



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**ECO/343**  
**Statistical tools for**  
**measuring volunteering**

Brussels, 10 December 2013

**OPINION**

of the  
European Economic and Social Committee  
on  
**Statistical tools for measuring volunteering**  
(own-initiative opinion)

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Rapporteur: **Krzysztof Pater**  
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On 14 February 2013 the European Economic and Social Committee decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion, under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, on

*Statistical tools for measuring volunteering*  
(own-initiative opinion).

The Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 14 November 2013.

At its 494th plenary session, held on 10 and 11 December 2013 (meeting of 10 December 2013), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 109 votes to 1 with 5 abstentions.

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**1. Conclusions and recommendations**

1.1 Taking into account that volunteering is:

1.1.1 an important driver of inclusive growth, which contributes to both social and human capital, and fosters intergenerational solidarity, while also offering significant economic value,

1.1.2 a key factor in many social policies and an indicator of public policy impact, which should be measured effectively and monitored to offer proper knowledge to decision-makers,

1.1.3 a research subject, which is currently insufficiently measured because of inconsistent and overly restrictive surveys, leaving aside such issues as voluntary help provided directly to people outside any organisational structures as well as neglecting the economic value of the volunteer work,

1.2 The Committee calls on the European Commission:

1.2.1 to put in place the conditions to start methodological work and pilot research, aimed at defining the principles underpinning research into volunteer work by national statistical offices from the EU Member States. In so doing, use should be made of the International Labour Organization's Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work and the past experience of countries which have already undertaken research using the solutions recommended in this manual.

- 1.2.2 over the next few years, to work on a standardised methodology for research into volunteer work and to ensure its adoption via an appropriate European Commission regulation for the purpose of regular research conducted by the Member States.
  - 1.2.3 to take steps to encourage the Member States' statistical offices to become involved in research into volunteer work before the regulation is introduced.
  - 1.2.4 to gather and make available consistent information resulting from research into volunteering conducted in individual countries or at EU level.
  - 1.2.5 to introduce legal measures binding at the EU and Member States level which would enable the non-profit sector to co-finance public grants with the economic value of volunteer work estimated on the basis of solid statistical data produced with the statistical tools developed in accordance with this opinion.
- 1.3 In addition, the EESC uses this opportunity to reiterate the need for a favourable environment and support for voluntary activities. Exact suggestions for the favourable environment for volunteering were developed within the framework of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, and this includes sustainable support for voluntary activities, which significantly contribute to the common good<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. **Background**

- 2.1 According to the widely used (in EU institutions) definition of the term, "volunteering" refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken of a person's own free will, choice and motivation, without concern for financial gain.
- 2.2 Consistent with this understanding of volunteering, although more precise, is the definition of volunteer work in the International Labour Organization's Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work, used as a conceptual framework for measuring formal and informal volunteering in various cultural and legal settings. According to this definition, volunteer work means "unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organisation or directly for others outside their own household"<sup>2</sup>. This definition, which precisely spells out the features of volunteering, should be used in international comparative research. This stems from the need to take account of all the important characteristics of volunteer work in the definitions used in individual countries, thus ensuring that the area of study is uniformly defined, regardless of local circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> [OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 150.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 2011.

- 2.3 In recent years, especially in connection with the 2011 European Year of Volunteering, many documents of the EC, EP and Council, as well as the EESC, CoR and the European civil society organisations, have pointed out that volunteering is associated with key EU values such as civic participation and solidarity with those in need. It has been stressed that volunteering makes a major contribution to that part of social welfare that is not measured by GDP, and has a major influence on the quality of peoples' lives. From a systemic point of view, volunteer work helps create social capital, building and consolidating bonds of trust and cooperation, while cultivating widely accepted social norms and values. Informal volunteering is an important form of investment in human capital, e.g. through informal care and education of children and young people, while formal volunteering plays a key role, among other things, in the development of transversal skills and the acquisition of new vocational skills. Also the voluntary care provided to older people as well as by older people, is of utmost importance for the greying European societies. All these characteristics, which point to the role of volunteering in building social cohesion and facilitating employment, mean that it is regarded as an important element of inclusive growth, forming one of the three pillars of the EU's development strategy - Europe 2020.
- 2.4 A key element of the debate was recommendations highlighting the need to collect comparable data illustrating both the social and economic importance of volunteering. Reference was made in this connection to the methodology proposed in the ILO Manual as an appropriate model for conducting statistical research in this field<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.5 These recommendations were clearly linked to the finding that not enough data was available on volunteering, an assessment which still holds true.
- 2.6 There has been some research into volunteering carried out in individual countries covering many key aspects of volunteering (not only the level of participation in volunteering and the demographic profile of people involved in this work but also their motivation, for example). One obstacle to the use of this research for analysis conducted on an EU-wide basis is the lack of consistency as regards the scope of the definition of volunteering and the means of defining it, as well as other methodological differences (e.g. the period covered by the research, inconsistencies in the age categories used for the populations surveyed, different research methods, accuracy of the results), together with differences in research dates. As highlighted in the report carried out at the request of the European Commission by the consultancy firm GHK, the differences in results can often be as much as 30-40 percentage points<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> (1) Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM(2011) 568 final); (2) The role of voluntary activities in social policy, - Council Conclusions – Council of the European Union, 2011; (3) Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Commission's Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU.

