

General Information

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT SCOTLAND

Capital: Edinburgh
Official Language: English, Gaelic, Scots
Population: 5,546,900 (mid-year estimate, 2024)*
Currency: Great British Pound (GBP)
Calling Code: +44

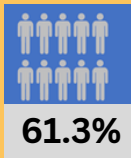
KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

GDP per capita: £37,834 (onshore) / £40,339 total with offshore (2024)**
Real GDP growth in 2024: +0.3%***
Unemployment rate in March 2026: 3.9%****



Statistics and Demographics

Volunteering rate of population



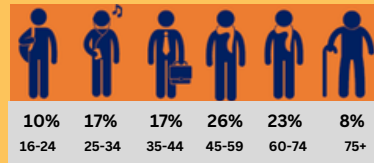
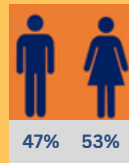
Total number of volunteers*****:

- Formal volunteers: 1,176,467 (25.3%)
- Informal volunteers: 1,674,024 (36%)

Annual economic value of volunteering*****:

- £5.3 billion to local economy
- £2.2 billion from formal volunteering and £3.1 billion from informal volunteering (numbers have been rounded to the nearest million).

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



Education Levels and Volunteering*****

In formal volunteering, 10% of volunteers have Level 1 qualifications ('O' Grade, Standard Grade or equivalent, SVQ Level 1 or 2), while 16% have Level 2 qualifications (Higher, A level or equivalent, SVQ Level 3). Around 12% hold Level 3 qualifications (HNC/HND or equivalent, SVQ Level 4), and the majority, 56%, have Level 4 qualifications (degree or professional qualification above SVQ Level 4). Additionally, 2% have other qualifications, and 5% have no or unknown qualifications.

DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING

Formal volunteering is defined as 'giving unpaid help to organisations or groups', whilst informal volunteering is 'the giving of unpaid help directly – not via an organisation or group - to other people or places, not including help given to relatives'. *****

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering plays a central role in Scotland's social fabric, contributing to community resilience, wellbeing, and national policy goals. The Scottish Government's Volunteering Action Plan (2022-2032) positions volunteering as a key driver of social cohesion, reducing inequalities, and strengthening local democracy. It highlights that volunteering is not simply an "add-on" to public services but a core part of how communities support one another, particularly in areas facing disadvantage. The Plan also emphasises that volunteering is shaped by wider social conditions – including poverty, health inequalities, and demographic change – which influence who is able to participate and how organisations can sustain volunteer-led activity. *****

Types of Volunteer Activities*****

Formal volunteering activities:

- Emergency services, first aid and public safety = 3%
- Animal welfare = 4%
- Politics = 2%
- Other group(s) = 4%
- Trade Unions, justice and human rights = 4%
- Groups aimed at supporting older people = 6%
- Adult guidance, advice and learning = 5%
- Culture and heritage = 7%,

- Environmental protection = 6%
- Children's education and schools = 14%
- Religion and belief = 16%
- Health, disability and wellbeing = 13%
- Physical activity, sport and exercise (coaching, organising or otherwise helping out) = 17%
- Hobbies and recreation = 13%
- Youth or children's activities outside school = 21%
- Local community or neighbourhoods = 24%

Motivation for Volunteering*****

- I wanted to improve things/help people = 68%,
- The cause was really important to me = 52%
- I thought it would give me a chance to use my existing skills = 44%
- I felt there was a need in my community = 34%
- The group/club/organisation was really important to me = 33%
- Someone asked me to give help = 26%
- I had spare time to do it = 25%
- I thought it would give me a chance to learn new skills = 24%
- I wanted to meet people/make friends = 22%
- I felt there was no one else available to help the group/club/organisation = 11%
- I had been helped by the group/ club/ organisation before = 11%
- I thought it would help me get on in my career/to get a recognised qualification = 11%
- It's part of my religious belief/philosophy of life to help people = 11%
- My friend(s)/ family member(s) were already involved = 8%
- It was connected with the needs of my family/friends = 8%

* Source: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/mid-2024-population-estimates/>
 ** Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/gdp-quarterly-national-accounts-2024-q4/pages/gdp-in-nominal-terms/>
 *** Source: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/economy-statistics/>
 **** Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/labour-market-trends-march-2026/>
 ***** Source: Internal Volunteer Scotland calculation using SHS participation rates and NRS mid year population estimates.

