

This report was created for the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) 2021 by Elena Dal Mas as part of her course requirement for the Bachelor's degree of International Relations and Modern Languages at the University of East Anglia (UK). It is intended as a first step in gathering evidence and data about gender inequalities in volunteering.

**June 2021**

**'Gender analysis and inequality in volunteering'**

<b>'Gender analysis and inequality in volunteering'</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Why do women volunteer more than men?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Why do men volunteer less than women?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Case studies</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>8</b>

## **Overview**

Volunteering is often seen as a sector which welcomes everybody indiscriminately (Kristiansen, 2002). However, data shows that there is a disproportion in groups of people participating and the position they hold in the organisation; factors which help this disproportion are gender, wealth, education and social networks. It has been shown that women are less likely to have the same opportunities as men to become part of the managerial team (BritishCouncil, 2016). This reflects on the larger issue of gender inequality which is present in the larger society. The purpose of this article is to investigate the problem within volunteering. The report provides an overview of what helps or hinders volunteering for a section of a social demographic group at risk of experiencing disadvantage. In regards to this, some barriers must be addressed to promote greater access. Gender equality and equal opportunities is the fifth UN Sustainable Developments Goals and, therefore, it is part of society's commitment to ensure this goal is respected (SDGs, 2021). Furthermore, the findings of this study will contribute to the discussion about women's rights and gender equality.

The understanding of gender ranges among different times, places and cultures; nonetheless, the perception of it, eventually, decides the distribution of power and resources between women and men. When we acknowledge gender equality, we consider the distribution of opportunities, rights and obligation to be even between the two sexes (Ministry of Education and Research 2012).

In this report, a secondary research method through relevant scholarly articles, volunteering organisation websites and governmental data was used. It focuses on volunteering in Europe and in the UK, although other countries are acknowledged.

I would like to mention that there is little knowledge and rather few studies regarding gender inequality in volunteering. The purpose of this report is to inform about the problem and encourage further research, making inequalities visible.

## **Methodology**

The meaning of volunteering changes from country to country. In western societies, such as in the UK and Australia, the meaning of volunteering comes from a Lockean concept of self-organising society, where there is a separation from the business sector and the statutory sector of government and public administration. In other countries like Germany, volunteering puts emphasis on the communal service to the public good. (Pankoke, 1994; Anheier and Seibel,

2000). What we consider to be formal volunteering is most common in developed countries and less prevalent in Latin

America and Central and Eastern Europe (Salamon et al, 1999). One of the earliest studies recorded on volunteering including the gender variable, was made in 1995. It included nine European countries and it illustrated the rate of men and women volunteering in each of them. The countries taken into consideration were Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden. The results showed little systematic gender disparity in the total levels of volunteering across countries (table 1); men tended to work in the fields of sports, recreation, and culture, while women were more inclined to work in social service and health fields. Although, according to the study, the number of men and women working in the non-profit sector was similar, there was a difference in the involvement in the committee work; 30% of men were part of the management, versus 22% for women (Gaskin and Smith 1997, p. 37). The situation seems to have changed little over the years.

In the UK, the Office for National Statistics, in 2017, analysed the changes in the unpaid volunteering from the year 2000 to 2015 and showed that, generally speaking, women are more likely than men to have volunteered at least once in the last year than men, 37% in comparison to 34% of men (Clegg, 2017). This factor did not change much over the years. In fact, in the UK, as data by the NCVO's demographic analysis shows, there were more women in volunteering than men in 2017 and 2018 (NCVO, 2019), where the proportions were 40% of women and 35% of men in the non-profit sector. Furthermore, the Office for National Statistics data illustrated that, although the participation rates for men and women were similar, women spent more time volunteering than men, 15.7 minutes per day in comparison to 11.3 minutes. In general, there were different trends in volunteering. For example, women are less likely to be in the managerial roles, and men are more likely to be involved in sports and political organisations (NCVO, 2019)

In countries like Italy, the portion of people in a non-profit organisation seems to be bigger for men, although women tend to spend more time doing so, 18.5 hours per week against the 15.4 hours of men, which is 18% more, while the proportion of men volunteering is 55 % in comparison to 45 %. However, although men are only 10% more and women put 18% more time than men into volunteer work, it seems that in the managerial side men have a greater slice, which amounts to 70% (Acisjf, 2017).

Another example can be found in Austria. Data showed a higher number of men working in the non-profit sector, 47% in comparison to 41%, in 2008. However, data shows that women are more likely to be active in helping in the neighbourhood and, therefore, being involved in informal volunteering, while men tend to be involved more in organisations and in clubs

(STATISTIK AUSTRIA, 2008). The pattern of women tending to be involved in informal social work is spread across countries in Europe.