<sup>4</sup> GHK report *Volunteering in the European Union*, GHK 2010.

- 2.7 Regularly collected and internationally comparable data on volunteering is quite limited in scope, relating mainly to the prevalence of engagement in voluntary work (with its various definitions) carried out through organisations (formal volunteering), and the demographic profile of the people involved in such activity. Sometimes the research addresses other questions, such as the frequency of volunteering<sup>5</sup>. Some of these studies are not limited to a general question about volunteering, defined in one way or another, but rather focus on multiple (up to a dozen or so) types of organisation or activity to which people devoted their free time<sup>6</sup>. Comparatively speaking, the question addressed with the least frequency is the number of hours worked by volunteers<sup>7</sup>.
- 2.8 Despite major differences in the results of individual international studies, as well as between national and international results, it is still possible to say that volunteering - even if only formal volunteering is taken into account - is very widespread. Estimates of the number of volunteers in the EU over the age of 15 vary between 92 and 150 million, which would mean that between 22 and 36% of adults across all EU countries are involved in voluntary, unpaid work in various kinds of organisation<sup>8</sup>. The positions adopted by the main EU institutions on volunteering are based on a relatively low estimate of the number of volunteers, no more than 100 million<sup>9</sup>.
- 2.9 On the basis of the data on volunteering currently available, it is not possible to carry out the analysis called for in the documents of the EC, the Parliament, the European Council or the EESC. At present, it is impossible to monitor reliably the economic importance of volunteering or its contribution to EU-level policies. It is not possible to determine the total amount of time devoted to volunteer work or its monetary value, and thus to assess how extensive it is in terms of universal economic indicators such as national employment (the number of people working in the national economy) or GDP. The only current available data, which however is limited to formal volunteering carried out in non-profit organisations and assessed on the basis of methods which are not very consistent, comes from the international Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, coordinated by the Johns Hopkins University. This data established the proportion of volunteer work carried out in non-profit bodies relative to

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<sup>5</sup> For example, in the framework of the European Social Survey (ESS 2002-2010), every two years data is collected on prevalence of engagement in the work of political parties or other organisations or associations, motivated by a desire to do good or prevent bad things from happening. However, in the survey for 2006 and 2012, people were also asked how often over the past 12 months they had been involved in work for a community or charitable organisation.

<sup>6</sup> The European Values Study (EVS), and some surveys carried out in the framework of the Eurobarometer Survey - coordinated by DG Communication (Eurobarometer 66.3/2006, 73.4/2010, 75.2/2011).

<sup>7</sup> European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS 2003, 2007), Eurobarometer 60.3 (2003/2004). The most comprehensive data on the time devoted to unpaid work in the framework of organisations, informal assistance for other households or participation in the meetings of organisations, groups or communities, also taking account of seasonal differences over the course of the year - the data is collected in the framework of the Time Use Survey.

<sup>8</sup> The above estimates come from the GHK report *Volunteering in the European Union*, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> The figure of 100m volunteers was included in the *Report on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion*, European Parliament, Committee on Regional Development (2008) (2007/2149 (INI) document A6- 0070/2008.

GDP and the labour potential of the economically active population in only three EU countries: the Czech Republic (0.2% GDP, 0.5% of the economically active population), France (1.4%, 3.2%) and Belgium (0.7%, no data available)<sup>10</sup>.

