



VOLUNTARY WORK IN FRANCE IN 2017 **CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS AND TRENDS**

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

Lionel Prouteau

LEMNA (University of Nantes)
and Centre de recherche sur les associations

June 2020

A survey

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Table of contents

p. 4	Introduction
p. 5	Presentation of the CRA – CSA 2017 survey on voluntary work
p. 6	Volunteers and their participation
p. 15	The number of hours devoted to voluntary work
p. 22	What comparisons with INSEE's <i>Vie associative 2002</i> survey?
p. 28	Conclusion – What lessons can be drawn from this research

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Introduction

At a time when the “development of a society characterised by commitment” is a declared ambition, it is somewhat paradoxical that official statistical agencies in France have been reluctant, to say the least, to display any real interest in collecting data on participation in voluntary work¹. Both qualitative studies and quantitative surveys are required if our knowledge of voluntary work in France is to be improved. The latter, however, are few and far between. The survey that has undeniably served as a reference point in this regard is the one carried out by INSEE, the French national statistical service, in 2002 as part of its Permanent Living Conditions Survey (*Enquête permanente sur les conditions de vie des ménages*). It provided some new and very interesting data on voluntary work and for the next 15 years was the only source of information on the volume of hours devoted to such work. Unfortunately, it has remained without a real successor; a survey inspired by INSEE’s work was conducted in 2010 by the Directorate for Research, Studies, Assessment and Statistics of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and Women’s Rights (DREES), in collaboration with the private polling company BVA, but the information it provided on voluntary work was much less rich.

It is true that, from time to time, figures supplied by private organisations are made available. However, besides the fact that they provide no information on the time devoted to voluntary work, such figures are obtained from surveys whose protocols are less than satisfactory. Consequently, they serve more to muddy the waters than to shed light on the behaviour of interest to us here. When it comes to surveys on voluntary work and, more generally, on the different forms of voluntary contributions, the methodologies used to obtain the data are, after all, of the essence.

Thus this shortage of information was the starting point for a survey designed by the *Centre de recherche sur les associations* with assistance from the polling company CSA. It took place in June 2017 and took into account only voluntary work carried out within organisations (formal voluntary work). After a brief description of this survey and of the sample used, the principal results derived from analysis of the data are presented. The first part deals with voluntary workers and their participation². The second focuses on the time devoted to voluntary work. The third compares the results obtained with those from INSEE’s *Vie associative 2002/Voluntary sector 2002* survey. In the conclusion we draw on a number of the principal lessons to be derived from this project in order to open up some avenues for deliberation and discussion. The full results of this research are contained in the report devoted to it, which can be consulted on line³.

¹ The expression “a society characterised by commitment” was adopted by the public authorities in January 2015. A report on the subject was published in May 2018. Entitled *For an ambitious policy on the voluntary sector and the development of a society characterised by commitment/Pour une politique de vie associative ambitieuse et le développement d’une société de l’engagement*, it was produced as part of the project on the co-construction of voluntary sector policy launched by the French government in November 2017 and managed jointly by the Directorate for Youth, Popular Education and the Voluntary Sector/ Direction de la jeunesse, de l’éducation populaire et de la vie associative (DJEVPA), the High Commissioner for the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation and the Association Movement.

² For the purposes of this research, we adopted Marie-Thérèse Cheroutre’s definition of a voluntary worker as “an individual who undertakes of their own free will to carry through to a successful conclusion a series of activities for the benefit of others; these activities are not remunerated, not subject to any legal obligation and take place outside the individual’s work and family time” (*L’essor et l’avenir du bénévolat, facteur d’amélioration de la vie, Rapport du Conseil économique et social*, 1989). It should be explained that in France a distinction is made between “le bénévolat” and “le volontariat” (in particular civic service); the former denotes unremunerated voluntary work, while *volontaires* receive an allowance that is a form of remuneration even though it is not a wage or salary. Such remunerated voluntary work is not included in the present study.

³ Internet links for the report: <https://fonda.asso.fr/ressources/le-benevolat-en-france-etat-des-lieux-et-tendances>.

Presentation of the CRA-CSA survey on voluntary work

The sample for the *Centre de recherche sur les associations – CSA 2017* survey (hereinafter CRA-CSA 2017) was drawn from the population of metropolitan France aged 18 and over. It comprised 5,039 individuals. It was put together by the Institut CSA using the quota method on the basis of gender, age, socio-occupational category and level of education after stratification by region of residence and category of conurbation. The adjustment factors were determined by the polling company on this basis.

The questionnaire, which was completed on a one-to-one basis, enabled interviewers to gather information on a number of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics in addition to those used to establish the quotas, including employment situation, marital status, the number of dependent children in the household and so on. The questions on voluntary work were grouped into two modules. The first was preceded by a question that asked whether respondents belonged to one or more associations. This question was accompanied by a very detailed list of associations to which respondents were likely to belong, the aim being to avoid any lapses of memory on their part. Only those who declared membership of one or more associations were then asked whether, in the course of their membership, they had provided any services on a voluntary basis or carried out any unpaid work in the twelve months prior to the survey. For those who answered in the affirmative, the first module was then completed for each instance of voluntary participation up to a limit of four. They were asked how long they had been doing this unpaid voluntary work, whether their participation was regular or occasional and how many hours they devoted to it.

The second module of the questionnaire was aimed at those respondents who stated that, during the year preceeding the survey, they had carried out voluntary activities within associations *but without being members of those associations* or within organisations without the legal status of an association, whether private or public and whether or not they were members of the organisation in question⁴. In order to differentiate this type of voluntary activity from the voluntary work detailed in the first module, which was carried out by members of an association, this second type of voluntary work was denoted by the term "other voluntary work". The content of this second module was more or less the same as that of the first module but respondents were asked to indicate the nature of the organisation for which they worked (association or organisation without association status). The type of activity carried out by these associations or other organisations was determined on the basis of a list similar to that used in the first module. This second module was completed up to a limit of two instances of voluntary participation.

Several fields of activity were defined by grouping together types of associations and other organisations as indicated by respondents. There are eight fields in all: arts and culture, sport, leisure activities, social, humanitarian and charitable action, health, defence of rights, causes and interests, education and training and economic and local development. Those associations that could not be allocated to one or other of these fields are grouped together under the heading "Other".

⁴ The term "association" in France is generally taken to denote organisations governed by the 1901 act on contracts of association, which enshrined freedom of association in French law (see Nirello L., Prouteau L., "The French Nonprofit Sector: a Literature Review", *Voluntaristics Review*, 2018, vol. 3 (2), pp.1-79.

1. Volunteers and their participation

Rate of participation in voluntary work of 43%

The overall rate of participation in voluntary work (i.e. taking all fields of activity into account) as estimated on the basis of the survey is 43%⁵. This equates to a little less than 22 million volunteers aged 18 and over.

Slightly more than one third (34.6 %) of the individuals surveyed said that they volunteered as members of their associations, while more than 15% were involved in "other voluntary work" (in associations but without being members or in organisations not governed by the 1901 Act) Almost one volunteer in six was involved in both forms of volunteering. 67% of volunteers reported only one instance of voluntary work, 21% reported two and 12% reported three or more.

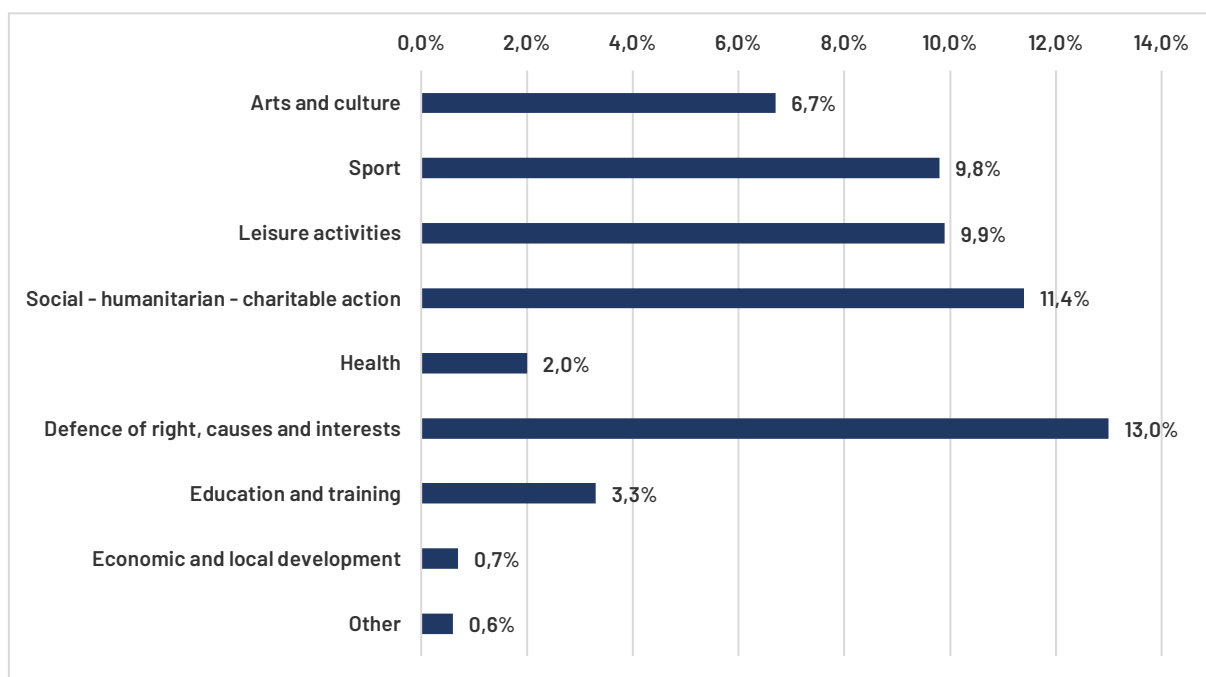
The defence of rights, causes and interests has the highest rate of volunteering, ahead of social, humanitarian and charitable action

The highest participation rate among the various fields of activity is observed in the heterogeneous field of the defence of rights, causes and interests⁶. It lies ahead of social, humanitarian and charitable action, which is followed in declining order by leisure activities, sport and arts and culture (Figure 1). Participation rates are lowest for education and training, health and, *a fortiori*, economic and local development.

