

General Information



KEY INFORMATION ABOUT BELGIUM

Capital: Brussels
Official Language: Dutch/French/German
Population: 11.825.551*
Currency: Euro (EUR)
Calling Code: +32

KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

GDP per capita: €44,800 (2023)**
Real GDP growth: 1%***
Unemployment rate: 6.5%****

Statistics and Demographics

Volunteering rate of population*****



8%

Total number of volunteers in 2019***:**
 735, 739 (only covers indirect / formal volunteering)

Annual economic value of volunteering:
 No data available for the moment.

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



There are just as many women as men involved, but there is a stereotypical division of roles. Men are over-represented in leadership roles, while women are over-represented in service roles, administrative tasks and basic duties (such as washing up or setting up the village hall, for example). Men are more numerous in sport, whilst women are more numerous in youth work, education, training and research, and in healthcare.

Education Levels and Volunteering*****

The participation in volunteering is closely linked to the level of education. More than half (53.6%) of volunteering is carried out by people who have completed higher education (bachelor's or master's degree), and a third of Belgian volunteers hold a secondary school qualification. Less than a fifth (17.3%) have a lower secondary school qualification. In other words, the higher your level of education, the greater the likelihood that you are a volunteer.



No significant variations in volunteering rates by age. One in three volunteers is over 60 (though people over 60 make up a larger proportion of the population). One in five volunteers is under 30.

DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING*****

Volunteering is, according to the Belgian volunteer law of 2005: unpaid, non-compulsory work, carried out within a non-profit organisation for the benefit of others or society. It is not carried out within a family or private context.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers play a crucial role in identifying unmet needs in society and taking initiative to address them. In Belgium, they are a vital pillar of civil society, strengthening social cohesion and supporting a wide range of organisations across sectors such as welfare, culture, sports, health, and local communities.

They contribute significantly to the accessibility and affordability of services. By offering their time and skills, volunteers enable organisations to reach more people, broaden their activities, and maintain services that might otherwise be financially unviable. This helps ensure that support and opportunities remain inclusive and widely available.

Volunteers are also essential to a well-functioning democracy. They act independently of profit motives, bring citizens together, and create spaces for participation, engagement, and collective action. In doing so, they amplify voices, foster solidarity, protect fundamental rights and help build trust within communities.

At the same time, volunteering has important benefits for the volunteers themselves. It provides a sense of purpose and belonging, allows people to contribute their talents, and offers opportunities to develop social, professional, and personal skills. Volunteering can strengthen networks, improve well-being, and enhance active citizenship.

Types of Volunteer Activities*****

These activities of volunteers are not limited. A study conducted by the King Baudouin Foundation on volunteering in Belgium shows that volunteers are active across a wide range of sectors.

The largest share (23%) is involved in **cultural, socio-cultural, or nature-related organisations** (24.7% of men and 21.1% of women). **Sports** accounts for 20.8% of volunteering (26.7% of men and 8.7% of women), followed by **social services** at 16.0% (11.7% of men and 14.4% of women).

Volunteering in **education, training, and research** represents 14.1% (7.2% of men and 17.1% of women), while **youth-related activities** account for 13.4% (7.9% of men and 13.5% of women). Smaller shares include **rights and advocacy organisations** at 11.1% (11.2% of men and 10.3% of women), **religious organisations** at 6.6% (6.8% of women), and **healthcare** at 5.6% (2.7% of men and 6.4% of women). Finally, 2.9% of volunteers are active in **other fields** (2.5% of men and 1.6% of women).

Motivation for Volunteering

Research shows that intrinsic motivators (being able to do volunteering yourself according to one's own abilities and interests, the enjoyment of volunteering, the connection with others, the meaningfulness of the tasks) are much more sustainable and stronger than extrinsic motivators (obligation or financial reward). Intrinsically motivated volunteers stay longer in the organisation.