2.10 On the basis of the methodological principles set out in the ILO Manual, national statistical offices in three EU countries (Poland, Hungary and Italy) have already carried out surveys on the extent and value of volunteer work while in some other countries they prepare to do so<sup>11</sup>. The 2011 data for Poland is currently available. It shows that, overall, formal and informal volunteering constituted the equivalent of the work of 9.6% of those working in the extended national economy (including volunteer work) and 2.8% of the broadly defined GDP. In Poland, where extended family ties are particularly strong, volunteer work mainly comprised informal volunteering - its share of the number of people working in the national economy, which also includes volunteering, amounted to 8% and its contribution to broadly defined GDP was 2.2%. Formal volunteering represented 1.6% and 0.6% of the above-mentioned categories respectively<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. **The ILO Manual as a comprehensive and universal approach to research into volunteering**

3.1 As mentioned above, the manual on measuring volunteer work published under the auspices of the ILO is mentioned in nearly all EU documents on volunteering as a suitable model for conducting statistical research in this area. The methodological solutions included in this manual were also highlighted by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians as an appropriate basis for research into volunteer work. It is proposed that volunteer work be included in official labour statistics<sup>13</sup>. The solutions proposed in the manual have also garnered support from third-sector stakeholders, with many NGOs promoting its model for conducting research into volunteering<sup>14</sup>.

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10 These results are based on studies of non-profit organisations. The research involved calculating the total number of hours of volunteer work in the non-profit sector (which was converted into full-time job equivalents) in order to then be able to make a comparison with the number of professionally active people in the given country. The value of volunteer work was then established by multiplying the number of these jobs equivalents by the average salaries earned in the non-profit sector. This method may lead to lower estimates of the amount and value of volunteer work than the method described in the ILO manual, since organisations generally do not keep records of the number of hours of volunteer work carried out and have a tendency not to take account of volunteer work carried out on an occasional basis. In addition, the results obtained concern the non-profit sector only while the ILO methodology allows all formal volunteering to be measured for all institutional sectors. The results mentioned in this paragraph come from the following publication: Salamon, L. M., Sokolowski, S. W., Haddock, M. A., Tice, H.S., *The State of Global Civil Society and Volunteering. Latest findings from the implementation of the UN Nonprofit Handbook*, Center for Civil Society Studies - Johns Hopkins University, 2013.

11 Public statistics of Portugal has already carried out a pilot module to the Labour Force Survey according to ILO Manual; willingness to start similar studies has been expressed also by public statistics of Ireland and Spain.

12 Nałęcz, S., Goś-Wójcicka, K., (eds.) *Volunteering through organisations and other forms of volunteer work outside own household – 2011*. Central Statistical Office of Poland, Warsaw, 2012.

13 In accordance with the resolution adopted on 11 October 2013 by the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, the statistical definition of work includes volunteer work. As a result it is proposed that it be subject to regular statistical observation.

14 For example, the EYV 2011 Alliance, European Volunteer Centre (CEV), Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies (CCSS), and Associazione Promozione e Solidarietà (SPES).

- 3.2 The methodological approach proposed in the ILO Manual is also a response to the lack, or inconsistency, of the available data on volunteering in the third sector, a problem pinpointed by the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, and later highlighted as a serious obstacle to the drawing-up of accurate statistics for national accounts and the satellite account of the non-profit sector<sup>15</sup>.
- 3.3 The methodological approach is based on an operational definition of the phenomenon referred to as "volunteer work" in the manual. This is not based on a specific term or terms uniformly used for research in the countries surveyed, but is, rather, a descriptive definition which highlights three fundamental features. Volunteer work is defined as actions which:
- a) involve productive work,
  - b) are unpaid,
  - c) are non-compulsory, and
  - d) are not for use by own household.

The ILO Manual contains many additional explanations, which help resolve any potential doubts over the interpretation of the criteria<sup>16</sup>.