*****Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-volunteering-2024/pages/volunteering/>
 *****Source: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/research-evaluation/national-volunteering-profile>
 *****Source: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2022-key-findings/pages/10/>
 *****Source: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-household-survey/>
 *****Source: Scottish Government – Volunteering Action Plan <https://www.gov.scot/publications/volunteering-action-plan/>
 *****Source: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/research-evaluation/research-publications/scv-workforce-survey-volunteer-report>

Impact of Volunteering

We carried out a study looking at the social value of volunteering in Scotland, which is one aspect of the impact of volunteering. We estimated that volunteering at least once a week with a group or organisation (formal volunteering) is worth £1000 per person per year in terms of the increased wellbeing they experience. Across Scotland this translates to over half a billion pounds worth of increased wellbeing for Scots who volunteer weekly. Combined with the time Scottish volunteers contribute weekly, this is a contribution of £2.3 billion in terms of economic and social value (note that this does not account for the costs of volunteering). That's equivalent to the gross value added of the arts, entertainment and recreation industry to the Scottish economy (worth £2.1 billion).*

Measuring the Impact of Volunteering*****

The Social Value of Volunteering in Scotland uses the UK Treasury-approved Wellbeing Valuation method, which quantifies how volunteering affects life satisfaction and converts those wellbeing gains into monetary values using national datasets. The latest research found that weekly formal volunteering generates around £1,000 in wellbeing value per person per year, contributing to a total of £530 million in wellbeing benefits nationally.

The Economic Value of Volunteering in Scotland uses a replacement cost model, which estimates how much it would cost organisations to replace volunteers with paid staff doing the same tasks. In other words, it calculates the value of volunteering by asking: "if volunteers didn't do this work, what would it cost to hire someone to do it instead?". In 2022, the economic value was £5.3 billion. £2.2 billion from formal volunteering and £3.1 billion from informal volunteering (numbers have been rounded to the nearest million).

National E-platform for Volunteering

<https://volunteer.scot/>

Volunteer Scotland Search is the official, national e-platform where people can browse, filter, and apply for volunteering opportunities. It is run in partnership between Volunteer Scotland and SCVO. The platform hosts thousands of live opportunities from charities, community groups, councils, NHS boards, and national organisations. And includes search by location, interest area, time commitment, accessibility, and remote/flexible roles.



Financial Support for the Development of Volunteering****

Financial support for volunteering in Scotland remains fragile and highly constrained, despite the recent rise in participation. SCVO's State of the Sector 2024 shows that while government funding has remained broadly stable, inflation and rising operating costs have eroded real-terms budgets, leaving many organisations with "wafer-thin margins". Nearly 45% of charities spent more than they generated in 2023, and the value of sector reserves fell by £1 billion between 2021 and 2023, signaling reduced financial resilience. This instability directly affects volunteer development: organisations report that they lack the secure, multi-year funding needed to invest in volunteer recruitment, training, coordination, and safeguarding infrastructure. Smaller and community-led groups – often the backbone of local volunteering – are particularly exposed, with many holding less than three months of reserves.

Key Stakeholders in the Development of Volunteering

Scottish Government:

(<https://www.gov.scot/policies/third-sector/volunteering/>)

- Sets national policy direction for volunteering, including the Volunteering for All: National Framework and the Volunteering Action Plan (2022–2032).
- Co-leads implementation of the 10-year plan with Volunteer Scotland, ensuring cross-government alignment and investment.

Volunteer Scotland:

<https://www.volunteerscotland.net/about-us>

- Scotland's national centre for volunteering.
- Leads on research, evidence, safeguarding (PVG), volunteer practice standards, and national digital infrastructure.
- Plays a central role in policy influence, sector leadership, and co-ordinating national action groups.

Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs):

<https://tsi.scot/>

- Local infrastructure bodies in each of Scotland's 32 local authority areas.
- Support volunteer-involving organisations, run local volunteer centres, and deliver the Saltire Awards for young people.
- Key partners in delivering the Volunteering Action Plan at local level.

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

Investing in Volunteers (iiv) is the UK's leading quality standard for volunteer management. It assesses organisations against a robust framework covering planning, recruitment, support, recognition, and safeguarding. It's considered the "gold standard" for volunteer management and is used by large charities, NHS boards, councils, and national organisations.