### **Why do women volunteer more than men?**

Therefore, what is the reason behind women volunteering more than men? Considering the disparity, it seems that women have reasons pushing them to volunteer and men reasons refraining them to do so. In the UK, one of the main reasons mentioned in the NCVO report, with 23% of positive answers, is that women are more likely

to see volunteering as a social activity, which is an occasion to make friends and interact with people. On the other hand, only 18% of men replied with the same reason. However, despite the majority of volunteers being females in the UK, only 22% of them are represented in the managerial positions, in comparison to the 28% of men. The reason that has been given is that women, precisely 62% of them, reported that they did not feel they had an impact on the organisations for which they volunteered. On the other side, 70% of men reported to feel that they had an influence in the organisation (Payne, 2015). One of the explanations provided for the diversity in the answers, was the undeniable higher number of men in representative roles, which might lead to men having more confidence in following their fellow's path, and discourage women to apply for the same role. Although this situation appears to be recurring, the question lays on the reason why it is not changing (Evans, 2019).

### **Why do men volunteer less than women?**

On the other hand, what is the reason for men to volunteer less than women? An analysis made by Priceonomics in America has shown that the gap in the amount of people who volunteer between men and women is deep, with women being more involved than men. Certainly, economic status is a factor which determines the amount of time spent in volunteering; yet, comparing the number of women and men in full time work, there is still a gap. Another reason which has been discussed is the cultural expectations for each sex. Men are often conditioned to spend their time generating income. In regard to this, the sociologist Hiromi Taniguchi showed that, when men and women are out of work, men spend most of the time looking for work, while women increase their time volunteering. Another example that has been brought up is that men might see volunteering as a field dominated by women, and therefore, men feel like they don't belong. Consultancy for non-profits have published entire guides dedicated to

helping non-profit organisations to recruit men. Olivia Bryant, CEO of YCore, an organisation which promotes volunteerism, has pointed out that women are attracted to the social and community part of volunteering, while men are more attracted to the practical benefits of developing skills and the network they can benefit from (Kopf, 2015).

### **Case studies**

Data shows that men dedicate less time than women in volunteering, but they hold a bigger slice in the management. Therefore, is there a reason for this gap in the positions held between each gender? A study made by the ISTR has investigated the social inequality in volunteering in Austria. Volunteering had been divided in four fields: politics, social services, religion and sports. The analysis brought to the conclusion that different social groups have different opportunities regarding the advancement in the organisation. Some elements, such as education and occupational status, have been shown to be beneficial to access higher positions in volunteering (Wilson, 2000). The stratification in volunteer work is a reflection of the social hierarchy in paid work.

When it comes to volunteering, the higher ranks in an organisation are more likely to be filled by older people, as well as males, professionals, managers and persons with a higher education (Musick and Wilson, 2008).

The institution of Statistik Austria has collected data in the 2006 micro-census on volunteering. Although the data are aged more than a decade ago, it seems that there has not been significant change in the field of volunteering in Austria (Federal Ministry of Labour Social Affairs and Consumer Protection 2015). In the four fields of volunteering, the gender ratio has shown that there are more women working in the field of religion, 66.4%, and social services, 55.3%, while they are a minority in sports, 30.7%, and politics, 29.1%, compared to males. The study shows the gender ratio in the managerial position of these fields, and it is interesting to note that, except for the field of religion, men have a bigger portion in higher ranking, even when the field is composed mainly by women. For example, in sports only 16.7% of the management are females. The only field where women seem to have a bigger slice of the managerial position is the field of religion, where the representative roles held by women amount to 55.9%. However, this dominance does not uphold the balance with the other fields, in regards to females and male participation in a management proportion balance. Although findings have shown that education and being part of a paid job are two important factors in senior and representative positions in all four fields, gender is also an important determinant. It has been demonstrated that, for men, age is a significant predictor for senior managerial positions; however, age does not significantly increase the likelihood for women to become managers. Regarding the

occupational status and education status as likely to improve the chances to be managers, it holds the same value for both men and women. However, females have less chances to get into senior managerial positions in sports, politics and social services. The study has shown that in male dominated fields there is a wider gender gap when it comes to managerial positions. It illustrates that, in female dominated volunteering, males have easier access to superior positions, although it seems that there are no gender differences in the requirement in the status to become one. Finally, the study explains that women are disadvantaged in their advancement towards senior managerial positions in the fields of politics, sport and social services, and they cannot compensate with advanced education or a good job position (Meyer, 2020).

Regarding the reasons why women have a hard time advancing, a study was made in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2014 on Volunteering, Gender and Power, aimed to explore the condition of women and men as volunteers in a male dominated volunteer organisation, by inviting all the members of the organisation to answer a questionnaire. The objective was to identify the inequalities between men and women, showing the differences in the work setting and explaining the male dominance in the organisation.

The study was made in a volunteer rescue organisation, where the majority were men, 76%, compared to 14% of women. The majority of leadership and supervisory roles were also held by men, constituting a hierarchical structure of the organisation, where men hold more power and influence. Two concepts are mentioned in the study which help understanding the research. First, the homosocial contest is mentioned as an act of including men and excluding women, in which men are given better opportunities (Löfström, 2004, Wahl et al. 2011).