- 3.4 The broad scope mapped out for research in the manual makes it possible to meet the information needs of many stakeholders. The manual's key definition of volunteer work implies a broad range of research, including both formal volunteering (called by ILO as indirect volunteer work) and informal volunteering (called by ILO as direct volunteer work). Furthermore, the focus is not limited to a single sector, but includes both volunteering in the third sector and in public sector institutions, and calls for the separation of data by field and institutional sector, for example. Data gathered are both clearly defined and flexible for users.
- 3.5 The research model proposed in the ILO Manual is based on a number of general principles which ensure consistency, irrespective of the type of survey on which the research is based:
- a) the widest possible population coverage, so as to capture all relevant components of the population;
  - b) the use of the definition of "volunteer work" adopted in the manual and of the terminology used to depict it;
  - c) coverage of all forms of volunteering (i.e. volunteer work done for or through organisations and volunteer work done directly for individuals outside the household or for communities);

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<sup>15</sup> Handbook on non-profit institutions in the System of National Accounts, United Nations Statistics Division, New York, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Official translations of the Manual are available in French, Spanish, Italian and Montenegrin and can be downloaded from [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org) and [www.evmp.eu](http://www.evmp.eu).

- d) coverage of the variables included in the recommended survey module: amount of volunteer time (hours actually worked), type of work activity (occupation), field in which volunteering occurs (industry or institutional sector);
  - e) the capability to translate volunteer activities into standard occupational (ISCO) and industrial (standard classification NACE or the ICNPO classification geared towards the activities of the non-profit sector) codes to allow for additional analysis of the labour market, including the assignment of an economic value to volunteer work<sup>17</sup>.
- 3.6 The proposed methodology makes it possible to focus research efforts primarily on acquiring the data needed to quantify the volume and value of volunteer work in standard economic units, permitting comparison with national employment or GDP. The data collected can be used to determine the amount and value of various kinds of volunteer work by institutional and economic sector, form of activity, region, level of urbanisation, etc.
- 3.7 On the basis of the data gathered using the volunteer work module, it is also possible to carry out numerous analyses of a social nature. It is possible to analyse the extent and degree of intensity of volunteer work, the forms that it takes (for people or organisations - in the case of formal structures, it is possible to specify the area of activity or sector). This analysis may take account of the various characteristics of volunteers: demographic characteristics (e.g. age, sex, family status), location (e.g. region, size of locality) and professional, educational and material status. By adding supplementary questions to the volunteer work module, it is also possible to analyse the motivation of volunteers, reasons for not getting involved in volunteering, etc.
- 3.8 Given the fact that respondents are usually able to provide detailed and reliable data only in relation to the recent past, the manual adopts a four-week reference period for questions on volunteer work. This is dictated by the need to determine the number of hours dedicated to volunteering as accurately as possible. At the same time, the four-week period is significantly shorter than the typical 12-month time frame for most research into volunteering. The shorter reference period translates into lower figures for the extent of volunteer work (number of volunteers), and creates the risk of obtaining results which have been skewed by seasonal fluctuations. The recommendation therefore is to stick to the four-week period for comparability reasons, while finding also methods to balance seasonality and to secure suitable sample size to provide enough volunteers in the survey for further estimations on number of hours in different groupings.

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Abridged and modified version of the provisions set out in the Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work (p. 10). ISCO – International Standard Classification of Occupations, NACE – Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the EU; ICNPO – *International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations*.



- 3.9 The guide's recommended method for research into volunteer work is in the form of a Labour Force Survey (LFS) or other household survey module. Using LFS as a platform provides a series of benefits:
- (a) full comparability and reliability of results obtained on the basis of research using a large representative sample and universal methodology (LFS),
  - (b) minimisation of the burden on the official statistics system and respondents,
  - (c) possibility to analyse data on volunteer work in connection with data specifying demographic, social and professional situation, obtained in the framework of LFS,
  - (d) low cost of reaching respondents,
  - (e) possibility to make use of interviewers with experience of encoding various forms of work with the help of classifications used by official statistics, especially the classification of occupations (ISCO),
  - (f) appropriate cognitive context for research (questions about unpaid work naturally complement questions about paid work).
- 3.10 Research into volunteering using an LFS module also involves certain limitations and problems which are solved in accordance with local conditions or on the basis of an overarching approach:
- (a) use of the telephone method for conducting research, which is increasingly common in LFS, instead of direct interviews increases the pressure on interview time and, as a result, may lead to a lower volunteering rate, especially in countries where there is little awareness of volunteering and it does not form an integral part of everyday language. Interviews therefore require time for additional explanations or examples<sup>18</sup>.
  - (b) the above-mentioned problem may be solved by including questions from the module for measuring volunteer work in wide-ranging surveys carried out by means of direct contact between the interviewer and the respondent (*face-to-face method*)<sup>19</sup>.
  - (c) the authors of the ILO Manual recommend universal solutions to some of the problems identified above concerning implementation of the module for research into volunteer work. For example, given the finding that information obtained from proxy respondents is of a poorer quality, it is recommended that interviews be carried out only with those people who are concerned by the survey, instead of using information about someone's volunteer work which has been obtained from a spouse or other members of the household. In case of difficulties applying complex universal classifications, such as

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18 Nałęcz, S., *Sharing the Experience of Volunteer Work Measurement. Lessons from pioneer implementation of the ILO methodology by the Central Statistical Office of Poland*, <http://evmp.eu/wp-content/uploads/Lessons-Podgorica-GUSISP.pdf>.

