



EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE

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VOLUNTEERING
INFRASTRUCTURE
IN EUROPE

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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 rooted¹.



However, Switzerland has quite a long way to go to achieve the quality standards and participation rates of other countries, such as the Northern European nations or the United States. In Sweden, Norway, Holland and the United States of America, more than 50% of the population is involved in volunteer activities².

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 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 7 million inhabitants. German is spoken by 63.7% of the population, French by 20.4%, Italian by 6.5%, and Romansh by 0.5% respectively. While English is not an official national language, its use has grown in importance over the past few years.

The Federal Statistical Office³ (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*

1. Leybold-Johnson, Isabel 'Swiss Remain a nation of volunteers' [swissinfo.ch](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss_news/Swiss_remain_a_nation_of_volunteers.html?cid=31726854), Dec. 13, 2011. www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss_news/Swiss_remain_a_nation_of_volunteers.html?cid=31726854

2. <http://www.cev.be/data/File/FactsandFiguresSweden.pdf>

3. www.statistics.admin.ch

institutions. On the other hand, informal volunteer work encompasses “neighbourly assistance, the minding of the children of third parties, transport, gardening etc.”⁴

Jacqueline Bühlmann and Beat Schmid⁵ 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 jobs⁶. 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 charge⁷.

The new census data of the 2010 SFSO survey indicates that volunteering in Switzerland is still quite popular, as “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”. While more men are active in formal volunteer work, performed through an institution or organisation (23% of the resident population for 16.9% of the women), women are considerably more involved in informal activities (22.7% vs. 13.9%), such as helping neighbours, looking after children and assisting relatives and friends.

The largest number of both male and female volunteers are involved with sports associations, although the percentage of men is significantly higher. This sector is followed by cultural associations, as well as interest groups for men, while women tend to participate in social/charitable organisations and church institutions. Volunteering for political parties and agencies is the least popular of the formal volunteering opportunities. Again, men are slightly more active than women in this sector⁸.

The time spent doing volunteer work is on average 2.6 hours per month of formal work and 2.7 hours of informal work. However, active volunteers spend nearly half a day per week performing unpaid work. To put things into context, ‘640 million hours were spent on volunteering in 2010’ while ‘755 million hours of paid work were carried out in the entire healthcare and social sectors in 2008.’

On average, volunteer involvement gradually increases with age for both men and women until they reach the 40-54 age bracket, when a slow decline begins. 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”⁹.

In Switzerland, there is no official difference between long-term and short-term voluntary service, although both forms are practiced in the country¹⁰.

25% of the Swiss population carried out a volunteer activity, corresponding to 44 million hours per month: approximately 248,000 full-time jobs. Informal volunteering occupies almost the same population: 23% of the total.

4. Volunteer work in Switzerland, Federal Statistical Office, 2001, www.bfs.admin.ch.

5. Jacqueline Behlmann, Beat Schmid. Du travail, mais pas de salaire. Office fédéral de la statistique, Neuchâtel, 1999.

6. 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.

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

8. Federal Statistical Office (Federal Department of Home Affairs) “Volunteering in Switzerland 2010”, www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/news/publikationen.html?publicationID=4555.

9. Swiss Labour Force Survey (SLFS): Unpaid work 2010.

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

Involvement rates in smaller communities, with less than 2000 inhabitants are higher than in urban centres.

According to the latest study by the SFSO¹¹, there are differences with regard to 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. The regions of Lake Geneva and Ticino are far below the national average, while the Zurich area is slightly higher. Central and Eastern Switzerland have the highest participation rates, while the Central Plateau and North-western Switzerland barely reach the average. Voluntary participation in sports is the main cause for these regional disparities.

We encounter similar, but less pronounced, distinctions between the linguistic regions in regards to informal voluntary work as with formal volunteering. As with formal activities, Swiss German residents are more participatory than those living in the French and Italian-speaking regions.

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 evident¹².

In its 2010 publication¹³, 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.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

In the last ten 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 or volunteerism.

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. It has been problematic making this law known to the public and to employees. For this reason, it has not been widely applied or used¹⁴.



11. www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/news/publikationen.html?publicationID=4555

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

13. www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/news/publikationen.html?publicationID=4555

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

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-de-promotion-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 (www.forum-freiwilligenarbeit.ch). After IYV2001, it continued to exist, but was dissolved at the end of 2011. While there are plans for a new structure to occupy its role, the foundation of “Swiss Volunteering” was still in its planning stages at the time of writing of this article.

There are a number of local volunteer centres, including Benevol Bern (www.benevolbern.ch), Benevol Basel (www.benevol-basel.ch), Benevol Luzern, Benevol Zug (www.benevol-zug.ch). A webpage provides links for the various centres that exist in the German-speaking part of Switzerland (www.benevol.ch/index.php?id=88), Réseau Bénévolat Netzwerk (www.benevolat-fr.ch), Bourse du bénévolat Genève (www.benevoles-ge.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) and Terre des Hommes (www.terredeshommes.ch), to name just a few.



6. 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 pay roll. 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. The staff of Credit Suisse in Switzerland may dedicate one working day per year to voluntary work. In 2010, the bank's employees spent 6,263 days helping good causes on a voluntary basis. On a national scale, Credit Suisse has been working in partnership with twelve Swiss charitable organisations. Philiias (www.philiias.org) collaborates with

corporate volunteers from various companies, in particular in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

74% Swiss people see their commitment as a good opportunity to make a difference together with others. 67% would like to help their peers and 61% consider meeting people as an important motivation for volunteering

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.

In a study carried out by Christian Lorenz et al.¹⁵, 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.

7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office – SFSO (www.statistics.admin.ch) publishes an annual report 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.

The impact of volunteering is not measured in economic terms. Swiss Society for Public Good (2006) and Stadelmann-Steffen et al (2007)¹⁶ 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 volunteer work. 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



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

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

people as an important motivation for volunteering.

8. 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. 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 have also developed their own certificates and tools.

9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2005 and 2011, the European University for Voluntary Service – EFU (www.universityforvoluntaryservice.ch) took place in Lucerne and Basel respectively. The University aims to encourage research on volunteering and, by doing so, involve the academic sector in the promotion of volunteering. During the International Year of Volunteers +10 (www.freiwilligenjahr2011.ch), a number of recognition events for volunteers were organised throughout the country. The Internet is an important tool when it comes to the promotion of volunteering opportunities. The Bourse du Bénévolat – Gensève (www.benevoles-ge.ch) lists some local voluntary activities and so do a number of local volunteer centres. 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 more 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 subject¹⁷.

17. 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.

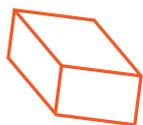
10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

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

11. 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 (www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/meetings-and-events/international-conference-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS_100574/lang--en/index.htm), developed by the ILO in close cooperation with the Johns Hopkins Centre for Civil Society Studies (<http://ccss.jhu.edu>).

It seems important that the Swiss Volunteering agency is actually founded. As a national structure, it can serve a unique function which local entities cannot entirely cover.



Resources

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