⁵ The volunteering rate is obtained by comparing the number of voluntary workers to the total reference population.

⁶ This field includes, among others, parent-teacher associations, environmental defence associations, tenants' and landlords' associations, professional or occupational organisations, including trade unions, as well as religious and parochial associations, associations defending human rights, political organisations, etc.

Figure 1. Rate of volunteering by field of activity



Note: The sum of the participation rates by field of activity is greater than the overall participation rate because of pluri-participants, that is those volunteers who work in more than one organisation. Source: CRA-CSA 2017 survey.

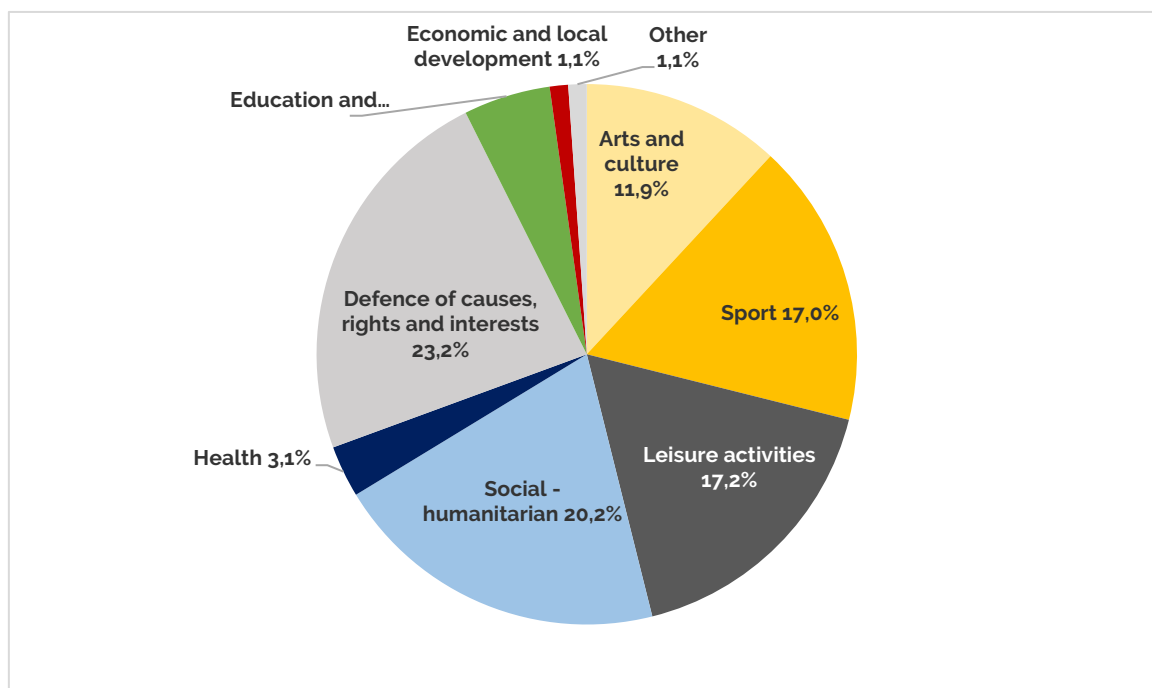
46% of instances of participation in voluntary work are concentrated in the fields of sport, arts and cultures and leisure activities

Since some volunteers reported several instances of participation (in different organisations), the total number of such instances is greater than the total number of volunteers⁷. The number of instances of participation in voluntary work is estimated to be a little more than 33 million. 93% of these were carried out in associations and 7% in organisations that do not have association status, such as municipal organisations or educational establishments. However, doing voluntary work in associations does not necessarily involve being a member. 23% of instances of voluntary participation in associations are carried out by non-members.

The defence of rights, causes and interests comes out on top once again, with 23% of such instances, ahead of social, humanitarian and charitable action, which accounts for one fifth. The next three fields (sport, arts and culture and leisure activities), which all concern activities of a recreational nature, account for 46% of the total number of instances of voluntary participation (Figure 2).

⁷ Participation in voluntary work is here taken to mean the carrying out of voluntary activities within an organisation. Thus a volunteer offering their services in several organisations is credited with several instances of volunteering. Such volunteers are denoted here by the term "pluri-participants".

Figure 2. Distribution of instances of voluntary participation by field of activity



Source: CRA-CSA 2017 survey.

A narrow majority of instances of participation are occasional

The response to the question as to whether or not their participation was regular or occasional was left to respondents to judge for themselves. They were deliberately not given any definition of regular voluntary work. 52% of instances of volunteering were declared to be occasional. However, there is a clear difference between volunteering in associations by members and other volunteering (Table 1). In the first case, only 4 instances out of every 10 were said to be occasional, compared with 8 out of 10 in the second case.

Table 1. Distribution of instances of volunteering by occasional vs. regular participation and type of voluntary work

Type of participation	All instances of participation	Participation as member of an association	Participation as non-member or in an organisation without association status (other voluntary work)
Regular participation	48.1 %	59.5 %	19.5 %
Occasional participation	51.9 %	40.5 %	80.5 %
Total	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

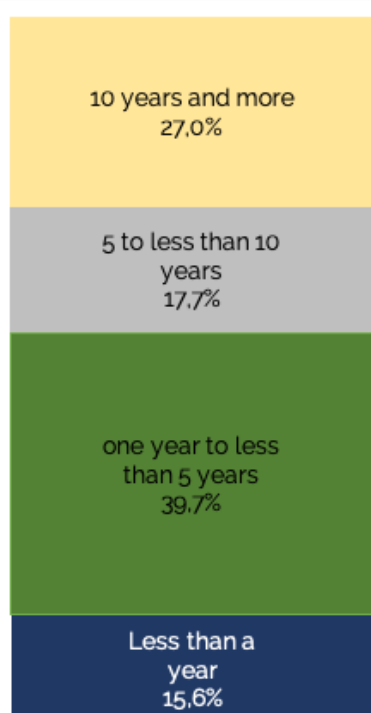
Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

The respective shares of regular and occasional participation also differ by field of activity. In local development, the majority of instances are regular (although the small numbers of volunteers here suggest any analysis requires caution), as they are in education-training, social, humanitarian and charitable action and health (Table 2). Conversely, the majority of instances of participation in leisure activities and arts and culture are occasional. In this last field, occasional volunteering plays an important role, notably in the performing arts and more particularly during festivals.

Table 2. Regular and occasional volunteering by field of activity

Field of activity	Regular participation	Occasional participation	Total
Arts and culture	45.4%	54.6%	100.0%
Sports	53.0%	47.0%	100.0%
Leisure activities	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Social – humanitarian – charitable action	50.8%	49.2%	100.0%
Health	52.3%	47.7%	100.0%
Defence of causes, rights and interests	46.4%	53.6%	100.0%
Education and training	57.3%	42.7%	100.0%
Economic and local development	65.7%	34.3%	100.0%
Other	46.2%	53.8%	100.0%
Total	48.1%	51.9%	100.0%

Example: 53% of instances of volunteering in sports are regular. Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.



More than a quarter of instances of participation date back at least 10 years

45% of instances of participation date back at least 5 years and more than a quarter date back at least 10 years (Figure 3). However, the length of this involvement in volunteering varies by field of activity. It is highest in sport and lowest in social, humanitarian and charitable activity and in health.

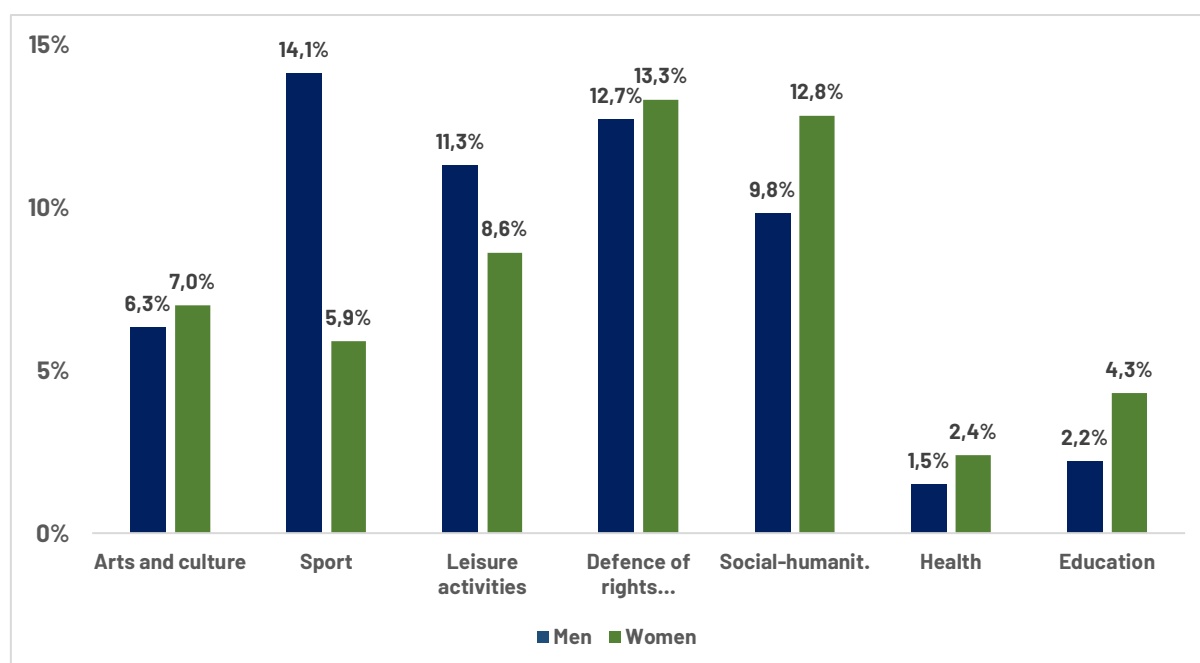
The length of involvement in volunteering also differs by participants' characteristics. It increases with age and is higher among men than among women and among agricultural workers and non-agricultural self-employed individuals than among manual workers.

