

General Information



KEY INFORMATION ABOUT PORTUGAL

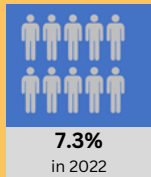
Capital: Lisbon
Official Language: Portuguese
Population: 10.4 million in 2026*
Currency: Euro (EUR)
Calling Code: +351

KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS**

GDP per capita: US\$ 36,453 per capita in 2026
Real GDP growth in 2026: 2.1%
Unemployment rate in 2026: 6.3%

Statistics and Demographics

Volunteering rate of population****



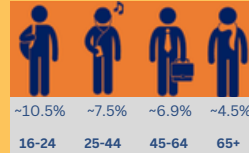
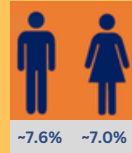
Total number of volunteers***:

Portugal ranks as the country with the lowest level of volunteering engagement among the Southern European countries. In 2022, around 9% of people were participating in formal/informal volunteering. There is a declining rate as in 2015: 9.0% and in 2022: 7.3% volunteered. The 2012 Volunteering Work Survey included both formal and informal volunteering (including help to family), resulting in a volunteer rate of 11.5% (about 1.04 million people). By 2018, volunteering declined across all indicators, partly due to methodological changes excluding informal family support. In 2012, volunteers were mainly women aged 25–44 with higher education, especially in northern regions and in social work. By 2018, the profile shifted toward younger people (15–24), likely due to youth-focused policies, while participation among those 65+ decreased significantly. In 2018, about 695,000 people volunteering aged 15+.

Annual economic value of volunteering*****:

263.7 million hours of volunteer work in 2018 valued between €870.2 million and €1,555.8 million, depending on the valuation method used. Their mid-range “occupation wage” estimate was €1,366.8 million.

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



There is a relatively balanced distribution across the various age groups, but it is noteworthy that students are the predominant group. Retirees are also a significant group in many OPVs.*****

Education Levels and Volunteering***

Volunteer participation is significantly linked to the level of education. The highest volunteer rate (15.1%) is observed among individuals with tertiary education, which aligns with the general trend of increasing volunteerism as educational attainment rises, particularly in formal volunteer work. Conversely, the lowest rate (1.7%) is found among those with no formal education. Interestingly, when considering employment status, the unemployed population exhibits the highest volunteer rate (10.5%). This is followed by the employed population (8.8%), with the inactive population showing the lowest rate (6.3%). (2018)

The highest qualification levels constitute the predominant group. It is noted that those with the highest levels of education constitute the predominant group in a larger percentage of VOs; it is also worth mentioning that 79% of VOs report that they do not include individuals without a complete level of education.

Motivation for Volunteering*****

Sangreman et. al. (2015) found that Portuguese volunteers are motivated by a mix of altruism and self-development rather than by a single factor. There are 4 broad motivations: altruistic reasons, sense of belonging, ego satisfaction, and learning. In practice, the strongest motives were promoting social justice and learning to be a better citizen / personal growth. It also found that 44% of respondents emphasized the desire to feel useful to others, 41% pointed to improving others' quality of life, 29% mentioned training/education, and 19% referred to work projects. Overall, the authors conclude that Portuguese volunteers are driven mainly by contribution to equality and social well-being, combined with learning and skill development.

DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING

In Portugal Law no. 71/98 provides the legal framework for volunteering, aiming to promote and ensure all citizens the participation in volunteering activities. This law defines volunteering as the ‘set of actions of social and community interest carried out unselfishly [...], within the framework of non-profit projects, programmes and other forms of assistance to individuals, families and the community [...]’.

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VOLUNTEERING*****

In Portugal, volunteering is also influenced by cultural characteristics and ties to religion. The Church was the first institution to provide voluntary assistance inspired by the Christian principle of charity. The last decade of the 19th century marked a turning point in volunteering with the institutionalisation of Social Services. According to the European Volunteer Centre’s National Report PT up to the 21st century, there was no formal infrastructure to support volunteering until the creation of the National Council for the Promotion of Volunteering (CNPV) in 1999, a Portuguese public body integrated into the structures of the Ministry of Labor and Solidarity. It was composed of representatives from public organisations, various ministries, regional governments, and private nongovernmental organisations, covering a wide range of volunteer activities.



Types of Volunteer Activities***

Volunteering in Portugal is highly diverse, involving many different types of organisations across sectors. The main actors include associations, NGOs, social solidarity institutions (IPSS), cooperatives, companies, universities, and public bodies, all contributing in different ways.

