



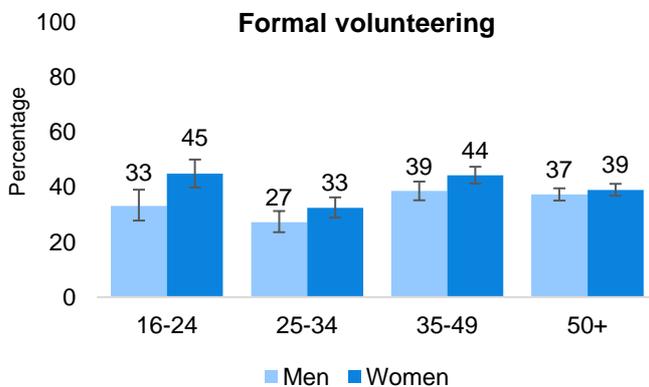
Correction notice: A small number of figures in chapter 3 were updated 3rd September 2019 to correct for a coding error in the underlying data

Community Life Survey and Taking Part Survey 2017-18: Focus on volunteering by age and gender

This report uses data from two surveys commissioned by DCMS to explore volunteering in England in more detail: the Community Life Survey and the Taking Part Survey. It expands on previous statistical releases by considering two age groups in particular: adults aged 25-34 and those aged 35-49. It also explores the influence of gender on volunteering behaviours within these age groups.

2017-18 key findings

- Among women, 25-34 year olds were the least likely of all age groups to participate in formal volunteering;



- A greater proportion of volunteers in the Sports and Heritage sectors were men than women;
- Men and women aged 35-49 were more likely to volunteer in connection with the needs of their family and friends than other age groups;
- The most commonly felt barriers to volunteering were felt differently by men and women of different age groups.

About

The Community Life Survey is a household self-completion study of adults aged 16+ in England. The survey is a key evidence source on social cohesion, community engagement and social action.

The Taking Part Survey is a household survey in England and measures engagement with the cultural sectors. The data are widely used by policy officials, practitioners, academics and charities.

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Introduction

Volunteering is an important part of civic and community life in Britain, involving millions of people.¹ Many organisations and initiatives could not exist without the work of volunteers.

Volunteering and the dual benefit'

Volunteering generates positive outcomes for communities but also for volunteers themselves. This has been called the 'dual benefit'. (See Sport England, [Volunteering In An Active Nation](#), published December 2016).

Yet the value of volunteering lies not only in meeting organisational needs, but in helping individuals to thrive: to develop their own skills, to broaden their horizons, and to root them more firmly in their community. Policies relating to volunteering tend to reflect this idea of the 'dual benefit': that as well as helping people in need and developing communities, contributing to society in this way may bring higher levels of wellbeing, improve people's confidence, and provide them with opportunities to develop skills.

The Office for Civil Society (OCS) within DCMS addresses volunteering as one element of its core remit of social action: the process of people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. This DCMS report considers two age groups in particular, where the evidence base relating to volunteering is less established: adults aged 25-34 and those aged 35-49.

This report is based on data from two separate surveys. The Community Life Survey provides detailed insight into volunteering and other forms of social action. The Taking Part Survey is used here to consider volunteering within DCMS sectors. These two surveys, and the data they produce, are not directly comparable with one another, but offer insight into different areas of the volunteering landscape. The surveys ask different questions about volunteering, and collect data in different ways. The Community Life Survey uses a self-completion questionnaire, delivered online or on paper, while the Taking Part Survey is conducted face-to-face.² Details on both surveys are available at www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey--2 and www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey.

Note: Changes over time and differences between groups are only reported on where they are statistically significant at the 95% level, i.e. where we can be confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents are reflective of the population. When sample sizes are smaller we can be less confident in our estimates so differences need to be greater to be considered statistically significant.

A confidence interval provides a range in which there is a specific probability that the true value for the population will fall. This means, had the sampling been conducted 100 times, creating 100 confidence intervals, then 95 of these intervals would contain the true value for adults in England.