Figure 3. Distribution of instances of volunteering by length of involvement. Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Volunteering in sports male-dominated, volunteering in social, humanitarian and charitable action female-dominated

When the volunteers' profiles are observed at an aggregate level, men have a greater propensity to volunteer than women. The rates of participation in voluntary works are 45% for the former and 41.6% for the latter. However, this aggregate result conceals some significant disparities (Figure 4). It is the product of the high level of male participation in voluntary work linked to sports. Men's rate of participation is also greater than that of woman in leisure activities. However, in social, humanitarian and charitable action, the opposite is observed, as it is in education and training. In arts and culture, health and the defence of rights, causes and interests, the slight differences shown in Figure 4 are not statistically significant. In other words, men and women have the same probability of participation in those fields.

Figure 4. Rate of participation in voluntary work by gender and field of activity



Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Sports volunteers tend to be younger, those in social, humanitarian and charitable action tend to be older

It is among the under-25s that the rate of volunteering in sports is highest while it is from the age of 45 onwards that it declines ever more sharply. Conversely, voluntary work in the field of social, humanitarian and charitable action reaches its peak among 55-75 year olds. It is also in this same age group that volunteering in the defence of rights, causes and interests is at its highest. No age effect can be observed in the other fields.

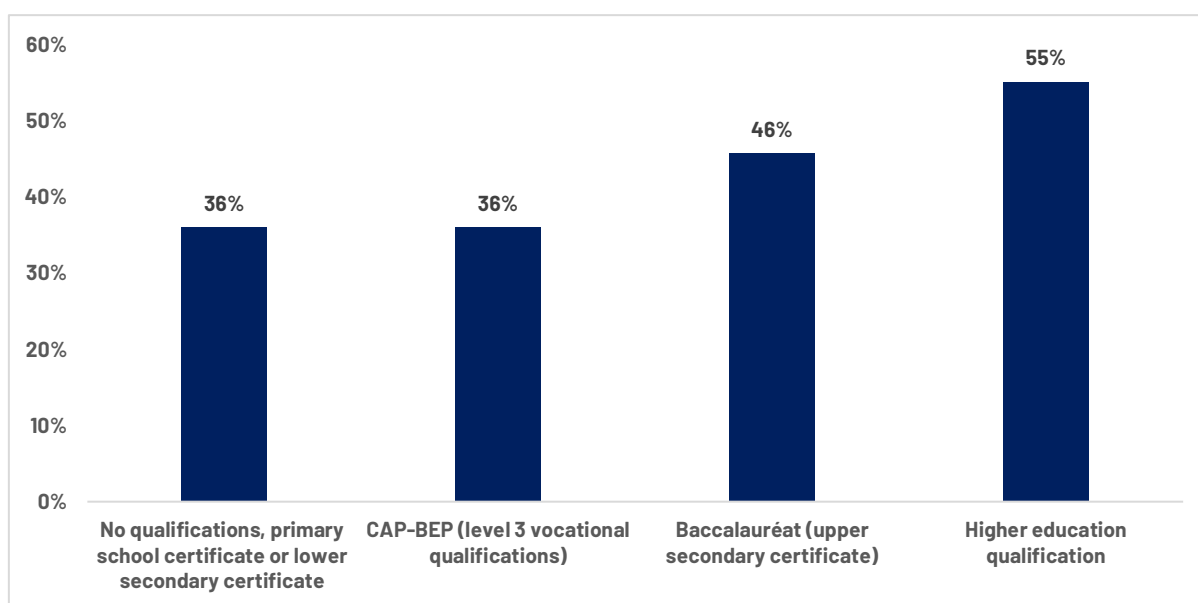
Voluntary work and place of residence

While volunteering in the fields of social, humanitarian and charitable action, health, education and the defence of rights, causes and interests is more common in large urban centres, volunteering in leisure activities is most frequently observed in rural areas. The west of France (Brittany, *Pays de la Loire* and the old *Poitou-Charentes* region), together with the central eastern region (Auvergne Rhône-Alpes) often have high rates of volunteering, while the east, south-west and Mediterranean regions have markedly lower rates.

Volunteering more common among the more highly qualified

Despite these differences in profiles between the various fields of voluntary work, certain trends emerge beyond the boundaries of those fields, or at least of most of them. Thus volunteering is by and large more common among the most highly qualified groups (Figure 5). Leisure activities are the exception here, since the participation rate for the most highly qualified is lower than that for the least well qualified.

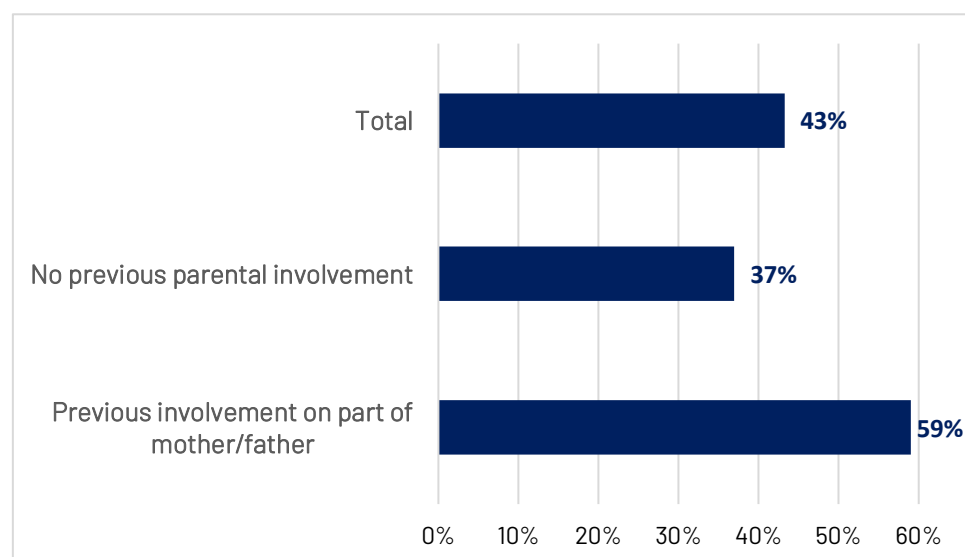
Figure 5. Overall rate of participation in voluntary work by level of qualification



Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

With regard to the results that are broadly similar in the various fields of activity, the propensity to take part in voluntary work is also greater among those who, when they were in their teens, had at least one parent who volunteered (Figure 6). This finding highlights the importance of family socialisation for the propensity to volunteer.

Figure 6: Rate of participation in voluntary work by previous parental involvement



Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

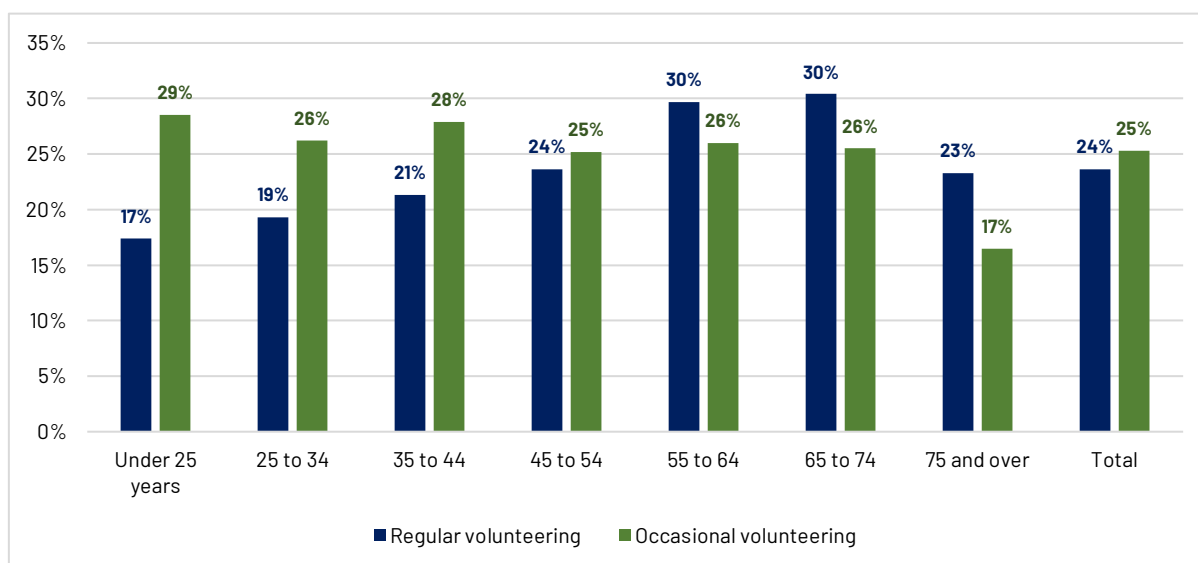
Finally, in all the fields except for sport and leisure activities, the use of digital technologies (Internet and social media) for purposes such as obtaining information on political or social issues, communicating one's opinions, signing petitions, taking part in on-line fundraising campaigns or producing on-line content, is associated with a strong probability of volunteering. However, a precise direction of causality cannot be inferred from this finding. The above-mentioned uses of the Internet and social media may encourage volunteering; conversely, being a volunteer may equally well encourage these uses.

Young people less inclined to volunteer on a regular basis

Regular volunteers have a somewhat different profile from that of occasional participants. Young people have a lower propensity to volunteer regularly compared with the over-45s, while there is no age effect for occasional volunteering, apart from a lower rate of participation among older people (Figure 7). When it comes to socio-occupational categories, only agricultural workers have a higher probability of volunteering both occasionally and regularly, while those in intermediate professions and managerial and executive positions (cadres) are more likely to volunteer only on a regular basis.