1. Traditional organisations like associations and Santas Casas da Misericórdia play a central role, especially in social support, healthcare, and community services. IPSS and NGOs are key drivers of volunteer work, particularly in social aid, development, and humanitarian activities.
 2. Cooperatives and companies contribute by promoting social cohesion and corporate volunteering, often as part of corporate social responsibility. The university sector increasingly promotes volunteering as part of education and skill development.
 3. The public sector supports volunteering through policies, institutions (like CASES), and local structures such as Local Volunteer Banks.
- Main areas of volunteering: Social support (most dominant), Education, Children and youth, Elderly care, Health and community development.
 Most common activities: Recreational, leisure, and sports activities, Supporting donation campaigns (food, clothes, etc.), Distributing essential goods (food, hygiene products), Supporting vulnerable groups (elderly, disabled, migrants, homeless), Emotional support and active listening, School support and tutoring, Organizing events and community initiatives, Environmental awareness and education, Health prevention activities (e.g., hygiene, screenings)

*Source: World Population Review: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/portugal>

**Source: IMF DataMapper, Portugal profile: <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/PT>

***Source: Casos - RECOLHA E ANÁLISE DE DADOS SOBRE O UNIVERSO DO VOLUNTARIADO EM PORTUGAL: <https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Relatorio-FINAL-Voluntariado.pdf> and National Institute of Statistics (INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTATÍSTICA): https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/19noTrabalho_2018ENG.pdf

****Source: Casos - RECOLHA E ANÁLISE DE DADOS SOBRE O UNIVERSO DO VOLUNTARIADO EM PORTUGAL: <https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Relatorio-FINAL-Voluntariado.pdf> and Eurostat EU-SILC (Quality of Life / Volunteering module, 2022): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LC_SCP19/default/table?lang=en and Eurostat EU-SILC (Quality of Life / Volunteering module, 2022): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LC_SCP19/default/table?lang=en

*****Source: Eurostat EU-SILC (Quality of Life / Volunteering module, 2022): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LC_SCP19/default/table?lang=en (DOI: https://doi.org/10.2908/LC_SCP19) and

*****Source: Casos - RECOLHA E ANÁLISE DE DADOS SOBRE O UNIVERSO DO VOLUNTARIADO EM PORTUGAL: <https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Relatorio-FINAL-Voluntariado.pdf>

*****Source: Youth Wiki, last updated - Nov. 2023: <https://national-policies.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/portugal/2/voluntary-activities>

*****Source: https://ijth.theipg.org/journals/Vol_5_No_4_August_2015/P.pdf

Impact of Volunteering*

There is a need to promote volunteering as a component of civic education and active citizenship. Volunteering should be integrated into the elementary and secondary school curriculum as a way to strengthen active citizenship and promote civic engagement from an early age. » volunteering as a contribution to Portugal's social, environmental, and economic development, while also strengthening active citizenship and civic participation.

Measuring the Impact of Volunteering

Portugal lacks continuous, systematic data collection on volunteering. Insufficient means to measure results and a lack of mechanisms to measure the actual impact of the initiatives.*

But there are some practical tools and mechanisms in place, especially from CASES / Portugal Voluntário, 2026: training course in Social Impact Assessment (Avaliação de Impacto Social) to strengthen skills in impact evaluation, planning, implementation, and results analysis. This suggests that impact measurement is being developed institutionally, but not yet fully standardized for the volunteering field as a whole***

Quality Standards in the Field of Volunteering

Three essential measures for strengthening, promoting, and enhancing the quality of volunteer work:

1. An online platform, Portugal Voluntário, designed to facilitate, in a flexible manner, the connection between those who wish to participate in volunteer activities and the organisations that promote them;
2. Financial support targeted at organizations promoting volunteerism to cover the costs of personal accident and civil liability insurance for the volunteers they oversee;
3. Professional development for volunteer work through training and sensitisation activities to build the capacity of volunteers and the organizations that carry out volunteer initiatives.

These support measures are integrated into the implementation of Portugal 2020.****

Other quality standards*****:

1. Volunteer Academy Quality Seal: a formal quality label for higher education institutions promoting volunteering. CASES says it is meant to be a tool for qualification, accountability, and dynamism in volunteering practice, and that institutions must meet defined selection criteria with validated monitoring results on continuity of volunteering practices.
2. The Support for Volunteering Measure (2018), managed by CASES, is a national policy tool designed to promote long-term volunteering and increase citizen participation in Portugal. It does this by providing financial support to accredited volunteer organizations for ongoing volunteer activities, particularly in the field of social action. The measure operates through the Portugal Voluntário platform, where organizations and volunteers register, and where volunteer opportunities are matched with volunteers. Only accredited nonprofit organizations that meet legal and administrative requirements can apply.

