

CO4.1: Participation in voluntary work and membership of groups and organisations for young adults

Definitions and methodology

The extent to which young people participate in formal and informal organizations represents an indicator of their societal participation. Measures presented here focus on membership and intensity of participation in formal groups and associations, plus also the degree to which young people engage in volunteering and voluntary work.

The data on group membership come from the *World Values Survey* (WVS) Wave 6 (2010-2014), which asked respondents whether they belonged to groups or organisations of a particular type and whether they considered themselves to be an “active” or “passive” member of these groups. The WVS categorises groups and organisations into different categories: groups based on religious affiliation; sports and recreational organisation; art, music or educational organisations; trade unions, political parties; humanitarian or charitable organisations; environmental organisations; and other types of organisations, including advocacy groups with specific causes.

Data on volunteering and the extent to which young people engage in voluntary work come from two sources, each of which provide slightly different data based on slightly different question. The first source (shown in Table CO4.1.B) is the *Gallup World Poll*, which asks respondents the question: “Have you done any of the following in the past month? How about volunteered your time to an organization?” In other words, data from *Gallup World Poll* reflect the proportion of people engaging in any kind of voluntary work roughly around the time of the survey. The second source (data shown in Table CO4.1.C) is the *European Social Survey* (ESS) 2012, which asks respondents whether, over the last 12 months, they have been involved in work for voluntary or charitable organizations. Given the 12-month window, the data from the ESS reflect the proportion of people engaging in voluntary work over a wider time-frame.

Key findings

Table CO4.1.A shows there is significant diversity across countries in the formal groups to which young people belong. In most countries the most popular type of group membership is to a church or religious organisation – indeed, in Australia, Chile, Germany, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States around 40% or more of young people are a member of a religious group, with the rate in Mexico and the United States reaching around 66%. That said, many of these young people consider themselves only passive members of these religious groups – the number of active members is in many cases far lower (see Table CO4.1.D). Sports and recreational groups are also relatively popular across many countries, especially in Australia and New Zealand where over 50% of young people are a member of a sports or recreational group. Membership of most other types of organisation is generally uncommon, except on specific occasions in specific countries. In Sweden, for example, almost 50% of young people report that they are a member of a trade union, although again many consider themselves only passive members of these groups (Table CO4.1.D). In the United States, meanwhile, 44% of young people report that they are a member of a political party, far higher than in any other OECD country.

Other relevant indicators: CO3.5 Young people not in education or employment; and, CO4.2 Participation rates and first time voters.

Table CO4.1.A Proportion (%) of young people who are members (active or inactive) of organisations by type of group, around 2012

Men and women age 15 to 29

	Church or religious organisation	Sports and recreational organisation	Art, music or educational organisation	Trade unions	Political party	Humanitarian or Charitable organisation	Environmental organisation	Other groups
Australia	41	52	31	22	10	32	15	10
Chile	39	28	18	13	10	13	8	12
Cyprus ^{1,2}	20	22	12	14	20	13	8	5
Estonia	14	18	15	7	6	5	2	7
Germany	48	37	15	12	7	13	7	..
Japan	12	22	12	10	5	3	3	11
Korea	44	29	25	8	6	11	9	23
Mexico	67	32	23	14	18	20	15	9
Netherlands	30	46	21	19	6	16	11	8
New Zealand	45	58	40	19	16	37	20	30
Poland	27	12	11	11	4	8	5	5
Romania	19	9	7	8	8	4	4	3
Slovenia	20	30	16	17	7	16	7	14
Spain	17	14	8	6	4	7	2	3
Sweden	43	34	22	49	12	29	11	26
Turkey	2	4	3	2	5	3	2	1
United States	63	27	24	16	44	30	18	16

1) 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".

2) 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: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014

Table CO4.1.B shows variation across countries in the proportion of the young people who declared having volunteered time to an organization in the past month, with rates ranging from 5% of the population age 15 and over in Turkey to 46% in the United States. Volunteering rates among young people are generally highest in the English-speaking non-European countries (Australia, Canada, and the United States) and tend to be lowest in Eastern and Southern European countries (e.g. Greece, Hungary and the Slovak Republic) plus Turkey.

Adolescents and young adults (age 15 to 29) are a slightly less likely to volunteer time to an organization than the population in general, except in Slovenia and Estonia. Yet, differences are generally only small and the intensity of participation seems to change little with age. Only in Finland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom is the proportion of younger people who reported volunteering in the past month more than 5 percentage points lower than the proportion of the general (15+) population.

On average across the OECD, volunteering time is similar among women and men, but in France for example, women tend to volunteer more time than men. However, these results have to be interpreted with some caution as sample sizes are small.