This regular volunteering is more common in large urban centres, while there is no correlation between the size of the municipality of residence and occasional volunteering. Once again, however, involvement in both types of unpaid voluntary work increases with level of qualification. It is more common when there is a family history of participation and it is positively correlated with the use of digital tools for the purpose of obtaining information on social and political issues.

Figure 7. Rates of participation in regular and occasional voluntary work by age



Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Voluntary work carried out as a member of an association is more male-dominated than “other voluntary work”

Although they are not mutually incompatible, voluntary work carried out as a member of an association and “other voluntary work” differ in terms of the profiles of the individuals involved. For example, men are more inclined than women and homeowners more inclined than tenants to be involved in the former, while the probability of being involved in “other voluntary work” does not vary either by gender or by the status under which the main residence is occupied. On the other hand, while the propensity to engage in “other voluntary work” peaks among 55-74 year olds, there is no age effect of this kind in the case of voluntary work carried out as a member of an association. In both cases, participation is, once again, more common among the more highly qualified. Previous parental participation in voluntary work and use of the Internet and social media are positively correlated with involvement in both types of voluntary work.

Association officials: a selective group

Association members who said they undertook voluntary work in their associations were asked whether they also occupied positions of responsibility in those organisations. If such was the case, they were then asked to indicate the nature of their responsibilities: member of the board of management, committee member, chair or other. Slightly fewer than 29% of association members indicated that they held positions of responsibility in one or more associations. Slightly more than 5% said they served as chair.

The profile of these association officials differs in several respects from that of the generality of members and volunteers offering their services as members of their associations. Volunteers holding positions of responsibility are a selective group. Men are overrepresented, particularly as association chairs (Figure 8), as are seniors - defined here as those aged 55 and over (see Figure 9) - senior managers and non-agricultural self-employed workers.

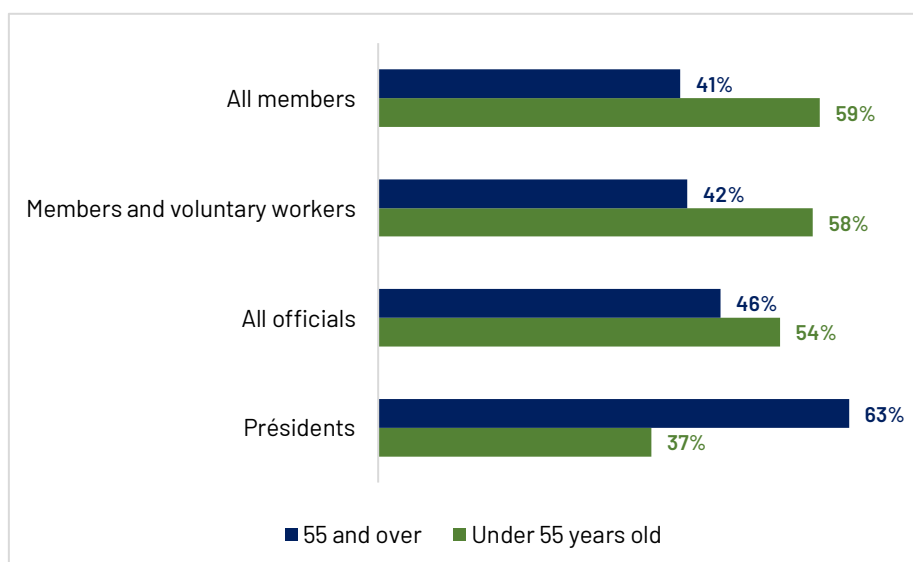
Figure 8. Gender distribution by position held in the association



Example: 55% of association officials are men compared with 50% of members.

Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Figure 9. Age distribution by position held in the association



Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

2. The time given over to volunteering

Estimates in the form of ranges

The 2017 *CRA - CSA* survey is the first survey of individuals since the INSEE survey of 2002 that can be used to estimate the annual number of hours given over to voluntary work. Calculation of this time is based on the hypothesis that the “voluntary work year,” is on average 9 months in length for those who say they volunteer regularly. This hypothesis might be considered restrictive but it reflects the need to avoid overestimates⁸.

The estimates are reported in the form of a range between a “lower” and an “upper” variant in order to take account of the sensitivity of the results to the choice of certain measurement conventions and to the sometimes variable interpretations to which some of the responses to the questions about the number of hours given over to voluntary work give rise. In order to make them easier to read, the tables and figures in the present document will show only the “lower” variant. The full results can be consulted in the report on this research project.

The overall volume of voluntary work: between 1,320,000 and 1,460,000 FTE jobs

If, for convenience’s sake, the standard full-time equivalent job (FTE) is taken as the unit of measurement, then on the basis of an annual working time of 1,645 hours for an FTE⁹, the total volume of voluntary work in 2017 is estimated to be between 1,320,000 and 1,460,000 FTEs, the overwhelming majority of which is carried out in associations (between 1,275,000 and 1,410,000 FTEs).

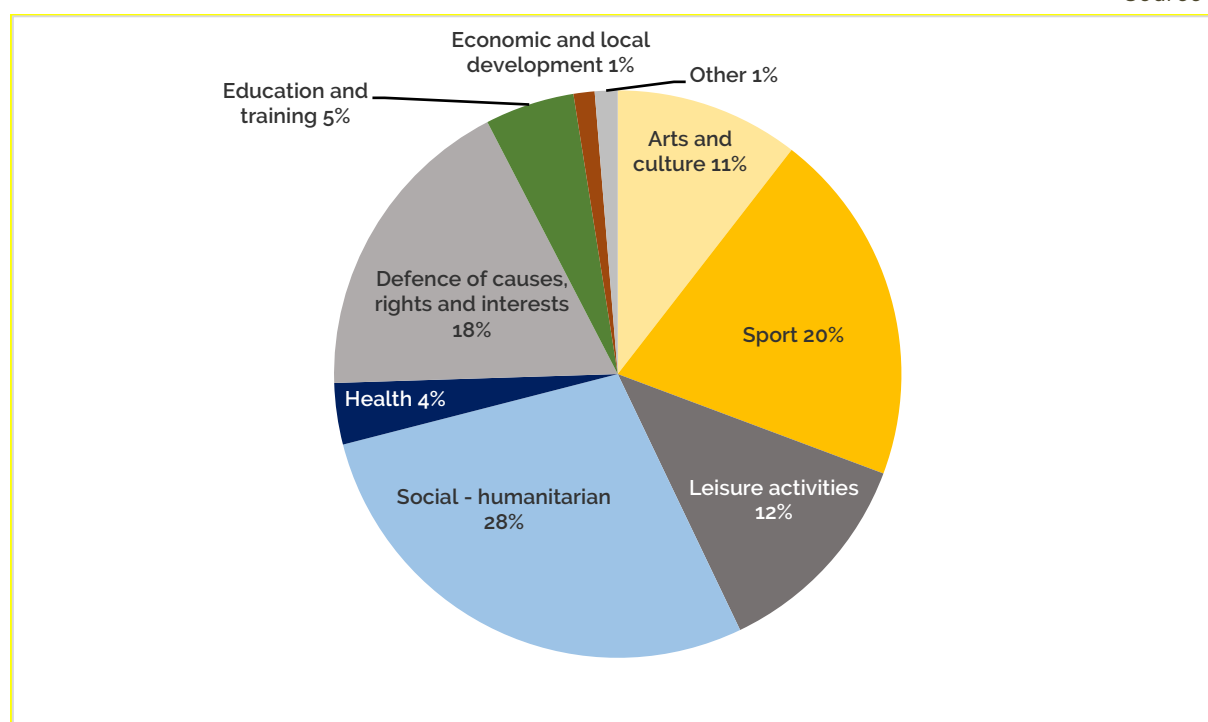
Calculated by field of activity, it is social, humanitarian and charitable activity that occupies first position, accounting for more than a quarter of the total volume (Figure 10). It is followed by sport, which accounts for a fifth of the total volume, and then by the defence of rights, causes and interests. The three fields of a recreational nature (sport, arts and culture and leisure activities) account for 43% of the total volume of time given.

⁸ Some volunteers certainly work for more than 9 months in the year. On the other hand, however, we also have to take account of the fact that in some cases the voluntary work year might be shorter because it is subject to seasonality. Furthermore, if an individual says they are a regular volunteer and that they do 4 hours’ voluntary work per week, for example, this does not necessarily mean that they work every week of the voluntary work year even if it last for 10 or 11 months of the calendar year.

⁹ That is to say 47 weeks of the year (52 minus 5 weeks’ holiday) and 35 hours per week.

Figure 10. Distribution of the volume of voluntary work by field of activity

Source : 2017 CRA-CSA



The average annual time per instance of volunteering: from 68 to 75 hours

The average number of hours devoted each year per instance of volunteering is between 68 and 75 depending on the estimation variant used. However, about one quarter of the shortest annual times do not exceed 6 hours per year and half of all instances of volunteering do not exceed 24-27 hours, while the number of hours devoted by volunteers in the top quarter is at least 90. The contributions of these various segments vary considerably in magnitude (Table 3). Not only are the various instances of volunteering highly dispersed in terms of the number of hours devoted to them but the volume of voluntary work is also concentrated among the instances having the largest numbers of hours.

