

# VOLUNTEERING IN ESTONIA IN 2018

## SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>

Volunteering is the act of providing one's time, energy or skills out of free will and without receiving any monetary or material benefits. Volunteers are acting for the benefit of the public and society. Volunteering is a **valuable method for creating unity, increasing the activeness of people and creating a shared sense of responsibility for the benefit of social good**. Engaging volunteers may help raise the quality of services (e.g. providing social welfare services with the help of volunteers), increase the availability of services (e.g. voluntary rescue workers) and avoid social stratification (e.g. involving segregated groups). Volunteering increases the sense of self-worth and the self-satisfaction of people, which are important sentiments in a welfare state. Moreover, volunteering also has **economic value**: in 2013, the value of volunteering in Estonia was about 1% (e.g. in Finland, ca 3% of GDP).

Given the importance of volunteering, the Ministry of the Interior ordered a **repeat study** on volunteering in 2018, the **goal of which was to analyze the current state of volunteering in Estonia**, the changes that have occurred over the last five years and the possible causes of those changes. The results of the study will be used as an input into planning the support allocated to developing the field.

For the study, a document analysis, a representative survey of the population, personal and focus group interviews with experts and organizations involving volunteers were conducted. In addition, a relatively new group of population was included in the research: new immigrants. The focus was on participating in voluntary activities, the motivations of volunteers and the barriers to volunteering in different target groups, as well as on factors that either help engage volunteers or act as barriers in engaging them. Taking into account the trends in the field and the results of the study, a set of recommendations was developed that is relevant to the new strategy document Civil Society Program 2021-2030 as well.

The study highlights the trends in volunteering, the unused potential and the threats to be taken into account. The field of volunteering needs additional resources as according to the study, the **potential of volunteers is underused** and the readiness of employers to support volunteering needs greater attention.

The study results demonstrate that in the last five years, **the proportion of volunteers has grown** (from 31% to 49%) which is the average in the EU. In the last 12 months, 477,831 people have volunteered. **40% of the population have never volunteered.**

**People who know much about volunteering and have thought about the meaning of volunteering are more likely to volunteer**, i.e. those who think highly of the impact of volunteering on society and on the volunteers themselves. Often, volunteers have been asked to participate by others: an important reason for volunteering is the invitation and initiative from someone else, i.e. people are more likely to volunteer if a friend invites them or someone asks for help. The most popular volunteer areas are **contributing to the community** (42%), **environmental protection** (34%), **education and science** (23%) and **sport** (21%). In terms of specific initiatives, volunteers are most involved in **public maintenance and upkeep** (33%) and **event organization** (15%), whereby the proportion of volunteers has grown in each of these activities when compared to 2013. It

---

<sup>1</sup> This short summary is part the study "Participation in volunteering 2018", conducted in 2019 by the Institute of Baltic Studies. Available in estonian at: <https://www.ibs.ee/publikatsioonid/vabatahtlikus-tegevuses-osalemise-uuring-2018/>

is likely that the results also reflect the effect of the administrative reform and the impact of EV100 events on activating people and communities. This means that the current high proportion of volunteers may decrease in the future, which makes it more important to **set maintaining the current proportion of volunteers as goal**.

The surveyed volunteers **volunteer in a larger variety of fields** – the proportion of those who volunteer in three or more fields has grown from 36% to 47% when compared to 2013. This is indicative of the worldwide **micro-volunteering trend** in which the number of regular volunteers decreases (in Estonia, from 34% to 26%) and **the number of one-time volunteers increases** (in Estonia, from 29% to 22% over the observed period). At the same time, **organizations would rather have permanent volunteers**, i.e. people who volunteer at an organization regularly and over a longer period of time. However, the largest risk in the upcoming years is that **the needs and readiness of Estonian organizations to engage volunteers contradicts the expectations and opportunities of citizens to volunteer**. Another contradictory trend is, on the one hand, underusing volunteers as a resource and, on the other hand, a decrease in the number of organizations who involve volunteers (from 68% to 53%).

In short, it can be said that **the ways people volunteer and how organizations and citizens understand and think about volunteering are changing**. Due to this change, both organizations using volunteers and the people developing the field of volunteering need to **rather focus on supporting the organizations that involve volunteers than raising the proportion of volunteers at large**.

By analyzing the participation of different social groups in volunteering and their motivations, the following groups can be outlined whose needs need to be taken into consideration when developing the field:

- **Local governments, ministries and other government agencies** – in order to shape an environment that favors volunteering, the key is their knowledge of the various roles, opportunities and peculiarities of the third sector, especially of the positive impacts of involving volunteers and the skills to support the organizations involving volunteers.
- **The organizations involving volunteers** – about 53% of NGOs use volunteers, but so do the public sector (e.g. volunteer rescue, libraries) and private companies (e.g. Tallinn Music Week and other organizers of large events). Since volunteers do a variety of tasks, it is important to take into account the diverse nature of the involvers and the involved and, to an extent, the competitiveness among the organizations when increasing the capabilities of organizations to involve volunteers.
- **Young people, 15-24-year-olds** – young people make up 19% of volunteers and 69% of young people are volunteers. When getting older, the proportion of volunteers, who volunteer unbeknownst to them, decreases considerably, indicating an underuse of the potential of youths. As young people are future volunteers, awareness raising of volunteering is very important so that they would continue to contribute even after turning 24.
- **The elderly, 65-74-year-olds** – they make up 9% of all volunteers and 32% of the elderly volunteer. Due to an increase in lifespan, the aging population and the positive effect of volunteering on the life quality of the elderly, the elderly constitute an underused target group, which means awareness raising among them on the diversity of volunteer activities is necessary, along with increasing the awareness of organizations on involving the elderly and developing the skills to involve them.
- **Families** – 49% of volunteers are from households with children and 56% of families with children are volunteers. 61% of volunteers do not have children. As an increasing number of families are looking to volunteer as a family, the organizations who involve volunteers should review their activities and consider involving families as well.
- **Employers** – 10% of volunteers volunteered through their employer and in 28% of cases, their latest volunteer action corresponded to their professional training and/or daily work (so-called professional volunteers). The activities by employers supporting volunteering in their workplace are more diverse

in other countries and their benefits have been proven. Thus, increasing the awareness of employers of supporting volunteering is necessary.

In case of social groups, a different approach is needed for those who have not volunteered before, who volunteer unbeknownst to them (they do not know that they volunteer but when describing volunteering, they recognize themselves as having volunteered), the conscious volunteers and former volunteers. Among these target groups, there are more groups characterized by their sociodemographic background, e.g. their language, education level, social status, dwelling type, migrant status. **The more the diversity and similarities of these groups are taken into account, the more effective the measures to address and activate them will be.**

If organizations do not receive support in coping with the aging population, the micro-volunteering trend and professionalization trends, including bridging the gap between the expectations of the volunteers and the organizations involving them, the proportion of volunteers in society may decrease. **When developing the field, special attention needs to be paid to the involving organizations:**

1. raising the capabilities of organizations to involve volunteers (including permanent volunteers) through training programs, counseling, continuing to issue the volunteer friend badge and raising the overall awareness;
2. creating a suitable environment in order to raise the awareness of NGO cooperation partners, including their clients, local governments and ministries on volunteering.

In terms of realizing the abovementioned actions, important roles are carried by both the Ministry of Interior, the leaders in the field and the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication, the Ministry of Finance, local governments and local government associations as well as those working with the target group, the strategic partner in volunteering and volunteer organizations.