_nation_of_volunteers.html?cid=81726854

[2] School of Public Policy, 2018, *Where are America's volunteers? A look at America's widespread decline in volunteering in cities and states*, http://publicpolicy.umd.edu/sites/default/files/UMD_Do%20Good_Where%20Are%20Americas%20Volunteers_Oct2018.pdf

[3] Federal Department for Foreign Affairs, 2017, *Language Facts and Figures*, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/en/home/gesellschaft/sprachen/die-sprachen---fakten-und-zahlen.html>

The Federal Statistical Office^[4] (SFSO) defines volunteering as an unpaid, non-profit involvement in culture, environment, sports and politics or social and church-based activities. This work can be performed within the framework of an organisation or an institution, but also as informal or spontaneous work. Furthermore, the SFSO distinguishes between organised or formal volunteering and informal volunteering, defined as follows: ‘Organised or formal volunteering includes honorary and associative activities carried out within the framework of associations and institutions.’ On the other hand, informal volunteer work encompasses “neighbourly assistance, the minding of the children of third parties, transport, gardening etc”^[5].

Jacqueline Bühlmann and Beat Schmid^[6] carried out the first Swiss national study on volunteering in 1999 by means of telephone interviews with 16,200 people of Swiss nationality or with a residence permit. Two years later, an even more general study of the Federal Statistical Office published results on the basis of the 1997 population census. The study showed that 25% of the Swiss population carried out a volunteer activity, corresponding to 44 million hours per month, which equates to approximately 248,000 full-time jobs^[7]. According to the same data, informal volunteering occupied almost as important a place as formal volunteering: 23% of the resident population, that being approximately 1.4 million people, provided services to third parties free of charge^[8]. In 2010, “33% of the resident population in Switzerland aged 15 and older was involved in at least one form of formal or informal volunteer work in 2010”. The time spent doing volunteer work was on average 2.6 hours per month of formal work and 2.7 hours of informal work, meaning that ‘640 million hours were spent on volunteering in 2010’.

The most recent data is from 2016^[9] shows that there has been a considerable increase to 42.7% of the population in volunteering since 2010. According to the Swiss Federal Statistics Office (SFSO), 21.7% of men volunteer through a formal volunteering organisation, compared with 17.4% of women. Sports associations are the most popular formal organisations through which men volunteer (8.6%), whilst most women (4.4%) volunteer with social-charitable organisations. Political parties remain the least popular organisations to volunteer with for both men and women. However, more women volunteer informally (42.9%) than men (28.4%), in providing support to relatives and friends.

The Swiss on average dedicate 2.4 hours per month to formal voluntary organisations and 4.7 hours to informal services. Despite a 0.2 hour decrease in dedication to formal organisation since 2010, time spent on informal volunteering has increased by 2 hours per month since the last census. This translates to 664 million hours spent on voluntary activities in 2016, which shows an increase of 24 million hours since 2010.

[4] Federal Statistics Office, www.statistics.admin.ch

[5] Federal Statistical Office, 2001, *Volunteer work in Switzerland*, www.bfs.admin.ch.

[6] Behlmann, J., Schmid, B., 1999, *Du travail, mais pas de salaire*. Office fédéral de la statistique, Neuchâtel,

[7] Le travail bénévole en Suisse (2001) and the Rapport sur le travail bénévole en Suisse (2004), the FSO, www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/news/publikationen.Document.49526.pdf.

[8] Federal Statistical Office (FSO) and iyv-forum.ch, Le travail bénévole en Suisse. Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 2001.

[9] Federal Statistical Office, 2016, Voluntary work, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/work-income/unpaid-work/voluntary-work.html>

People aged 15-24 perform the least number of hours per month of voluntary work. There is an increase in hours in each age category with the highest participation in 65-74-year-olds, performing on average 14.6 hours of formal and informal voluntary work per month. The SFSO survey states that “in general, people with higher educational attainment, the employed, as well as people engaged in domestic work and those living in a household with a couple and children are also those who tend to volunteer with an organisation or institution. This profile applies to both men and women; however, the participation rates for the latter are consistently lower”[10].

In Switzerland, there is no official difference between long-term and short-term voluntary service, although both forms are practiced in the country[11].