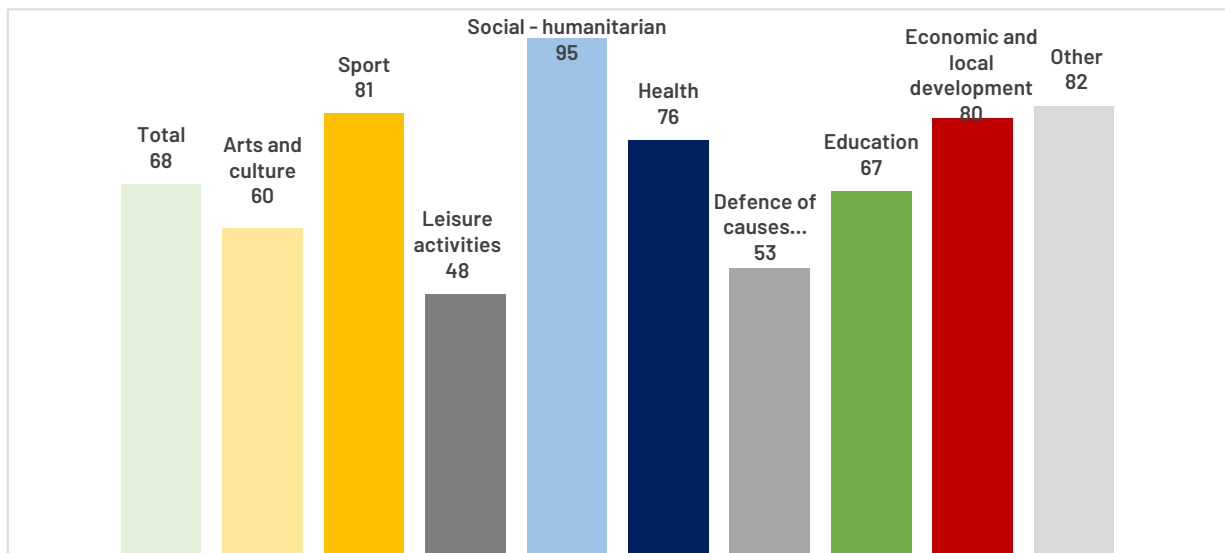
Table 3. Distribution of instances of voluntary work by annual volume of hours

Annual time devoted per instance of volunteering	Share in total instances of volunteering	Share in total volume of voluntary work
6 hours or fewer	25.6 %	1.1 %
From more than 6 hours to less than 24 hours	24.8 %	4.9 %
From more than 24 hours to less than 80 hours	24.2 %	18.0 %
At least 80 hours	25.4 %	76.0 %
Total	100.0 %	100.0 %

Note: These data relate to the "lower" estimate of the time devoted to voluntary work. Example: The time devoted to 25.6% of the shortest instances of volunteering is 6 hours per year at most. These instances of voluntary work account for 1.1% of the total volume of voluntary work. Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Significant differences in the average annual volumes of hours per instance of voluntary work can also be observed between the various fields of activity (Figure 11). Social, humanitarian and charitable action and local economic development are the fields that have the highest average volumes, while leisure activities and the defence of rights, causes and interests have the lowest.

Figure 11. Average annual number of hours per instance of voluntary work by field of activity



Note: These data relate to the "lower" estimate of the time devoted to voluntary work.

Example: On average, the annual number of hours per instance of volunteering in arts and culture is 60. It is 68 hours when all fields are taken into account. Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

The number of hours devoted to regular volunteering is on average 6 to 7 times greater than that devoted to occasional volunteering.

Taking all fields of activity into account, the average volume of hours given over to regular volunteering is between 122 and 131 hours per year, depending on whether the upper or lower estimation variant is used. It is lowest in the fields of leisure activities, education/training and the defence of rights, causes and interests and highest in social, humanitarian and charitable action, sport and health.

The average volume of hours given over to occasional volunteering is between 18 and 23 hours per year. By field of activity, it is highest in education/training and lowest in the defence of rights, causes and interests and sport.

The average volumes of hours devoted to voluntary work carried out in associations by members are significantly greater than the volumes of hours given over to "other voluntary work". This finding is hardly surprising, since occasional volunteering is much more frequent in other voluntary work.

Occasional voluntary work: between 13 and 16% of the total volume

Due to the substantial difference between the number of hours devoted to regular volunteering and that given over to occasional volunteering, the latter accounts for only 13 to 16% of the annual total of voluntary work, depending on the estimation variation used, even though there are more instances of occasional than of regular volunteering. Nevertheless, this share varies depending on the field of activity in question (Table 4). It is higher in leisure activities, arts and culture and education/training and significantly lower in sport and social, humanitarian and charitable action.

Table 4. Distribution of the total volume of voluntary work by field of activity and by regular vs. occasional participation (in %)

	Regular volunteering	Occasional volunteering	Total
Arts and culture	83.7%	16.3%	100.0%
Sports	91.0%	9.0%	100.0%
Leisure activities	80.1%	19.9%	100.0%
Social – humanitarian – charitable action	88.6%	11.4%	100.0%
Health	86.7%	13.3%	100.0%
Defence of causes, rights and interests	86.7%	13.3%	100.0%
Education and training	79.8%	20.2%	100.0%
Economic and local development	90.1%	9.9%	100.0%
Other	92.7%	7.3%	100.0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>86.8%</i>	<i>13.2%</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Those volunteers who carry out their unpaid activities as members of an association account for about 86% of the total volume of voluntary work, with the rest accounted for by "other voluntary work". Although it represents almost 30% of all instance of volunteering, the latter's contribution is much less because it has a much higher share of occasional volunteering.

Contributions calculated at the level of the individual volunteer: from 100 to 111 hours per year, more among seniors

Because some voluntary workers give their time to more than one instance of volunteering, the number of hours committed to each instance should not be confused with the number of hours worked per volunteer. Each volunteer works on average between 100 and 111 hours per year, depending on the estimation variant used.

Quite logically, these volumes are higher among the pluri-participants, that is those volunteers who work in more than one organisation. They also vary with several of the volunteers' socio-demographic characteristics, notably age and employment situation (Table 5).

Age appears to be a particularly discriminating factor in this regard. Seniors who volunteer offer on average significantly more hours than younger volunteers. When it comes to the relationship between time devoted to voluntary work and employment situation, it is retired persons and other economically inactive individuals (excluding students) who devote most time to volunteering.

Table 5. Annual contributions per volunteer (in hours)

Volunteers' characteristics	Average contribution	Median contribution
Age		
Under 25	87	36
25 to 34	75	36
35 to 44	80	27
45 to 54	84	36
55 to 64	127	65
65 to 74	146	80
75 and over	113	72
Employment situation		
Economically active in work	82	36
Unemployed	96	45
Retired	139	75
Student	90	36
Other inactive	124	48
All volunteers	100	45

Note: These data relate to the "lower" estimate of the hours of voluntary work.

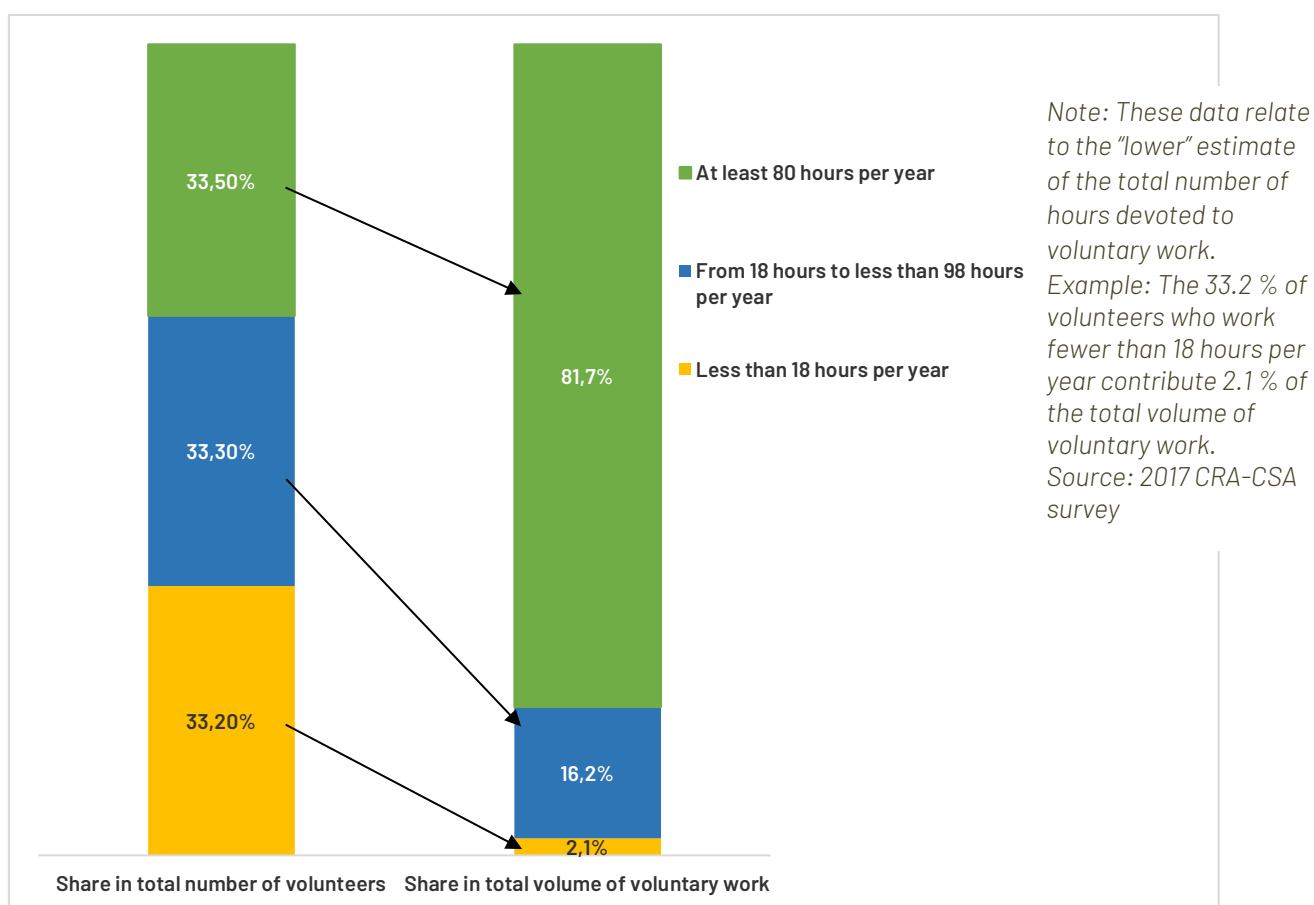
Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

These contributions are lower when the volunteer lives in a household with children, particularly a very young child, and more especially among women. Such observations lend credence to the idea that voluntary work is sensitive to the constraints individuals experience in their social time, and more particularly in their work and domestic responsibilities. The greater the time constraints there are, the more limited the time is that can be given over to voluntary work.