Other research from 2018 shows that volunteers (i) are primarily motivated by the social importance of volunteering, (ii) tend to be task-oriented (rather than organisation-oriented) and (iii) consider it important that voluntary organisations are accessible and well organised.

In the German-speaking community, a 2022 survey indicates that volunteers express the following reasons as the main motivations for their involvement:

being able to do something for the common good/the community ('applies fully / applies to some extent': (95%))
 Being able to help others (92%)

Contributing to a stronger sense of belonging to the local community (91%)

The opportunity to make new contacts (83%) and to take on personal responsibilities and decision-making power (77%) are also significant motivations.

*Source: <https://statbel.fgov.be/fr/themes/population/structure-de-la-population#Figures>
 **Source: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-countries/belgium_en
 ***Source: https://www.inf.org/external/dataset/gdp_rpch@WEO/DEMDC/ADV/EC/WEOWORLD
 ****Source: <https://statbel.fgov.be/fr/themes/travail/labor-market/employment-and-unemployment#Figures>
 *****Source: <https://media.kbs-frb.be/fr/media/7736/Le%20volontariat%20en%20Belgique.pdf>
 *****Source: https://etaamb.openjustice.be/nl/wet-van-03-juli-2005_n2005022674.html

*****Source: De Clerck, T., Willem, A., Aelterman, N., & Haerens, L. (2019). Volunteers' managing volunteers: The role of volunteer board members' motivating and demotivating style in relation to volunteers' motives to stay volunteer. *Voluntas*. Haivas, S., Hofmans, J., & Pepermans, R. (2013). Volunteer engagement and intention to quit from a self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43, 1869-1880. / https://users.ugent.be/~sbaert/Wat_organisaties_moeien_weten_oven_hun_vrijwilligers.pdf and *Ostbelgien Statistik - Ehrenamtliches Engagement* https://ostbelgiestatistik.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-7561/12508_read-69045/

Impact of Volunteering

A limited number of studies highlights the tangible impact of volunteering. Studies by Stijn Baert* demonstrate that volunteers tend to be in better health than non-volunteers, even when controlling for factors such as age, gender, education, migration background, religiosity, and country of residence. Based on data from 40,000 Europeans, volunteers appear to be as healthy as non-volunteers who are five years younger. Nevertheless, Jessica Morton (UCLouvain) highlights certain nuances and limitations to the strictly positive effects of volunteering**. Indeed, volunteering can also be a source of negative effects on mental health such as fatigue and stress***.

In addition, ongoing research by Christophe Vanhee at Ghent University explores how organizations can better report on the value of volunteering. One approach under study involves quantifying volunteer hours and translating them into monetary value, by estimating what these contributions would cost if performed by paid staff. This type of analysis can help make the often invisible contribution of volunteers more visible and better recognized in policy and organizational decision-making.****

Measuring the Impact of Volunteering*****

In 2026, the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk launched in the context of IVY2026 the V-krachtmeter, a practical instrument that helps organisations assess the impact of their volunteers on SDG's.

Quality Standards in the Field of Volunteering

In Brussels & Wallonia, The Plateforme francophone du Volontariat provide a Charter for Quality Volunteering, a certification ratified by its members (non-profit organisations/municipalities) to ensure that the volunteer's place is meaningful in the organisation's project and that they are supported during their time as volunteers. It highlights the importance of identifying the specific contribution of volunteering beyond its pro bono nature. It recognises that volunteers bring value not so much for what they do, but for who they are, including their time, humanity, freedom, initiative, creativity and knowledge of the reality on the ground. To support organisations/municipalities, PFV provide support such as trainings, tools, workshops, promotion and answers by phone/mail.*****

In Flanders, the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk plays a key role in strengthening the quality of volunteer work across organisations and municipalities. The organisation offers a wide range of training programmes, study days, tools, and publications aimed at supporting organisations and public authorities in developing effective and sustainable volunteer policies. In addition, the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk provides the V-Wijzer, a practical framework specifically designed for local governments. The V-Wijzer offers guidance and inspiration to develop a coherent and high-quality volunteering policy at the municipal level, helping cities and municipalities create an enabling environment in which volunteering can thrive.