There are differences with regard to voluntary work, specifically formal voluntary work, in each of the linguistic regions. The first outstanding characteristic is that the percentage of people involved in voluntary work is notably larger in German-speaking Switzerland than in the French and Italian-speaking regions. Predominantly German-speaking central Switzerland has the highest formal volunteering activity at 25.2% of the population, whilst the French and Italian speaking regions both register below 15%[12]. Italian-speaking Tessin in the south also has the lowest percent of informal volunteering (21.6%), with French- and German-speaking Espace Mittelland having the highest (34.9%)[13]. Voluntary participation in sports is the main cause for these regional disparities.

For formal volunteer activities, the involvement rates in rural communes with less than 2,000 inhabitants are higher than in urban and larger communes. The urban agglomeration areas are around the Swiss average. As for informal voluntary activities, the tendency is very similar, although perhaps less evident[14].

In its 2010 publication[15], the SFSO distinguishes eight types of volunteers: (1) Avid Volunteers: those who carry out formal and informal volunteer work and make monetary contributions to charity; (2) Volunteers: those who also participate in formal and informal activities but do not give to charity; (3) Formal Plus: formal volunteers who donate to charity, while (4) Formal volunteers do not give to charity, but do carry out work in the formal sector. Similarly, (5) Informal Plus are informal volunteers who contribute to charity, and (6) Informal volunteers do not give to charity; (7) Charity Donors are non-volunteers who make contributions to charities. Lastly, (8) Non-volunteers are those who do not volunteer nor donate money.

[10] Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS): Unpaid work 2010.

[11] AVSO & CEV Project: The Legal Status of Volunteers 2005. “Country report on the legal status of volunteers in Switzerland”.

[12] Federal Statistical Office, 2016, *Travail bénévolé organisé*, en 2016:

https://www.atlas.bfs.admin.ch/maps/13/fr/12581_6907_6901_119/20658.html

[13] Federal Statistical Office, 2016, *Travail bénévolé informel*, en 2016,

https://www.atlas.bfs.admin.ch/maps/13/fr/12580_6902_6901_119/20657.html

[14] Schön-Bühlmann, J., 2011, *Freiwilligenarbeit in der Schweiz: Unterschiede nach ausgewählten regionalen Gliederungen (Voluntary work in Switzerland: Differences based on selected regional divisions)*. FSO, Neuchâtel, 2011.

[15] [Www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/news/publikationen.html?publicationID=4555](https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/news/publikationen.html?publicationID=4555)

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

In the last twenty years, there have been numerous governmental drafts to support voluntary work in Switzerland, but in almost every canton, the efforts have not gone beyond the discussion stage. Thus, to date, there is no nationwide legislation concerning voluntary work. There is however one exception: the Law on Youth Vacation (Art. 329e OR – Obligationenrecht SR 220 über Jugendurlaub). This law allows the employee to take one working week off every year in order to perform an unpaid directing, supervising or advising activity in a cultural or social organisation as well as the necessary further training. The person would have to be less than 30 years old. However, making this law known to the public and to employees has been a slow process. For this reason, it has not been widely applied or used[16].

4. STRUCTURE OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING

Many organisations work with volunteers. Three national exchange platforms exist, one per major linguistic region: Benevol Schweiz (www.benevol.ch), Groupe romand de promotion du bénévolat (www.benevolat-vaud.ch/tout-sur-benevolat-vaud/reseau/53-groupe-romand-depromotion-du-benevolat), and Conferenza del volontariato sociale (www.volontariato-sociale.ch). The platforms are places of exchange for voluntary organisations and local volunteer centres working in the social field.

In 2000, a national umbrella organisation was founded with the aim of bringing together local, regional and national stakeholders working with volunteers around the International Year of Volunteers 2001 (IYV2001). This national entity was called Forum Bénévolat / Forum Freiwilligenarbeit / Forum Volontariato. After IYV2001, it continued to exist, but was dissolved at the end of 2011. In its place, Réseau Suisse Bénévolat (RSB), or the Swiss Volunteering Network was created in December 2012. The role of the network is to provide a platform for its member organisations to exchange ideas and good practice. Each year, a steering group is created and is made up of a selection of member organisations. For instance, in 2019, Association des communes suisse et Unions des villes suisses (the president), Fondation Mercator Suisse and Croix-Rouge suisse constitute this group. There is an annual public meeting, the theme of which is set by the presiding group and agreed upon with the steering group[17].