Secondly, the concept of feminine and masculine attributes to tasks, actions and physical bodies. Men and masculinities are seen as superior and it is irregularity from the standard, which is considered problematic (Wahl et al. 2011).

The study has shown the discrimination towards women both in an organisational and cultural way. For example, there was a higher value attached to the roles played by men. This can be found in the fact that being a rescue volunteer is typically a job associated with men (Alvesson and Billing 1999, Olofsson 2012). Therefore, women in this context had to work to a greater extent to be taken seriously and often their competence was questioned (Kanter, 1977). One of the consequences of this structure is also that women are assessed by stereotypes and not by their individual achievement. Furthermore, as it is a male dominant environment, the male dominance is perceived as the norm, where women are the variant to this norm and they are constantly compared to males (Wahl et al. 2011). As a male dominated environment, there was

an association between work and masculinity, which reinforced the idea of a male domination and female subordination. This has shown to be a problem; for example, where the expectation of the ideal volunteer requires total commitment to the work and does not allow for other commitments for the home or the family, tasks that are generally associated with women. Previous research has explained that starting a family has a great impact in advancing in an organisation (Wahl et al. 2011). Starting a family is not an issue by itself, but the structure of the organisation, implying someone has to give priority to the work, is (Kanter, 1977).

The male dominated environment and the lack of willingness to change the situation, create discrimination internally towards women; for example, the interviewed answered that women's opinions are heard less than men, and that there is less sympathy towards women. The survey's findings illustrated that the physical work environment does not provide equal conditions, but it disfavours women both physically and psychologically. Both men and women recognise that the equipment and the work arena are not always suitable for women, for example when the clothes do not suit women, and therefore they make it more difficult for this part of the employers to reform their tasks. The surveys emphasised that a large slice of volunteers was invited by previous volunteers, 36% of women and 44% of men. Therefore, the recruitment was unstructured, and allowed a subjective judgment in the enrolment. The unorganised recruitment was a problem when allowing the centralisation of power to those who are already influential. Regarding positions of power held inside the organisation, the findings exposed that there is a better match between male qualifications and education with their work tasks in comparison to women. Furthermore, males had a better access to choices regarding what task to perform. The reason for this seemed to be the structure of the organisation, the one in which there was a male domination and a female subordination, rather than a difference in ambition. However, reasons which might discourage women to even apply to those positions are the lack of women in supervisory roles and the lack of opportunities (Kanter, 1977). In fact, the survey revealed that a quarter of women believe that men's growth potential is bigger. For example, men were prioritised when it comes to being enrolled in courses. Furthermore, the findings manifest discrimination in the organisation, which can be the cause of women's lack of participation. This kind of discrimination is seen as sexual harassment (Holgersson 2006), and female subordination to the male dominant system (Glans and Rother, 2007). Males too reported being discriminated against, but it was always from other males' members who had higher positions. Therefore, the problem is in the structure of the system and the stretch in which masculinities are perceived to be the norm and what is different is less valued (SÖDERHJELM, 2014).



## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the analysis has shown that, in Europe, regardless of the meaning different countries associate with volunteering, the proportion of women and men involved in the non-profit sector is very similar, with a slightly higher number of men volunteering but with women spending more time doing so. However, data shows that women are less likely to have a representative role or being in the management of those organisations. The analysis of the study made in Austria showed that men are more likely to reach a higher presence in management in the majority of fields. While for men the main factors for becoming part of the management are positional status and education, women seem to be unable to reach higher positions despite holding those statuses. Therefore, gender influences the roles people can achieve even within volunteering organisations. Inequalities in larger society are transferred to volunteering.

The study made in Sweden served to show the reasons behind this inequality. Rather than lack of ambitions, the given reasons are discrimination, even in the form of sexual harassment, lack of representation the higher positions, unequal circumstances, unstructured recruitment, which leads to the concentration of power on those who are already influential in the organisation, and a homosocial environment, where the concepts of masculinities are considered as an element for prejudice.

In order to comply with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to contribute to a more equal society, we need to pay more attention to what can be done. First of all, it is important to keep the discussion of gender inequality going. Furthermore, we need to make sure the data we collect is sufficient and adequate. The problem of lack of data regarding women's opinion or women's figure in society is a larger problem, but it appears in volunteering just as much. It is crucial to have gender integrated data to comprehend the gender dimensions in the non-profit sector. One of the options is for national statistics agencies to collect data on volunteer work using Labour Force Surveys, which can pass through the population census (Borromeo, 2021).



The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), established in 1992, is the European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion of, and support to, volunteers and volunteering in Europe at European, national or regional level. CEV channels the collective priorities and concerns of its member organisations to the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe. CEV's vision is a Europe in which volunteers are central in building a cohesive, sustainable and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship. CEV is a European network of organizations dedicated to the promotion of and support to volunteers and volunteering. Our mission is to provide collaborative leadership to create an enabling environment for volunteering in Europe.