The voluntary effort is highly concentrated

As is the case with the instances of participations in voluntary work (see above), the total volume of voluntary work is concentrated among a minority of volunteers. One third of the leading contributors account for more than 80% of the total volume, while those in the bottom third of the distribution account for little more than 2% of the total (Figure 12).

Figure 12. The concentration of the volume of voluntary work



Among this group of leading contributors, men are better represented than women and seniors are better represented than younger people. Volunteers without children in the household are also overrepresented. It is still the case, nevertheless, that the characteristics of these major contributors can vary from the one field of activity to the next. Seniors (those aged 55 years and over) contribute a very significant volume of voluntary work to the social, humanitarian and charitable field, amounting to no less than 60% of the total in that field (Figure 13). Their contribution to sport is much lower; here they account for only a third of the total volume (Figure 14).

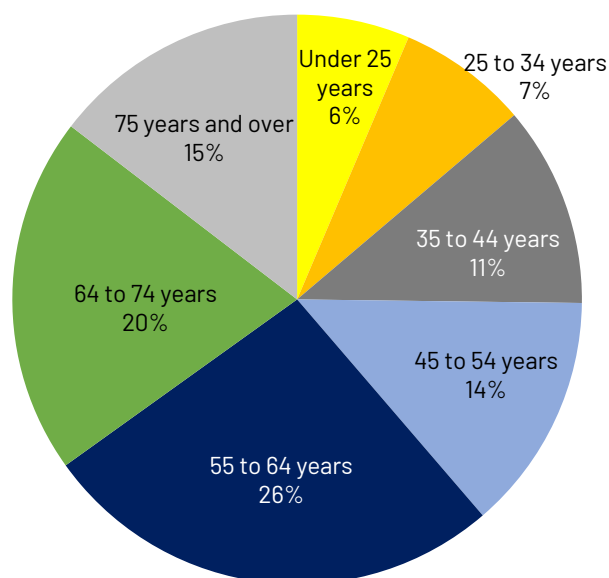


Figure 13. Contributions to the volume of voluntary work in social, humanitarian and charitable action by age group, as %

Note : These data relate to the « lower estimate of hours of voluntary work. Source : 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

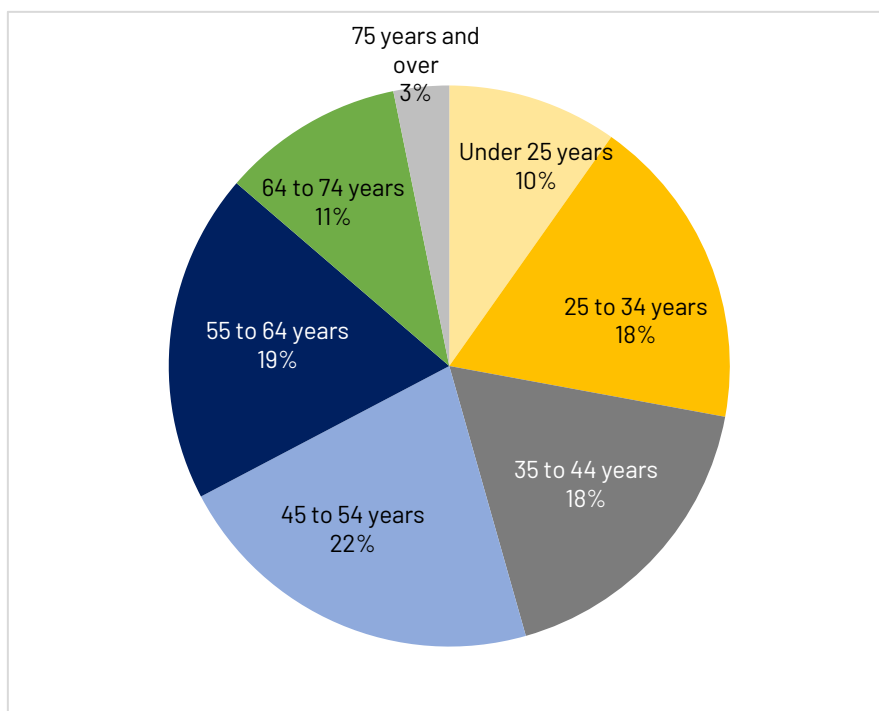


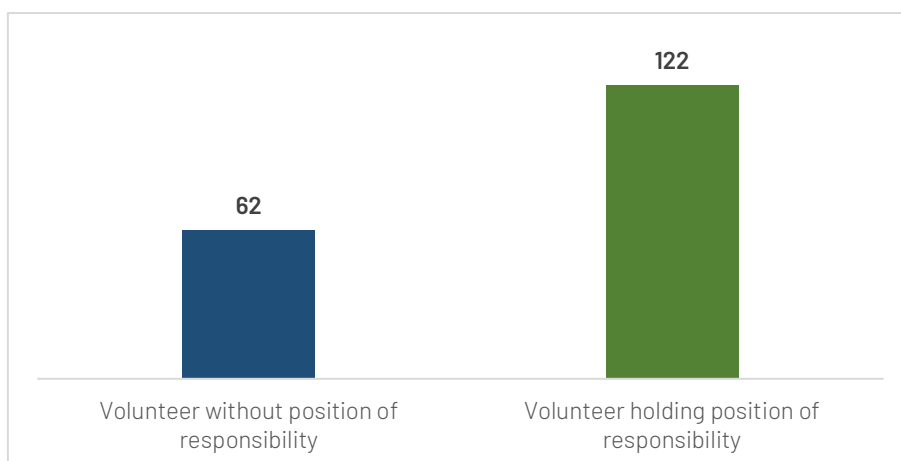
Figure 14. Contributions to the volume of voluntary work in sport by age group, as %

Note : These data relate to the « lower estimate of hours of voluntary work. Source : 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Association officials devote more time to voluntary work

Among the volunteers who give up their time as members of one or more associations, it may be assumed that those in positions of responsibility devote more time than others to their voluntary activities. It is also true that association officials are more likely to be pluri-participants, which increases the total amount of time they devote to voluntary work. If we want to have some idea of the effect of being in a position of responsibility on the time they give up, we could, for example, consider just the volunteers with a single instance of participation and then compare the number of hours of voluntary work contributed by association officials with the number of hours contributed by the others. It turns out that the former contribute practically twice as many hours as the latter (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Average annual number of hours' voluntary work by position of responsibility in an association



Scope: all volunteers who offer their services as members of an association and declare only one instance of participation in voluntary work.

Note: These data relate to the "lower" estimate of the hours of voluntary work.

Source: 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

3. What comparisons with Insee's 2002 Voluntary sector survey?

Comparing two surveys is a tricky undertaking

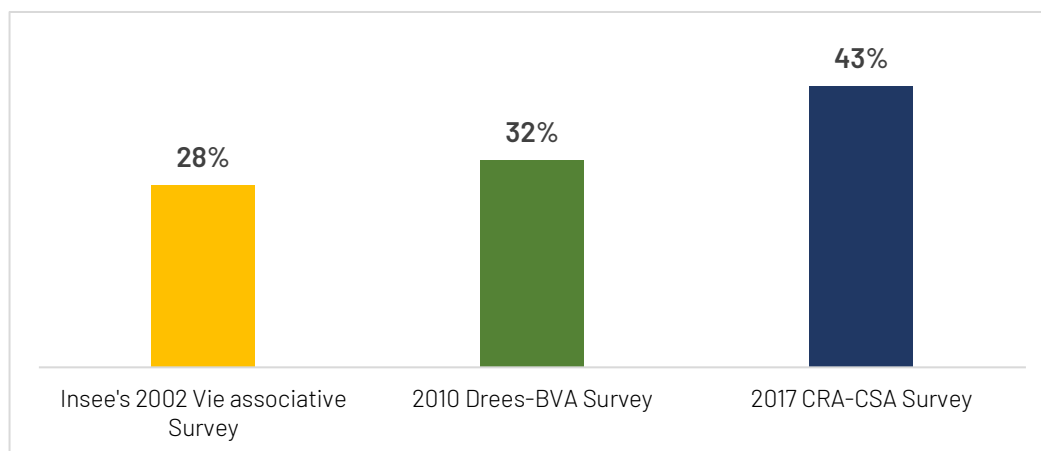
Will a comparison between INSEE'S 2002 *Vie associative* survey and the 2017 *CRA - CSA* survey shed light on the changes in volunteer behaviour over the last 15 years? Any attempt to answer this question must proceed with caution. There are certain points of convergence between the approach adopted by the 2017 *CRA - CSA* survey and that used in the INSEE survey. However, there are also methodological differences between the two surveys; consequently, if discrepancies are found in the results, it is not possible to identify what may be attributable to these methodological differences and what may be imputable to possible changes in behaviour. Thus caution must be exercised in any comments accompanying this comparative exercise, which is nevertheless useful since it enables us to put forward a number of suggestions.

Rate of participation in voluntary work higher in 2017 than in 2002 notably because of the increase in voluntary work in the field of social, humanitarian and charitable action

The estimated rate of participation in voluntary work in the INSEE survey was 28%, which equated to some 12.5 million volunteers aged 18 and over. The estimated rate in the 2017 *CRA - CSA* survey is 43 % (slightly fewer than 22 million voluntary workers), which is an appreciable difference (Figure 16). The *Drees-BVA* survey estimated that, in 2010, the rate of participation was close to 32%, equating to some 16 million volunteers¹⁰.

