

CO14: Participation in voluntary work and membership of NGOs for young adults

Definitions and methodology

The extent to which young people participate in formal and informal organizations is an indication of their societal participation. Indicators presented here focus on membership and intensity of participation in formal groups and associations; quantitative information on engagement in volunteer work is also presented.

The data on group membership come from the 2005 - 2007 wave of the *World Values Surveys* (WVS; Tables CO14.1 and CO14.2), which asked respondents whether they belonged to groups of a particular type, and whether they considered themselves to be an “active” or “inactive” member of these groups as categorized in four broad groups: groups based on religious affiliation; sports and cultural associations; organisations with a political orientation, including labour unions; charitable organizations; and, other groups including those advocacy groups with specific causes, such as environmental associations (Inglehart *et al.*, 2004).

The proportion of people involved in voluntary work is based on data taken from the 1999-2002 *World Values Surveys* (the 2005 wave did not replicate the questions on voluntary work) and from the 2006 *European Social Surveys* (ESS). In the WVS, respondents were also asked if they were *currently* doing unpaid voluntary work for any of the groups they reported to belong to. The relevant question in the ESS is less restrictive since people were asked about their involvement in work for voluntary or charitable organizations over the last 12 months.

Key findings

Table CO14.1 shows large cross-national variation in the proportion of the population who declare to belong to a formal organization, ranging from 15.2% of the population age 15 and over in Turkey to almost 96% in Sweden. The high participation rates in Finland and Sweden are because of the high rates of affiliation to the Lutheran Church and/or trade-unions.

Adolescents and young adults (age 15 to 29) are less likely to be member of an organization than the population in general, except in Italy, the Netherlands and Slovenia. On average across the OECD, young women are, less likely to be members of a formal group compared to young men, and differences are particularly pronounced in Japan and Turkey.

Table CO14.1 shows that, at 49% the proportion of people who declare to “actively” participate in an organization is far lower than membership itself (70.4%). The intensity of participation seems to change little with age: in Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Poland, young adults are significantly (5 percentage points) more likely to consider themselves as active group members than the general population of these countries, while young people in Japan and New Zealand appear “relatively inactive”. However, these results have to be interpreted with some caution as sample sizes are small (Table CO14.1).

Other relevant indicators: CO13 Young people not in education or employment; and, CO15 Participation rates and first time voters.

Table CO14.1 Group membership and active participation of young adults, around 2005¹

	Member of a group as a proportion of population group			Active participants of a group as a proportion of group members		
	All ages	15-29 women relative to men's ratio		All ages	15-29 number of cases	
Australia	83.1	82.7	1.06	60.8	66	191
Bulgaria	17.3	16.9	0.71	8.4	7.9	177
Canada	82.1	78.5	0.91	67.8	67.5	382
Cyprus^{2,3}	55.7	62.2	0.85	34.8	39.1	307
Finland	92.9	92.3	1.06	49.1	48	196
France	54.5	51.7	0.89	40.4	37	194
Germany	67.1	60.4	0.92	45.2	45	298
Italy	61.7	65.3	1.02	39.9	49.2	193
Japan	58.1	45.9	0.66	36.8	27.6	181
Korea	68.8	67.6	0.88	34.6	34.5	278
Mexico	82.7	80.6	0.97	62.8	62.5	501
Netherlands	77.1	79.2	0.9	58.4	65.5	240
New Zealand	82.3	77.5	0.92	67.6	61.3	113
Norway	88.1	85	1.04	55.1	66	191
Poland	40.1	44.6	1	26.8	31.8	242
Romania	19.8	19.5	0.74	12.8	10.7	307
Slovenia	66.2	77.8	1	44.6	55.6	225
Spain	38.7	34.5	0.83	25.4	21.1	275
Sweden	95.9	93.6	0.99	62.8	60.1	188
Switzerland	88.4	91.1	0.97	68	69.3	101
Turkey	15.2	12.5	0.5	8.4	6.6	542
United Kingdom	75.6	70.4	0.9	61.8	62.2	233
United States	85.9	81.7	0.99	62.9	58.9	219
OECD average	70.4	68.2	0.9	49.2	49.5	250

1) year: 2005 for most countries except: 2004 for New Zealand; 2006 for Cyprus, Bulgaria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom; 2007 for Switzerland and Turkey.