National E-platform for Volunteering

The regional support centres of Flanders and the French-speaking part of Belgium have an online database for volunteer opportunities to promote and match volunteers with organisations. There is also a platform to find volunteers in the German-speaking Community:

- <https://www.levolontariat.be/annonces>
- www.vrijwilligerswerk.be
- www.emja.be



Challenges to the Development of Volunteering*****

Volunteering in Belgium faces several structural and practical challenges that can limit participation and the full potential of volunteers' contributions.

- One major obstacle is **financial pressure**. Budget cuts and limited resources in organisations and local governments can reduce their capacity to support volunteers effectively.
- **Administrative requirements** are often complex and demanding, creating additional burdens for organisations where volunteering is central. Administrative tasks for associations where a lot of volunteering takes place, are very demanding. Especially for volunteers in boards, Belgian law and administrative processes could be considered as constraints so that people are less willing to volunteer in such roles.
 - (<https://www.levolontariat.be/capadmin>)
- **Inclusion and accessibility** are ongoing concerns. Barriers related to language, mobility, socio-economic background, or cultural differences can prevent some groups from engaging in volunteering.
- Furthermore, **unequal treatment** sometimes arises from the volunteer law itself, which can create confusion or inconsistent application. A specific challenge affects unemployed jobseekers receiving social benefits. The current "reporting obligation" requires them to report volunteer activities to employment authorities.
- In the welfare sector in Brussels, additional challenges include defining the role of volunteering in the context of **state disengagement from social issues**, ensuring accessibility, designing adequate volunteer support, and preventing burnout or disengagement among volunteers. These issues highlight the need for careful planning, sufficient resources, and structural support to ensure that volunteering remains sustainable and inclusive

Institutional and Legal Framework for Volunteering in Belgium

- There is a **volunteer law (2005)** for all volunteers and volunteer organisations in Belgium. The law establishes also an advisory council, the High Council of Volunteers in Belgium (made up of German-, French- and Dutch-speaking members, representing the various sectors of the voluntary sector).
- For any new legislation/changes that affects the voluntary sector, whether at national level or at other levels of government, it is mandatory to consult this body.
- Moreover, a free insurance for small organisations exists in Belgium
- There is a first framework of a Flemish coordinated policy for all volunteer sectors.

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

The regional support centres for volunteering – the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk in Flanders and the La Plateforme Francophone du Volontariat in Wallonia & Brussels – receive funding from their respective regional authorities. The Ministry of the German-speaking community offers information and training for volunteers and organisations, free of charge.

In addition, some non-profit organisations engaged in volunteer work benefit from financial support from government sources at various levels, including federal, regional, and local authorities. This funding helps these organisations strengthen volunteer management. One-shot support was developed in 2025 by King Baudouin Foundation : Funds for actions supporting volunteers in first-line health services



Trends in the Development of Volunteering

- One important trend is the **risk of instrumentalisation**: volunteers are increasingly mobilised to serve policy goals such as activation, integration, or cost-saving, which can lead to the misuse of volunteering as a substitute for paid work. Public discourse and policy narratives can influence how different types of volunteering are valued, sometimes prioritising certain forms over others.*****
 - This trend is linked to a **broader "socialisation" of sectors** such as care, education, and even security, where governments partially withdraw and place greater responsibility on citizens and volunteers.
- At the same time, the **boundaries between the non-profit and for-profit sectors** are becoming more blurred, with some commercial organisations also engaging volunteers. This raises questions about the core values and purpose of volunteering.
- People are increasingly looking for **meaningful, flexible, and short-term engagement** opportunities that fit their personal interests and schedules.
- In addition, volunteering is expanding beyond formal organisational settings, with more activities taking place in informal or community-based contexts.
- In the German-speaking community, a 2022 survey also indicates that the rate of voluntary engagement, taken in a broad sense, stands at 48% (Ostbelgien Statistik - Ehrenamtliches Engagement)