[16] AVSO & CEV Project: The Legal Status of Volunteers 2005. "Country report on the legal status of volunteers in Switzerland", 2005

[17] Réseau Suisse Bénévolat, 2019, Le Réseau, <https://www.reseaubenevolat.ch/fr/le-reseau/>

There are a number of local volunteer centres, including Benevol Bern (www.benevolbern.ch), Benevol Basel (<https://www.benevol.ch/de/basel-stadt/benevol-basel-stadt.html>), Benevol Luzern, Benevol Zug (www.benevol-zug.ch). The home page for Benevol (<https://www.benevol.ch/de.html>) provides more links for the various centres that exist across the German-speaking part of Switzerland. For the French-speaking regions, there are organisations such as Réseau Bénévolat Netzwerk (www.benevolat-fr.ch), Centre genevois du volontariat (www.volontariat-ge.org), Association Genève Bénévolat (www.genevebenevolat.ch), Association jurassienne pour la coordination du bénévolat (AJCB), Association neuchâteloise de services bénévoles (ANSB), Bénévolat Neuchâtel (www.benevolat-ne.ch), Bénévoles Valais, and Bénévolat-Vaud (www.benevolat-vaud.ch).

Further, there are a number of national and international non-profit and volunteer organisations, including ICVolunteers.org (www.icvolunteers.org), the Swiss Red Cross (www.redcross.ch), Caritas (<http://web.caritas.ch>), Amnesty International (www.amnesty.ch), Greenpeace (www.greenpeace.org), the International Olympic Committee (www.olympic.org), Terre des Hommes (www.terredeshommes.ch), and the Swiss International Volunteer Organisation (<https://sivo.ch/?s=founded>), to name just a few.

5.FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In the last few years, corporate volunteering has grown more popular in Switzerland. Corporate volunteers are those who are supported and encouraged to perform social work by their employers while on the company's payroll. Technically, this form of volunteering is not actually considered in the statistics as it does not meet the criterion of being a non-remunerated effort. This being said, the term 'volunteer' is used to describe it. Credit Suisse works with 70 regional and national charitable organisations, and may dedicate up to four working days per year to voluntary work. In 2018, around 4000 of the bank's employees invested 50,000 hours as part of corporate volunteering[18].

The Migros Culture Percentage (www.migros-culture-percentage.ch) is a voluntary commitment by the Migros shopping centre chain in the sectors of culture, society, education, leisure and the economy. Its institutions, projects and activities make it possible for the general public to have access to cultural and social services. The idea of Migros Culture Percentage goes back to the founder of Migros, Gottlieb Duttweiler. In his spirit, the Federation of Migros Cooperatives and the Migros Cooperatives commit themselves to an annual contribution to the Migros Culture Percentage. The amount of this contribution is based on sales and continues to be made even during times of downward performance in the retail trade.

[18] Credit Suisse, no date, Volunteering,
[https://www.credit-suisse.com/corporate/en/responsibility/economy-society/commitments-in-switzerland/volunteering.html](http://www.credit-suisse.com/corporate/en/responsibility/economy-society/commitments-in-switzerland/volunteering.html)

In a study carried out by Christian Lorenz et al.¹⁵[19], 78.3% of the people surveyed indicated that their company is involved in their community, while 41% are or have been involved in corporate volunteering. In general, communication efforts relating to charitable endeavours are sparse, with a greater propensity to communicate internally than externally. However, larger companies are significantly more likely to communicate their good deeds.

6. REGULAR AND SYSTEMIC RESEARCH

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office – SFSO (<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home.html>) publishes regular reports (2011, 2013/2014, 2016...) on voluntary service in Switzerland (also see section 2). It provides data concerning the age, gender, type of work, regional participation, the sectors where volunteering is carried out and the time spent volunteering. SFSO makes a clear distinction between formal and informal voluntary work. Furthermore, the Swiss Society for Public good publishes a Volunteer Work Bulletin every four years, which is a study to assess the state of volunteering in Switzerland.

The impact of volunteering is not measured in economic terms. Swiss Society for Public Good (2006) and Stadelmann-Steffen et al (2007)^[20] provide an explanation, albeit qualitative, of who benefits from volunteering in Switzerland. Social assistance, sports, and cultural organisations, as well as those with a religious background are the ones which benefit the most from volunteering.