2) Footnote by Turkey: The information in this document with reference to « Cyprus » relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".

3) Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Source: 2005 World Values Surveys.

Table CO14.2 shows there is significant diversity across countries in the formal groups to which young people belong. Young people are most likely to be member of a "sport or cultural" association rather than any other group, except in Finland, Mexico, Sweden and the United States. In these four countries youngsters are most likely to belong to a Church (or other religious organization), but active participation in Churches is rather low (see comparability and data issues). The membership to an association with a political orientation, including labour unions, is also more frequent in Sweden, Finland, the United States and Norway than anywhere else. One-third of young people in Canada and Sweden are members of a charitable or a humanitarian association, about twice as high as for the OECD on average.

Table CO14.2 Proportion of young people who are active or inactive group members by type of group, around 2005¹

Men and women age 15 to 29

	Church or religious organisation	Sports and Cultural association	Trade unions and association with political orientation	Humanitarian or Charitable organisation	Other groups
Australia	32	62	23	25	36
Bulgaria	4	9	4	2	3
Canada	45	70	33	33	42
Cyprus^{2,3}	20	47	22	17	25
Finland	82	44	47	17	14
France	6	43	8	19	21
Germany	27	45	6	4	10
Italy	19	51	10	18	17
Japan	9	30	13	1	14
Korea	38	45	9	6	14
Mexico	62	49	20	23	30
Netherlands	21	66	13	15	18
New Zealand	32	63	22	21	41
Norway	35	60	39	27	39
Poland	28	30	11	14	13
Romania	11	3	10	1	2
Slovenia	38	59	16	12	17
Spain	15	23	9	8	7
Sweden	63	58	49	32	48
Switzerland	53	82	12	22	44
Turkey	2	6	4	2	3
United Kingdom	27	59	18	23	27
United States	60	44	40	20	34
OECD average	35	49	20	17	25

1), 2) and 3) see corresponding notes to Table CO14.1
 Source: 2005 World Values Surveys.

The World Values Surveys suggests that the proportion of young people engaged in voluntary work *at the time of responding to the survey* varied from less than 10% in Japan and Turkey to more than 35% in Canada, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (Table CO14.3). Participation in voluntary work according to the European Social Survey is generally higher, as the ESS asks whether people were involved in voluntary work at least once in the year before the survey, as reported by more than half of young people in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Switzerland. However, for the Slovak republic and Sweden, the results generated by the ESS are lower than voluntary work participation as suggested by the WVS. In view of the survey questions this seems counterintuitive, but could be related to a very broad perception of voluntary work among ESS survey respondents; the sample sizes of the ESS and the WVS may also play a role.

Table CO14.3 Proportion of people doing voluntary work

Proportion of people by age-category

	World Values Surveys - 1999-2002 ¹		European Social Survey 2006 ²	
	15-29 years old	30-49 years old	15-29 years old	30-49 years old
Austria	28.2	35.3	52.2	57.7
Belgium	33.1	39.1	38.1	38.4
Bulgaria	..	..	7.9	7.1
Canada	39.3	53.9	..	..
Cyprus^{3,4}	..	..	50	48.2
Czech Rep.	34.7	31.1	..	..
Denmark	32.1	42.4	50.8	48.3
Estonia	..	..	22.3	19.7
Finland	28.8	41.3	51.3	52.8
France	23.2	25.4	33.4	33.9
Germany	15	23.3	45.4	48.4
Greece	38.4	42.5	..	..
Hungary	12.2	17.4	16.7	23.4
Iceland	19.7	39.6	..	..
Ireland	30.1	30.3	42	48.5
Italy	26.7	28.3	..	..
Japan	5.6	10.9	..	..
Korea	46.5	48.5	..	..
Luxembourg	32.7	29	..	..
Mexico	36.6	36.2	..	..
Netherlands	51.3	48.5	43.6	51.2
Norway	..	..	64.3	69.7
Poland	14.8	13.5	20.1	13.8
Portugal	14.3	17.5	33.7	38.6
Romania	..	..	17	18.7
Slovak Republic	49.2	52	21.6	26.4
Slovenia	..	..	39.3	39.8
Spain	19	15.8	31.7	43.1
Sweden	57.1	55.2	26.2	32.1
Switzerland	..	..	55.7	55.7
Turkey	1.8	1.7	..	..
United Kingdom	37	46.4	41.5	42.5
United States	62.4	70.8	..	..
OECD average	30.4	34.5	..	..