National E-platform for Volunteering*****

Portugal Voluntário is the main national platform in Portugal that connects volunteers and organisations. It allows both individuals and organizations to register, create profiles, and post or search for volunteer opportunities. The platform's core function is to match volunteers with suitable projects, based on their skills, interests, and availability. Basically, a central hub that aggregates volunteering opportunities from different organisations, helping to simplify access in a system that is otherwise decentralised.



Institutional and Legal Framework for Volunteering***

Portugal's legal framework for volunteering is primarily based on three key instruments. Law No. 71/98 of 3 November establishes the foundational principles of volunteering, defining it as an unpaid activity carried out freely within nonprofit organisations for the benefit of society, and setting out both the rights (e.g. training, insurance, reimbursement of expenses) and duties of volunteers, as well as the responsibilities of promoting organisations. This framework is operationalised through Decree-Law No. 389/99 of 30 September, which provides practical rules for implementation, including the requirement for formal volunteer programmes, insurance coverage, and identification systems, as well as clarifying organisational responsibilities and procedures. Complementing these, the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 50/2000 establishes the National Council for the Promotion of Volunteering, defining its composition and role in coordinating public policies and fostering cooperation between the state and civil society actors in the development of volunteering.

National Award and Recognitions for Volunteering

1. Volunteer Municipality Award (Galarão Autarquia Voluntária): Given the role of local governments in developing and consolidating programs and projects of local interest, in strengthening mechanisms to promote local-level initiatives, which are close to the people and knowledgeable about local realities, particularly in the local revitalization of volunteering practices, it is important to identify and publicize the practices promoted by these entities, enhancing the dissemination and recognition of their projects and initiatives and highlighting their role in promoting volunteering in their territories.**
 2. The Portuguese Capital of Volunteering (Capital Portuguesa do Voluntariado) is an initiative of the Portuguese Confederation of Volunteering (CPV) aimed at promoting and highlighting the value of volunteering in Portugal by selecting a Portuguese municipality as the "Portuguese Capital of Volunteering." The first edition took place in 2023, designating Cascais as the Portuguese Capital of Volunteering for 2024. In 2025, Maia was the selected municipality, and in 2026 it was Vila Nova de Gaia's turn, making it the current Portuguese Capital of Volunteering.**
- The most important factor for the development of the volunteer infrastructure in Portugal, according to the volunteer organizations (VOs), is the recognition of volunteers and the volunteer activities they carry out. Notable are certain practices implemented by entities such as CASES, CPV, IPDJ, R-YES, and also some VOs that aim to recognize and honor VOs and volunteers.*
- Some other examples for awards:
1. CASES Volunteer Municipality Award
 2. Portuguese Capital of Volunteering (CPV)
 3. CASES Volunteer Academy Quality Seal
 4. CPV Portuguese Volunteering Trophy
 5. IPDJ Regional Awards for Best Practices in Youth Volunteering
 6. Ser+ Award R-YES R-YES
 7. Cascais Municipal Council Volunteer School Award
 8. Volunteer Festival Volunteer Work Recognition Ceremony, Cascais City Council
 9. Montepio Youth Volunteering Award Montepio Mutual Association
 10. UBI Volunteering Presentation of certificates to UBI volunteers



Financial Support for the Development of Volunteering*

According to the current study and the results of the survey of NPOs, the lack of a specific budget is the most frequent response (34.9%), with these activities being integrated into the organization's broader operations; only 13% report having specific programs to fund volunteer activities. Public support, own revenues, individual donations, membership dues, and fundraising activities also play a significant role. Some volunteer organizations mention that income tax allocations to the organization are another way to secure funding. Patronage and specific funding programs are less prevalent. It is also worth noting the importance of programs such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and EEAGRANTS for funding volunteer projects.

Key Stakeholders in the Development of Volunteering*

A formal infrastructure to support volunteering has existed since 1999, following the creation of the National Council for the Promotion of Volunteering (CNPV). It was composed of representatives from public organisations, various ministries, regional governments, and private nongovernmental organisations. With its dissolution in 2017, its functions were transferred to CASES – Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social, which became the entity responsible for promoting, supporting, training, and raising awareness about volunteering in Portugal.

In 2007, the Portuguese Confederation of Volunteering (CPV) was established, arising from the need felt by organisations for an entity to represent them and defend the rights and interests of volunteers and their respective organisations in Portugal.

Additionally, the sector encompasses a highly diverse range of organizations playing a significant role in the sector: (1) Associative Movement, (2) Local development organisations, (3) Santas Casas da Misericórdia, (4) Non-governmental development organisations (5) Private Solidarity Institutions (IPSS), (6) Private sector Corporate volunteering, (7) Public sector.

At the public level, the Local Volunteer Banks (BLV) stand out; these are local structures primarily managed by municipalities that contribute to the promotion, organisation, and expansion of volunteering.