Another aspect of volunteering impact is the motivation behind volunteering. 80% of formal volunteers state that they are active in associations and organisations because they enjoy doing voluntary work. 74% see their commitment as a good opportunity to be able to make a difference together with other people. 67% would like to help others and 61% consider meeting people as an important motivation for volunteering^[21].

7. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

A national dossier for the recognition of volunteers was developed as one of the main outcomes of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001. The Dossier is available in three languages (German, French and Italian) and can be ordered by mail at www.dossier-benevolat.ch. A new electronic version is also available online free of charge. The Dossier aims to provide visibility for volunteering and offers appropriate recognition to volunteers. Structured into singled sheets, it allows volunteers to document their voluntary activities.

[19] Christian Lorenz et al., 2011, *Who, why, and to what end? Corporate volunteering as corporate social performance*, Int. J. Business Environment, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp 183-205, www.pda.ethz.ch/news/publications/CV_CSP.

[20] Société Suisse d'utilité publique (SSUP), 2006, *Observatoire bénévolat 2006*. See also Isabelle Stadelmann-Steffen, Markus Freitag et Marc Bühlmann: *Freiwilligen-Monitor Schweiz*. Editions Seismo, Zurich 2007.

[21] Swiss Federal Statistics Office, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home.html>

The Dossier is useful for personal development but also for the value of volunteer work as an asset for career development and job searching. It contains an introductory user manual, as well as the following: inventory of activities, continued education, events and training courses, and certificate. Note that, created in 2001, the Dossier was the first of its kind and was used as a reference document by other countries (e.g. Austria, Germany) trying to develop similar tools of recognition for voluntary work.

Some of the larger Swiss volunteer organisations such as Caritas have also developed their own certificates and tools[22]. However, in the case of Caritas, this training and certification is usually reserved for employees of the company, rather than the volunteers.

8.AWARENESS OF FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2005 and 2011, the European University for Volunteering, EUV, (<http://www.euvolunteering.org/>) formerly the European University for Voluntary Service, took place in Lucerne and Basel respectively. The University, which is a traveling university, holding events in different cities each time on irregular intervals, aims to map the current state of research on voluntary work, especially, but not exclusively, in Europe. “Students”, or participants, to these events must be members, and membership can be gained by paying an annual fee. The fact that the university operates across a variety of cities means that it is able to gather ideas from many different participants and scholars, and paint a more comprehensive picture of volunteering in Europe.

The Internet is an important tool when it comes to the promotion of volunteering opportunities. Bénévolat Vaud (www.benevolat-vaud.ch) provides listings of volunteer activities as well as a number of training courses, tools and documents. ICVolunteers.org lists volunteer opportunities and contains studies and definitions about volunteering both in local and in international settings. The Centre for Philanthropy Studies in Basel (<http://ceps.unibas.ch>) takes an active role in promoting research around voluntary work.

While not easy to work with, the media can play an important role in the promotion of volunteer work. Whether it is local newspapers, television or radio stations, their participation can make a true difference. The English-speaking radio of Switzerland, World Radio Switzerland (www.worldradio.ch), publishes listings about volunteer opportunities and has run various radio programs about the subject[23].

[22] Caritas, no date, *Employer*, <https://www.caritas.ch/en/who-we-are/organisation/caritas-switzerland/employer.html>

[23] Expat Life: More volunteer opportunities for expats, http://worldradio.ch/wrs/programmes/expat_life/expat-life-volunteer-opportunities-abound.shtml; http://worldradio.ch/wrs/programmes/expat_life/expat-life-more-volunteer-opportunities-for-expats.shtml?18592.

9.ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICS

While Switzerland is in the heart of Europe, it is not actually a member of the European Union.

10.RECOMMENDATIONS

While this general statistical framework is already fairly developed, efforts are needed to make it further so as to abide with the recently published International Labour Organisation (ILO) Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/publication/wcms_162119.pdf) developed by the ILO in close cooperation with the Johns Hopkins Centre for Civil Society Studies (<http://ccss.jhu.edu>).

It would also be beneficial for the Law on Youth Vacation to be made better known by the public and to employers in order for more young people to take advantage of their right to get involved in a volunteering project.

It seems important that the Swiss volunteering network is actually founded. As a national structure, it can serve a unique function which local entities cannot entirely cover. This research has shown that a new national volunteering network has been created (Réseau Suisse Bénévolat), however the influence of this organisation seems limited. In order to enact real and positive change in Swiss society, the network must improve its visibility and reach to the wider public.

Resources

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