Table CO4.1.B. Proportion of people who volunteered time to an organization in the past month, 2015 or last year available¹

	Total	All ages:		15-29 year olds	Year
		Men	Women		
Australia	40	38	41	42	2015
Austria	26	25	28	28	2015
Belgium	28	26	29	28	2015
Canada	44	42	46	40	2014
Chile	16	17	15	16	2014
Czech Republic	13	13	13	16	2014
Denmark	23	24	23	27	2015
Estonia	19	17	20	29	2014
Finland	31	29	34	22	2015
France	29	24	33	27	2015
Germany	27	27	27	23	2015
Greece	8	9	8	10	2015
Hungary	9	9	8	11	2015
Iceland	29	30	28	..	2013
Ireland	40	40	40	35	2015
Israel ²	21	21	20	19	2014
Italy	15	14	17	15	2015
Japan	26	30	23	..	2014
Korea	21	20	23	25	2014
Luxembourg	31	29	34	31	2015
Mexico	13	13	13	12	2015
Netherlands	33	32	34	29	2015
New Zealand	45	47	43	..	2014
Poland	9	11	7	14	2015
Portugal	15	15	14	15	2014
Slovak Republic	11	10	11	9	2014
Slovenia	34	41	27	45	2015
Spain	17	18	16	19	2015
Sweden	15	15	15	18	2015
Switzerland	27	25	28	20	2014
Turkey	5	6	4	5	2013
United Kingdom	33	30	35	26	2015
United States	44	41	47	46	2014
OECD average	24	24	24	23	
Bulgaria	4	4	5	8	2014
Croatia	17	14	21	28	2014
Cyprus ^{3,4}	25	27	23	23	2015
Latvia	9	8	10	14	2014
Lithuania	8	7	10	7	2014
Malta	28	29	27	27	2015
Romania	7	8	5	11	2014

1) Data refer to 2014 for Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czech Rep, Estonia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, and United States, and to 2013 for Iceland, and Turkey.

2) The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

3) See note 1) in Table CO4.1.A

4) See note 2) in Table CO4.1.A

Source: Gallup World Poll.

Data from the European Social Survey show higher rates of volunteering among young people, which is not surprising given the wider reference period involved (the past 12 months, as opposed to only the past as is used in the Gallup World Poll). Data from the European Social Survey are available mostly only for European countries so the country sample in Table CO4.1.C is a little different to that in Table CO4.1.B, but here the highest rates of volunteering are reported in Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries (with the partial exception of Sweden). The lowest rates again tend to come from Eastern and Southern European countries, particularly the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Portugal where only around 25% of young people report having been involved in work with a voluntary or charitable organisation over the past 12 months.

Table CO4.1.C Proportion of people involved in work for voluntary or charitable organisations in the past year
Proportion (%) by age group

	15-29 years old	30-49 years old
Belgium	39	35
Czech Republic	26	27
Denmark	50	47
Estonia	37	28
Finland	51	49
France	26	31
Germany	58	57
Hungary	23	23
Iceland	50	55
Ireland	49	48
Israel ²	42	40
Italy	43	47
Netherlands	54	58
Poland	25	24
Portugal	26	29
Slovak Republic	42	43
Slovenia	41	38
Spain	42	55
Sweden	35	41
Switzerland	53	58
United Kingdom	51	47
Bulgaria	13	14
Lithuania	27	28
Cyprus ^{3,4}	42	44

1) In the 2012 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.

2) See note 2) in Table CO4.1.B

3) See note 1) in Table CO4.1.A

4) See note 2) in Table CO4.1.A

Sources: European Social Survey 2012

Comparability and data issues

The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire, translated into the predominant languages of each country. With few exceptions, all samples are probability based and nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 years and over, including rural areas. While this ensures a high degree of comparability across countries, results may be affected by sampling and non-sampling error and variation in response rates; especially for youth, data should be interpreted carefully. Sample sizes vary between around 1 000 and 4 000, depending on the country. These probability surveys are valid within a statistical margin of error, also called a 95% confidence interval. This means that if the survey is conducted 100 times using the exact same procedures, the margin of error would include the “true value” in 95 out of the 100 surveys. With a sample size of 1 000 the margin of error at 50% is ± 3 percentage points. Because these surveys use a clustered sample design, the margin of error varies by question.

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. Six waves of surveys have been released from 1981 to 2014. The last wave was carried out over the 2010/2014 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 and the last round in 2010/12. Sample sizes of the 2012 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 (Table CO4.1.D). Membership of labour unions is also relatively high in Nordic countries and, again, active participation concerns only a sub-set of members (Table CO4.1.D).

Table CO4.1.D Active versus passive affiliation to a church, a religious organization or a trade union, around 2012

Men and women age 15 to 29

	Affiliation to church or religious organisation			Trade union membership		
	Total	Active	Passive	Total	Active	Passive
Australia	41	15	26	22	9	12
Chile	39	23	16	13	5	8
Estonia	14	4	10	7	1	6
Germany	48	14	34	12	4	9
Japan	12	4	8	10	2	9
Korea	44	24	20	8	2	6
Mexico	67	38	29	14	6	8
Netherlands	30	11	19	19	3	15
New Zealand	45	19	26	19	9	10
Poland	27	15	12	11	4	7
Slovenia	20	7	13	17	6	11
Spain	17	7	11	6	3	3
Sweden	43	6	37	49	13	36
Turkey	2	1	1	2	2	1
United States	63	35	29	16	7	9
Cyprus ^{1,2}	20	10	11	14	6	8
Romania	19	11	9	8	4	4

1) See note 1) in Table CO4.1.A

2) See note 2) in Table CO4.1.A

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014

Sources and further reading: Gallup World Pool <http://www.gallup.com> 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 (2014), *Society at a Glance 2014* <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/societyataglance.htm>.