Challenges to the Development of Volunteering*

The most persistent challenges relate to volunteer availability and commitment, including limited time, irregular participation, and difficulties balancing volunteering with everyday life. Organizations also face matching problems and skill gaps, highlighting a need for better training and improved alignment between volunteers and roles. Structural issues such as insufficient funding and lack of staff limit the quality and expansion of volunteer activities, while retaining volunteers over time remains a major difficulty.

From the volunteers' perspective, the main barriers are lack of time, limited flexibility, and difficulty balancing commitments, along with insufficient information about opportunities. Lack of formal recognition, limited availability of suitable activities, and inefficient matching processes, which can discourage participation. Public recognition of volunteering is mainly driven by volunteers and communities, while institutional recognition, especially from media and government, is weak.

Trends in the Development of Volunteering*

Stability dominated the past 5 years (2020-2025), but growth is expected in the near future. Decline is considered unlikely (only ~8% of organisations expect it)

1. Number of active volunteers
 - o 2012 → 2018: Overall decline
 - o 2020–2025: Mostly stable
 - o 2025–2028: Expected to increase
 - o Participation among 65+ decreased significantly
2. Time dedicated to volunteering has stabilised over time. But it is seen as a key challenge (limited availability and commitment). Expected to increase slightly in the future.
3. Clear growth trend over the past years in volunteer activities and projects. Organisations plan to expand projects further. Overall, future growth depends on better management, recruitment, and retention.
4. Volunteer organisations are increasingly focusing on improving recruitment through digitalisation and outreach, especially by targeting new groups and strengthening their online presence, with a strong emphasis on more inclusive and diverse volunteering.
5. There is a growing recognition of digital recruitment, but virtual volunteering remains underdeveloped and undervalued, despite its international relevance.
6. A trend toward more flexible and short-term volunteering is emerging, but some organisations still rely on passive recruitment due to already high demand.
7. There is a clear trend toward the professionalisation of volunteer management, with increasing importance placed on evaluating impact, assessing volunteer performance, and improving organisational quality, although these practices are not yet systematic due to resource constraints.
8. Organisations are also moving toward better integration and support systems, including the use of digital tools (e.g., online training, communication platforms) to engage and retain volunteers.

Research in the Field of Volunteering*

There is no systematic research system on volunteering in Portugal; existing studies are one-off initiatives. The first known study on volunteering in Portugal dates from 2001 and was published by the National Commission for the International Year of Volunteers ("Profile of Volunteering in Portugal") by the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Lisbon. As part of EYV2011, two studies were conducted in Portugal: the first was a follow-up to the 2001 study ("Characterization of Volunteering in Portugal"), and the second focused on the activities and operations of Local Volunteer Banks in Portugal. The economic impact of volunteering was measured by a preparatory study conducted by the Observatory of Employment and Vocational Training, dated 2008. Another notable source is the Survey on Volunteer Work (ITV) conducted by CASES in partnership with INE; this survey is one of the main sources of official statistical data on volunteering in Portugal, allowing for comparisons with other countries. In addition, there are various studies, such as those promoted by the Eugénio de Almeida Foundation, ANImAR, or the Diagnosis of NGOs in Portugal (2015–2024), a report by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which includes data and recommendations for the sector. Other studies on volunteering in Portugal are published by CEV-European Volunteer Centre.

*Source: CASES - RECOLHA E ANÁLISE DE DADOS SOBRE O UNIVERSO DO VOLUNTARIADO EM PORTUGAL: <https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Relatorio-FINAL-Voluntariado.pdf>
**Source: <https://cases.pt/casas-casas-da-misericordia-2026/> and <https://www.com.voluntariado.pt/atividades/capital-portuguesa-do-voluntariado>
***Source: <https://autonomia.pt/en/content-dep/framework-principles-of-volunteering-at-the-autonomous-university-of-lisbon/> and <https://autonomia.pt/en/content-dep/legislacao-2/#:~:text=NATIONAL%20LEGISLATION%20ON%20VOLUNTEERING,for%20the%20promotion%20of%20volunteering,> and <https://national-policies.ec.europa.eu/youth/ml/chapters/portugal/2-voluntary-activities/> and CASES - RECOLHA E ANÁLISE DE DADOS SOBRE O UNIVERSO DO VOLUNTARIADO EM PORTUGAL: <https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Relatorio-FINAL-Voluntariado.pdf>

***Source: <https://cases.pt/formacao-cases-avaliacao-de-impacto-social-2/>

****Source: <https://cases.pt/voluntariado/>

*****Source: <https://cases.pt/av25/> and Source: CASES (2021)- <https://cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Regulamento-Apoio-Voluntariado.pdf>

*****Source: <https://www.portugalvoluntario.pt/cs2/homepage?dswid=8885>