19 Cappadozzi, T., *Sharing the Italian experience on the project of measurement of unpaid volunteer work*. [http://evmp.eu/wp-content/uploads/Cappadozzi\\_Presentation\\_EVMP-Conference\\_Madrid\\_3.28.2012.pdf](http://evmp.eu/wp-content/uploads/Cappadozzi_Presentation_EVMP-Conference_Madrid_3.28.2012.pdf).

NACE, the authors provide for the possibility of using simpler classifications such as ICNPO<sup>20</sup>.

- 3.11 The Manual on the measurement of volunteer work is comprehensive, including guidelines on organising and conducting research as well as recommendations on drawing up and presenting results. When assessing the value of volunteer work, the manual recommends the full replacement cost approach, using the average wage in the national economy for the type of activity (vocation) and the economic and institutional sector to which the body, for which the voluntary work is performed, belongs.
- 3.12 Independently of the overarching approach of the proposed solutions and the solid justification for them, the ILO Manual retains considerable flexibility on many questions which may be dealt with by individual countries in the light of local conditions. This concerns issues such as adapting the phrasing to the local circumstances, and the more or less detailed way of calculating the value of the volunteer work (some other examples are given in point 3.10). On the other hand to ensure international comparability of the data, the key elements of the definitions of volunteer work should be used.
- 3.13 The manual's flexibility stems from a desire to make it universal and to ensure its broad application, regardless of significant cultural and societal differences at global level. In the EU, these differences are relatively small, which makes it possible to develop a more uniform methodology and, consequently, to obtain more comparable data.

#### 4. **What should be done?**

- 4.1 Given the considerable need for data on volunteering, stemming from its key role in generating inclusive growth and strengthening social cohesion, social and human capital, informal education, integration into the labour market and intergenerational solidarity, there is a need at EU level to ensure conditions supporting systematic, comparable research into volunteering in the Member States. The EESC understands that all new activities taken up by the EU institutions and Member States have to get proper financing stability and therefore declares its will to explore all possible means of supporting and financing research on measuring volunteering, including the proposal pointed out in point 4.2.
- 4.2 Following the recommendations in EU documents which call on Member States to develop research into volunteering on the basis of the ILO Manual, the EESC urges the European Commission, over the next few years, to work on a standardised methodology for research into volunteer work and to ensure its adoption via an appropriate regulation for the purpose of regular research conducted by the Member States.

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<sup>20</sup> Simplified classifications were applied in all three countries which have so far measured volunteer work in accordance with the ILO Manual.

- 4.3 Before the regulation is adopted, the EC should take steps to support methodological work and pilot studies, with a view to establishing consistent principles for research into volunteer work by national statistical offices, making use of the main principles of the ILO Manual and the experience of countries which have already undertaken research using the solutions described in it. When working out the details of the regulation, steps should be taken to minimise costs and red tape. To this end, the best approach would be to combine research into volunteer work with one of the other areas of research currently carried out by the national statistical offices of the Member States.
- 4.4 Given the considerable need for data on the extent of formal and informal volunteering and its impact on the general level of wellbeing and on selected areas of public life in individual countries and across the EU, conditions should be put in place to ensure that the European Commission gathers and makes available suitably harmonised data from studies carried out in the Member States and at EU level. One possibility for conducting research into the effects of volunteering could be, for example, the Adult Education Survey, through which data could be gathered and analysed on the impact of volunteer work on acquiring skills useful for obtaining a desired job.
- 4.5 The economic value of volunteer work must be recognised and valued by public authorities. The European Commission and the Member States should introduce rules allowing the economic value of volunteer work to be one means of co-financing publicly funded projects. Experience and data acquired during research into the economic value of volunteering, carried out on the basis of a single methodology across the EU, will be very helpful in devising practical solutions.

Brussels, 10 December 2013

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

Henri Malosse

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