¹⁰ We refer here, exceptionally, to the 2010 *Drees-BVA* survey, since it can be used to estimate the overall rate of participation in voluntary work. On the other hand, it does not enable us to calculate participation rates by field of activity.

Figure 16: Overall rate of participation in voluntary work in 2002, 2010 and 2017



Source: INSEE's 2002 Vie associative survey, 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

This difference is explained notably by a substantially higher rate of participation in voluntary work in the social, humanitarian and charitable field in the 2017 survey than in the 2002 survey (11% vs. 4%). Rates of participation in the other fields also rose but to varying degrees and to a lesser extent than in the social, humanitarian and charitable field, whose share in the number of volunteers doubled (Table 6). Leisure, health and education/training also saw their share in the number of volunteers increase, while the shares of the sport and arts and culture fields fell slightly and that of the defence of causes, rights and interests fell more significantly even though it was still the largest.

Table 6. Distribution of volunteers by field of activity in 2002 and 2017

Field	INSEE's 2002 survey	2017 CRA-CSA survey
Arts and culture	17.6%	15.5%
Sport	25.5%	22.6%
Leisure activities	17.8%	22.9%
Social – humanitarian – charitable action	13.1%	26.3%
Health	3.0%	4.5%
Defence of causes, rights and interests	37.2%	30.1%
Education and training	4.1%	7.6%
Other (including local development)	3.8%	3.0%

Note: The sum of the percentages in the various fields is greater than 100 because of pluri-participants.

Source: INSEE's 2002 Vie associative survey, 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

Voluntary work still overwhelmingly linked to associations but non-members increasingly involved in 2017

In both the 2017 CRA-CSA survey and the INSEE's 2002 survey, voluntary work is linked for the most part to associations. In 2002, 84% of volunteers worked exclusively within associations, 10% in organisations without association status and 6% in both types of organisations. The percentages in 2017 were 90%, 5% and 5% respectively.

However, as has already been noted, volunteering in associations does not necessarily mean that the individuals concerned are members of the association. In 2017, 27% of the volunteers giving up their time in associations were non-members (although this does not of course exclude the possibility of volunteering in another association as a member). It was more frequent in that year than in 2002, when it applied to 14% of volunteers.

Volunteers' profiles in the 2002 and 2017 surveys: convergences and divergences

Multivariate analysis of volunteers' socio-demographic characteristics reveals certain differences between the two surveys. In 2017, there was no relationship between the level of household income and the probability of being a voluntary, while in 2002 those in the lowest income brackets had a lower propensity to volunteer. The 2002 survey showed that inhabitants of rural areas and small towns had higher rates of participation in voluntary work; the 2017 survey suggested, on the contrary, that participation rates were highest in large urban areas, with the exception of volunteering in leisure activities, sports and arts and culture. In 2017, volunteers were on average older than they were in 2002, although this applied only to those who volunteered regularly.

Nevertheless, certain convergences in volunteer profiles can be observed between the two survey. Thus participation in voluntary work remains positively associated with previous parental volunteering as it is, at least in certain fields, with assiduous practice of a religion. In both surveys, possession of a higher education qualification significantly increases the probability of participation in voluntary work. Women still have a lower overall propensity to volunteer than men, although the gap is narrower in the 2017 survey even though it is still substantial in sport. Overall, the 2017 survey suggests that volunteering is still selective but that it is a little less so than it was in 2002.

Twice as many instances of participation in voluntary work

The number of volunteers calculated on the basis of the 2017 survey is greater than that calculated on the basis of the 2002 survey. At the same time, the former shows there were more pluri-participants in 2017. Taken together, these two results indicate that the number of instances of volunteering was significantly greater in 2017, in fact twice the figure calculated for 2002.

However, this multiplication factor is considerably greater for the social, humanitarian and charitable and education/training fields. On the other hand, it is lower in arts and culture, sport and, particularly the defence of rights, causes and interests.

Regular participation more common in the 2017 survey and more association members participating in voluntary work

In 2002, 4 out of every 10 instances of volunteering were declared to be regular. In 2017, it was almost half (48%). This increase was general but varied in degree from field to field. The increase in sport was considerable but lower in the defence of rights, causes and interests and even more limited in leisure activities. At the same time, the share of members who volunteered in their association was also greater in 2017 than in 2002.

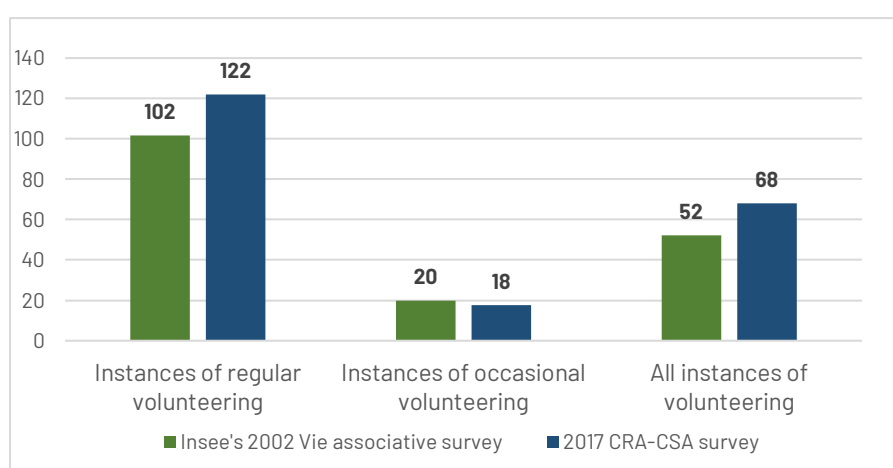
These results suggest there is an increasing incentive for members to involve themselves to a greater extent in their associations' activities. This is scarcely surprising. After all, over the 15 years between the two surveys, the number of associations has risen more quickly than the number of members. As a result, the competition between associations for new members has intensified and their operating requirements have increased the pressure on members to give up their time if they do not already do so or to give up more of their time (or to volunteer more regularly) if they do.

The average annual number of hours devoted to voluntary work is greater in the 2017 survey

The time devoted to voluntary work was calculated for INSEE's 2002 *Vie associative* survey on a similar basis to that used for the 2017 *CRA - CSA* survey, which led us to adopt a "lower" and an "upper" variant for both surveys¹¹.

Except in arts and culture, the average time spent on volunteering estimated on the basis of the 2017 survey is greater than that obtained on the basis of the 2002 survey. However, that applies only to instances of regular participation, since the average number of hours devoted to occasional participation was lower in 2017 (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Average annual time in hours spent on regular and occasional voluntary work in 2002 and 2017



Source: INSEE's 2002 *Vie associative* survey, 2017 *CRA-CSA* survey.

¹¹ Here once again, the figures and/or tables show only the "lower" variant in order to avoid making them too difficult to read. The calculations of the "upper" variant can be consulted in the full report.

The total volume of voluntary work was 2.4 to 2.5 times greater in 2017 than in 2002

More instances of participation in the 2017 survey and more time spent per instance make for a significantly greater total volume of voluntary work than in the 2002 survey. The multiplication factor is between 2.4 and 2.5 depending on the variant considered. As was observed in the comparison of the number of instances of participation per field of activity, this multiplication factor is greater for the social, humanitarian and charitable action and education/training fields. It is lower for the defence of rights, causes and interests (Table 7).

Table 7: Total volume of voluntary work per field of activity in the 2002 and 2017 surveys (in full-time equivalents – FTEs)

	INSEE's 2002 survey		2017 CRA-CSA survey	
	Number of FTEs	%	Number of FTEs	%
Total	518,593	100.0%	1,315,522	100.0%
Arts and culture	84,951	16.4%	138,045	10.5%
Sports	119,480	23.0%	266,056	20.2%
Leisure activities	59,887	11.5%	159,991	12.2%
Social – humanitarian – charitable action and health	81,490	15.7%	415,321	31.6%
Defence of causes, rights and interests	139,754	27.0%	235,159	17.9%
Education and training	16,642	3.2%	67,743	5.1%
Other (including Economic and local development)	16,389	3.2%	33,207	2.5%

Note: These data relate to the “lower” estimate of the total volume of voluntary work.

Source : INSEE's 2002 Vie associative survey, 2017 CRA-CSA survey.

The average time given up per volunteer is greater in the 2017 survey

The average time given up per volunteer, as calculated on the basis of the 2002 INSEE survey, was 68 hours (“lower” variant). The average contribution calculated on the basis of the 2017 CRA-CSA survey is 100 hours. In the “upper” variant, the figures are 79 and 111 hours respectively. These differences between the two dates are explained by the cumulative effect of a higher average contribution per instance of participation in 2017 and a higher share of pluri-participants.

Compared with 2002, the difference in contributions between seniors (who give up more time) and younger volunteers increased in 2017, as did that between the economically inactive (greater contributors) and active.

In 2002 and in 2017, the total volume of voluntary work is strongly concentrated among a limited number of volunteers

A quarter of volunteers gave up at most 8 hours per year in 2002 and 9 hours in 2017 in the lower estimation variant and, in the upper variant, 9 hours in 2002 and 10 hours in 2017. These volunteers contributed between 1 and 2% of the total volume of voluntary work in 2002 and 1% in 2017. At the same time, those in the highest quartile of contributors gave up a minimum of 73 hours per year in 2002 and 136 hours in 2017 in the lower variant and 96 and 144 hours respectively in the upper variant. However, their contributions accounted for three quarters of the total volume of voluntary work in 2002 and between 70 and 72% in 2017, depending on the estimation variant used. Thus the concentration of the supply of voluntary work is a robust finding and a lasting situation.

Conclusion

What lessons can be drawn from this study?