.. data not available

1) In the 1999-2002 World Values Surveys, respondents were asked if they were currently doing unpaid voluntary work for any group they belong to. The estimate shows here the proportion of respondents doing unpaid work for at least one group.

2) in the 2006 European Surveys, respondents were asked whether, over the last 12 months, they have been involved in work for voluntary or charitable organizations. The estimates derived here correspond to the proportion respondents who answered positively.

3) and 4) see notes 2) and 3) of Table CO14.1

Sources: European Social Survey, and World Values Surveys.

Comparability and data issues

The World Values Survey (WVS) is a worldwide network of representative national surveys carried out in 97 societies covering almost 90 percent of the world's population. Five waves of surveys have been released from 1981 to 2007. The last wave was carried out over the 2005-2007 period. Sample sizes in OECD countries varied from approximately 1000 individuals in France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland or the United Kingdom to more than 2000 in Canada or Germany.

The European Social Survey (the ESS) is a biennial multi-country survey covering over 30 nations. The first round of data was collected in 2002/2003, the second in 2004/2005 and the third in 2006/2007. Sample sizes of the 2006 wave are relatively large compared to previous years as well as

the WVS, with around 2,000 or more people being interviewed in France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Affiliation to churches can be widespread, especially when it concerns national and/or former state churches as, for example, in Finland and Sweden. In general, however, active participation is much smaller than membership. Membership of labour unions is also relatively high in Nordic countries; and, again, active participation concerns only a sub-set of members.

Table CO14.4 Active versus passive affiliation to a church, a religious organization or a trade union, around 2005¹

Men and women age 15 to 29

	Affiliation to church or religious organisation		Trade unions membership	
	Active	Passive	Active	Passive
Australia	7.6	24.5	8.1	11.4
Bulgaria	1.9	1.75	0.6	2.1
Canada	18	27	12.5	16.1
Cyprus^{2,3}	6.8	13.4	5.2	9.8
Finland	14.5	67	9.9	37.6
France	1.8	4	1.5	4.7
Germany	9.6	17.4	0.9	3.2
Italy	10.9	8.3	0.5	4.1
Japan	2.2	6.6	1.1	11.1
Korea	13.8	24.6	0.8	6.9
Mexico	34.5	27.7	3.8	9.2
Netherlands	9.6	10.9	4.2	7.3
New Zealand	10.2	22.2	5.6	13.1
Norway	5.2	29.5	8.3	26.4
Poland	14.7	12.8	2	8.5
Romania	4.6	6.8	3.3	3.6
Slovenia	13.3	24.4	6.2	7.6
Spain	3	12.4	1.8	5.5
Sweden	6.8	56.6	11.7	36.2
Switzerland	8.6	44.4	0	6.7
Turkey	1	0.6	0	0.5
United Kingdom	11.3	16.2	10.1	5.6
United States	32.4	27.5	3.5	7.1
OECD average	11.4	23.2	4.5	11.6

1), 2) and 3) see corresponding notes in Table CO14.1
 Sources: 2005 World Values Surveys.

Sources and further reading: World Values Surveys: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>; European Social Surveys: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>; Inglehart et al. (2004), *Human Beliefs and Values: a cross-cultural sourcebook based on the 1999-2002 values surveys*, Siglo XXI Editores, México; Inglehart R. (2008), "Changing Values among Western Publics from 1970 to 2006", *West European Politics*, 31(1-2): 130-146; OECD (2006), *Society at a Glance 2006*.