Key Stakeholders in the Development of Volunteering

- FR: Organization La Plateforme francophone du Volontariat (<https://www.levolontariat.be/>)
- NL: Organization Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk (www.vlaanderen.vrijwilligt.be),
- GER: Cell Ehrenamt und Vereinsarbeit in the Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft <https://ostbelgienlive.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-8510/> & Platform to find volunteers and volunteer work in the German-speaking Community: www.emja.be
- National level: High Council of Volunteers in Belgium: advisory body concerning volunteering/volunteers <https://conseilsuperieurvolontaires.belgium.be/>

National award and recognitions for volunteering*****

Since 2024, the Plateforme francophone du Volontariat offers municipalities that wish to do so and meet certain criteria to receive the "Commune Volontaire" label. This label promotes municipalities that facilitate and concretely encourage quality volunteering accessible to all.



Research in the Field of Volunteering

- Research on volunteering in Belgium remains relatively limited, especially at the national level. The most recent nationwide study was conducted in 2019 by researchers from Ghent University at the request of the King Baudouin Foundation. This study examined the scope and characteristics of volunteering in Belgium, based on data from the 2019 labour force survey of FPS Economy. To date, no more recent national study of similar scale has been carried out, highlighting a gap in up-to-date data and monitoring.
- In addition to this general research, more specific topics are being explored. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lesley Hustinx and Sam Gorleer (2020) conducted a study on crisis volunteering in Flanders, commissioned by the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk. Based on a survey of 1,868 registered volunteers, the study explored their profiles, motivations, activities, experiences, and willingness to continue volunteering in the future.
- In 2024, a collaborative research project led by la Plateforme francophone du Volontariat and Crebis (research centre) brought together volunteers and volunteer coordinators to consider the following question: against a backdrop of increasing pressure on volunteering in the social sector, how can we ensure that volunteers have the means to continue to engage freely in their roles whilst taking their well-being into account? This discussion led to key recommendations for ensuring a positive volunteering experience, particularly for vulnerable people
- More and more organisations are also conducting internal surveys to gain a better understanding of their volunteers' motivations, improve the support they provide, identify the impact of volunteering.
 - (a recent example from a youth organisation: <https://www.latitudejeunes.be/evenement-volontariat-22-01-2026/>).
- Research about young people participation is currently conducted in Wallonia & Brussels, with an online survey aimed at young people.

*****Source: <https://www.fondsdanieleconinck.be/fr/initiative/benevolat-dans-la-premiere-ligne/>
*****Source: <https://www.levolontariat.be/memorandum-2024-de-la-pfv> / <https://www.vlaanderen.vrijwilligt.be/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/memorandum-mei-2023-def.pdf>
*****Source: <https://media.kob-fib.be/fr/media/7736/L6%20Volontar%20Der%20Belgique.pdf> and <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/862838> and
*****Source: <https://www.levolontariat.be/fonctionnement-volontariats>
*****Source: <https://www.levolontariat.be/memorandum-2024-de-la-pfv>
*****Source: https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi/lol/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&table_name=loicn=2005070399

*Source: https://users.ugent.be/~sbaert/onderzoek_vrijwilligerswerk_cv_gezondheid.htm
**Source: <https://www.levolontariat.be/fr/encadrer-le-rgndr-de-justice-morton-sur-le-bien-etre-des-volontaires>
***Source: <https://www.levolontariat.be/fr/cahiers-du-volontariat-2025-sengages-cet-bon-pour-le-moral>
****Source: <https://www.vlaanderen.vrijwilligt.be/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Presentatie-workshop-26-02-2026-1.pdf>
*****Source: <https://www.levolontariat.be/fr/label-commune-volontaire>
*****Source: <https://www.levolontariat.be/memorandum-2024-de-la-pfv>
*****Source: https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi/lol/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&table_name=loicn=2005070399