The diversity of the world of voluntary work

What are the key lessons to be drawn from the investigations conducted on the basis of this survey? We could obviously highlight the number of volunteers by pointing to the sharp increase in their numbers over the last two decades suggested by the 2017 *CRA-CSA* survey. In the same vein, we could equally well point up the increase in the volume of voluntary work, since our survey is the first since INSSE's 2002 *Vie associative* survey that can be used to estimate the hours given over to voluntary work. And yet, while these indicators have some value, whether taken in isolation or simply juxtaposed, we cannot stop there since to do so would be to ignore the survey's main message, namely that it reveals the internal diversity of the world of voluntary work. It is certainly this diversity that seems to us to be highlighted by this research project. This diversity stems from that of the volunteers' profiles, which vary depending on the field of activity, even though certain common characteristics transcend the boundaries of those fields and voluntary work remains a selective world. In any case, this diversity is sufficient to make any attempt to construct an identikit description of the typical volunteer a very risky undertaking indeed.

However, this diversity cannot be gauged simply in terms of the fields of activity. It is also reflected in the variety of ways in which voluntary work is carried out: regularly or occasionally, in associations (overwhelmingly so) but sometimes in organisations without association status, in associations by members but also, in a not insignificant number of cases, by non-members. It is also manifested, finally, in the time given up to voluntary work, and we have already seen how disparate volunteers' contributions are, with very short donations of time existing alongside much more substantial contributions.

The concentration of the volume of voluntary work puts the level of the participation rate and the number of volunteers into context

In this respect, whether it be data from INSEE's 2002 *Vie associative* survey or the 2017 *CRA - CSA* survey that are used, at least one finding emerges that appears to be robust, namely that the total volume of time given up is strongly concentrated among a minority of volunteers. This finding makes it easier to understand the limitations of participation rates or the number of volunteers as sole indicators. Although the participation rate among the population aged 18 and over was 43% in 2017, more than 80% of the total volume of voluntary work was carried out by less than 15% of that population.

This statement should not be misunderstood. It is not intended to suggest that the participation of small contributors is insignificant, particularly since they may be prevailed upon to get more involved at a later date. In this respect, the reception they are given by the associations or other organisation to whom they give up their time plays an important role, since it may either encourage them to make a bigger contribution or, conversely, dissuade them from doing so.

Is all voluntary work a commitment?

In a similar vein, one may also question whether it is appropriate to regard every instance of voluntary work as a commitment. Once again, we are broaching here a thorny question that cannot be properly examined in this summary report ¹². Commitment is a loaded word whose use is sometimes unsettling. It is true that a universal definition is highly improbable because commitment cannot be isolated from its context. To put it simply, and to take an example from outside the field of voluntary work, in a country that allows freedom of expression signing an Internet petition in defence of a right one considers insufficiently respected is to take part in a campaign but not necessarily to commit oneself if that signature does not lead to a more lasting investment in the defence of the cause. On the other hand, in a dictatorship, any challenge to or criticism of the status quo would certainly be construed as a commitment that may well provoke an angry response from the authorities.

Taking a long-term view is often regarded as an attribute of commitment. With regard to voluntary work, its intensity (measured in terms of the time devoted to it) might also be regarded as a factor that has to be taken into account. The 2017 *CRA - CSA* survey provides better data on how far individual participation in voluntary work dates back than INSEE's 2002 *Vie associative* survey, but it does not tell us the duration of each instance since that would require its end date to be known. If the fact that a volunteer's involvement dates back a long time indicates a lengthy period of involvement, then a more recent involvement may, conversely, indicate either a short-lived dalliance or the start of a long-term commitment to volunteering.

However that may be, can we speak of commitment when an individual contributes only 5 hours per year, even if they make their contribution year in, year out? The question arises once again, although it should be borne in mind that commitment is not a fixed state but a process and that sporadic donations of time may gradually lead to more continuous involvement.

¹² We return to this question in the report.

Analysis of these processes is beyond the scope of a quantitative survey and will be enhanced by more qualitative studies. Nevertheless, it is essential that any such studies consider these processes not simply as the effect of purely personal dispositions but rather as they interact with individual trajectories, the strategies of the organisations that make use of volunteers and the wider economic, social and cultural context.

On the “new forms of commitment”

The preceding observations lead on fairly logically to a recurrent theme in both the world of volunteering and the literature on associations and voluntary work. This theme concerns the “new forms of commitment”. Drawing on the studies of authors such as Jacques Ion, albeit in some cases without any great discernment, the argument that the old forms of commitment are being replaced by new ones has been very much in vogue. To put it very succinctly, a form of commitment variously described as “post-it” or “unaffiliated”, which is sporadic and volatile in nature, is said to be replacing long-term or “affiliated”¹³ commitment, which is characterised by a strong identification with the organisation within which the voluntary work is carried out. Once again, readers are referred to the full report for further deliberations on these questions, which are also addressed in the foreign-language literature on voluntary work. To condense our argument very considerably, let us say that we do not deny that behaviours in this regard are changing but that it seems to us essential not to confuse these behavioural changes with changes in collective perceptions of them, which may vary depending on the specific historical context.

It seems to us much more judicious to interpret the reality of contemporary volunteering behaviours as a diversification of the forms that volunteering now takes rather than as the substitution of one dominant model for another. The 2017 *CRA – CSA* suggests both that so-called “post-it” voluntary work is a reality but that it is not the dominant form of volunteering. It should be remembered, after all, that according to this survey 45% of instances of volunteering date back at least 5 years and that more than a quarter go back a minimum of 10 years. If, additionally, we note that the average number of hours worked by volunteers whose involvement dates back more than 5 years is greater than the average contributed by those whose involvement is more recent, it will be agreed that long-term commitment has not disappeared. The fact remains that the changes in the forms of commitment is a stimulating topic for investigation that deserves our full attention.

Putting a monetary value on voluntary work: a misguided idea?

Should a monetary value be attributed to voluntary work? The question may appear preposterous, coming as it does from the author of this study who has, in the past, contributed to just such an exercise in France. However, he has become increasingly doubtful about both the feasibility and value of such an undertaking.

The usually recommended method is the replacement cost approach. To put it another way, the aim of this approach is to estimate the cost to those organisations that make use of

¹³ “Post-it”, “affiliated” and “unaffiliated” are all expressions used by Jacques Ion. See, for example: *S'engager dans une société d'individus*, Armand Colin, 2012.

volunteers if they had to replace them with wage workers. The problem here, quite specifically, is to determine which wages should serve as a reference in order to complete the exercise successfully. In this regard, the ILO's *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work* advises those undertaking such an exercise to use "the full replacement cost method i.e. assigning the actual wage for the occupation and industry of the work performed to each hour volunteered" (p. 35-36). In order to calculate this "quality-adjusted replacement wage", information is required on the nature of the tasks carried out by volunteers and on the skills they possess. In the absence of such information, the Manual suggests some fall-back solutions, such as average wages in each field of activity or average wages by occupation, the statutory minimum wage where it exists or the wage in less well-paid occupations, such as social work outside residential facilities. By way of illustration, the last two suggestions were implemented using the data from the 2017 CRA - CSA survey. Using the French national minimum wage (SMIC) as a reference, the "monetary value" of voluntary work was approximately 26 to 29 billion euros depending on the estimation variant of the time devoted to volunteering, equivalent to between 1.2 and 1.3% of GDP. Using the wage in social work outside residential facilities as a reference, the values were 42 to 47 billion euros or 1.9 to 2% of GDP respectively.

That is all well and good, but what is the value of these indicators? There is nothing to suggest that these aggregates, which incidentally differ considerably, constitute a reasonable approximation of the values that would have been imputed on the basis of the "quality-adjusted replacement wage", which is the only reference wage that might satisfy the rigorous conditions required from a strict economic point of view. However, the information required for such an imputation at the macroeconomic level is well beyond the scope of most of the surveys carried out to date. It is more conceivable that such information could be obtained as part of a monetary valuation exercise carried out at the microeconomic level of the association, although even that would not necessarily be an easy undertaking.

However, the main objections to monetary valuation are undoubtedly situated at another level. The argument underlying this valuation is based, after all, on the hypothesis that voluntary and wage work are substitutable without any particular problem. This is acceptable and attested in a certain number of cases. In some associations, voluntary work may constitute a stage on the route towards paid work and, conversely, some tasks carried out by wage workers may equally well be done by volunteers.

Nevertheless, this hypothesis cannot be generalised except at the risk of changing the nature of certain voluntary services, the "value" of which is based precisely on the principle of non-remuneration. Thus in many associations without paid workers, whose activities help to forge an everyday sociability among members, would not replacing volunteers with wage workers change the character of that sociability?

Could we be sure that the services provided would remain exactly the same and that the association's character would remain intact?¹⁴ The same question arises in the case of voluntary activities with a high militancy quotient. What monetary value can be imputed to

¹⁴ Would it still be an association if all the volunteers were replaced by wage workers? Obviously not, since even if the members of the board of management, who are volunteers, were replaced by paid employees, the organisation would no longer be an altruistic, not-for-profit entity.

strength of conviction deployed in the defence of rights, causes or interests?¹⁵ Some activities may be altered completely as soon as they are carried out for money rather than voluntarily, which makes it impossible to adopt the substitutability between voluntary and wage work as a general principle.

These last considerations take us fairly logically into the ethical sphere, and it is here that the fundamental objection to attributing a monetary value to voluntary work actually lies. This objection is based on the conviction that the value of voluntary work cannot be measured in monetary terms except by running the risk of corrupting its nature for, as Mickaël Sandel notes, "to corrupt a good or a social practice is to degrade it, to treat it according to a lower mode of valuation than is appropriate to it"¹⁶. Some may retort that the monetary valuation of voluntary work is intended to measure its economic rather than its social value. However, our societies are so in thrall to economism and its vision of the world that there is every likelihood of the latter value being entirely subsumed under the former. On this question too the debate remains unresolved.

¹⁵ In order to avoid any misunderstanding, let us make it clear that we are not saying here that a wage worker is incapable of showing militancy at work. What we mean is that such attitudes cannot be measured in monetary terms.

¹⁶ M. J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy. The Moral Limits of Markets*, Allen Lane, 2012, p. 34.