Challenges to the Development of Volunteering***

Volunteering in Scotland is showing early signs of recovery after several years of decline. The Scottish Household Survey 2024 reports that formal volunteering has risen to 25%, up from a historic low of 18% in 2023 - an increase of 331,000 volunteers in a single year. This brings participation almost back to its pre-pandemic level of 26% in 2019. Growth has been seen across all demographic groups, with particularly notable increases among 16–34-year-olds, suggesting renewed engagement from younger adults. Informal volunteering also remains strong, with 36% of adults contributing time in their communities. These trends point to a cautiously optimistic shift, indicating that Scotland's volunteering landscape may be stabilising after the combined impacts of COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis.

However, the recovery masks deeper, persistent challenges. Volunteer Scotland's analysis highlights that inclusion gaps are widening, not narrowing: the participation gap between disabled and non-disabled people has grown from 3 to 10 percentage points, and the gap between the most and least deprived communities has widened from 12 to 15 points. Organisations continue to face rising demand for services, funding insecurity, and workforce pressures - all of which limit their capacity to recruit, train, and support volunteers effectively. So while participation is increasing, the sector still faces a complex mix of structural inequalities and resource constraints that shape who is able to volunteer and how well organisations can sustain that engagement.



Trends in the Development of Volunteering

Recent evidence points to a mixed but cautiously improving landscape. Volunteer Scotland's State of Scottish Volunteering 2025 highlights that participation is beginning to recover, with the 2024 Scottish Household Survey showing a significant rise in formal volunteering after several years of decline. However, this recovery sits alongside deeper structural trends: inequalities in who volunteers are widening, particularly between disabled and non-disabled people and between the most and least deprived communities. Long-established pathways into volunteering – such as youth programmes, community clubs, and informal neighbour-to-neighbour networks – are described as "under threat" due to chronic under-investment and the cost-of-living crisis. The report also identifies a shift in the demographic profile of volunteers and highlights the importance of positive volunteer experiences as a driver of retention.*****

Institutional and Legal Framework for Volunteering

Volunteering in Scotland is not governed by a single "Volunteering Act". Instead, it operates within a set of cross-cutting legal duties that organisations must follow to ensure volunteers are safe, supported, and treated fairly. A core element of this framework is safeguarding, where volunteers working with children or protected adults must join the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme, administered by Disclosure Scotland. Organisations also have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, meaning volunteers must be protected from harm just as employees would be.

Volunteers are further protected under the Equality Act 2010, which prohibits discrimination and requires accessible, inclusive practice. Organisations must also comply with General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018, ensuring volunteer information is handled lawfully and securely. Alongside these legal duties, Scotland promotes good practice through the Volunteer Charter, which sets out ten principles for fair, respectful, and high-quality volunteering. The Charter is open to any organisation or group that involves volunteers or influences how volunteering is supported, helping to embed shared standards across the sector.



National Award and Recognitions for Volunteering**

Saltire Awards (Ages 11–25) is Scotland's national youth volunteering recognition scheme.

Four levels: The Challenge, The Approach (10 & 25 hours), The Ascent (50–500 hours), and The Summit for outstanding contribution.

Delivered locally by each area's Third Sector Interface (TSI).

Who it's for: Young people aged 11–25 volunteering for community benefit.

Why it matters: Provides nationally recognised certificates useful for CVs, college, and employment.



Research in the Field of Volunteering*****

Volunteer Scotland as the national centre for volunteering produce comprehensive volunteering research, including: The Social Value of Volunteering in Scotland, The State of Scottish Volunteering, regular cost of living bulletins and analysis of the Scottish Household Survey.

Please note that this country factsheet is for Scotland, not the United Kingdom as a whole. Volunteering is a devolved issue and data is captured separately across the four nations.

* Source: The social value of volunteering in Scotland <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-social-value-of-volunteering-in-Scotland-%E2%80%93-Technical-Report.pdf>

**Source: <https://saltireawards.scot/>

***Source: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/news/scottish-household-survey-2024>

****Source: SCVO, State of the Sector 2024: Key Figures and Trends - <https://scvo.scot/research/reports/evidence-library/state-of-the-sector-2024-key-scottish-voluntary-sector-figures-and-trends>

*****Source: Volunteer Scotland, State of Scottish Volunteering 2025 - <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/State-of-volunteering-in-Scotland-2025.pdf>

*****Source: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/research-evaluation/research-publications>

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*****Source: <https://investinginvolunteers.co.uk/>