¹ The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) estimates that 11.9 million people formally volunteered once a month in 2016-17 (2018 *UK Civil Society Almanac*).

² Different survey methodologies have been shown to generate different results. For some discussion of these issues, see Stern et al, 'The State of Survey Methodology: Challenges, Dilemmas, and New Frontiers in the Era of the Tailored Design' in *Field Methods* 2014, 26 (3). More information on Community Life Survey and Taking Part Survey methodologies is available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/770554/Community_Life_Online_and_Paper_Survey_Technical_Report_2017-18.pdf and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-report-taking-part-survey-2017-to-2018-year-13>.

The importance of engaging younger people in social action and civic activity is clear. As well as the immediate benefit to young people and their communities, early engagement should help to facilitate a lifetime of social action: a core aim of the OCS.³

Older people meanwhile are understood to form the backbone of the 'civic core' – a relatively small number of people that participate disproportionately in civic activity and social action – in Britain.⁴ There is an increasing understanding that the lives and expectations of older people are shifting substantially, with the prospect of longer, healthier lives. The Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing (CVSA) has argued that the opportunities this presents are not being explored sufficiently, making a strong case for more creative and extensive engagement with older people.⁵ The CVSA's call to action sits alongside evidence that the expectations others have of older people have increased. For example, in 2017 Age UK published figures showing 40% of over 50s provide regular childcare for their grandchildren ('grannanning'),⁶ while the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has highlighted the extent of caring responsibilities taken on by older people – including those still in full-time employment.⁷

An ageing civic core?

A 2012 paper by Mohan and Bulloch suggested that 41% of people in this core are over the age of 50. The Charities Aid Foundation reported in 2013 that 33% of the core was aged over 65. The ageing of this civic core has prompted some concerns over the likely outlook for volunteering in the years to come.

The double burden

The 'double burden' is a sociological phenomenon which describes how the weight of two workloads – within the home and in employment – is borne disproportionately by women. (See for example The Second Shift, Hochschild and Machung, 1990.)

Continuing to develop engagement with younger and older age groups is vital. Yet it is also imperative to consider those that fall in between, not least as a way of renewing an ageing civic core. Data from the ONS show that most marriages take place between the ages of 25-29 and 30-34. It also shows that most children are born to women between the ages of 25 and 34.⁸ This age group therefore represents a transitional stage for many adults, with effects extending well into the 35-49 age group, and one at which we might predict men and women to be motivated or limited by different factors. This report therefore examines those aged 25-49, and offers analysis of differences in participation between men and women within these groups.

³ The #iwill campaign (www.iwill.org.uk), aimed at those aged 10-20, is one specific intervention targeting young people. A toolkit published by Volunteering Matters in 2018 providing specific guidance on young people and volunteering illustrates the specific needs of this group as well as the need to encourage and support them. See Volunteering Matters, *Youth Volunteering and Social Action in Health and Social Care* (2nd edition), published November 2018.

⁴ Charities Aid Foundation, *Britain's Civic Core: Who are the people powering Britain's charities?*, September 2013; Mohan and Bulloch (Third Sector Research Centre), *The idea of a 'civic core': what are the overlaps between charitable giving, volunteering, and civic participation in England and Wales?*, February 2012.

⁵ Commission on the Voluntary Sector & Ageing, *Decision Time: Will the voluntary sector embrace the age of opportunity?*, published March 2015.

⁶ See www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/articles/2017/september/five-million-grandparents-take-on-childcare-responsibilities.

⁷ See

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/livinglongerhowourpopulationischangingandwhyitmatters/fittingitalinworkingcaringandhealthinlaterlife#how-does-caring-affect-employment.

⁸ See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity> for data tables and reports.

Chapter 1: Participation in volunteering

1.1: Participation in formal and informal volunteering

The Community Life Survey collects data about both formal and informal volunteering. This reflects a broader understanding of what volunteering means. It acknowledges the value of people freely giving their time for the benefit of others in a variety of different ways, not only through clubs and organisations. The following data relate to those who reported volunteering at least once in the past 12 months.

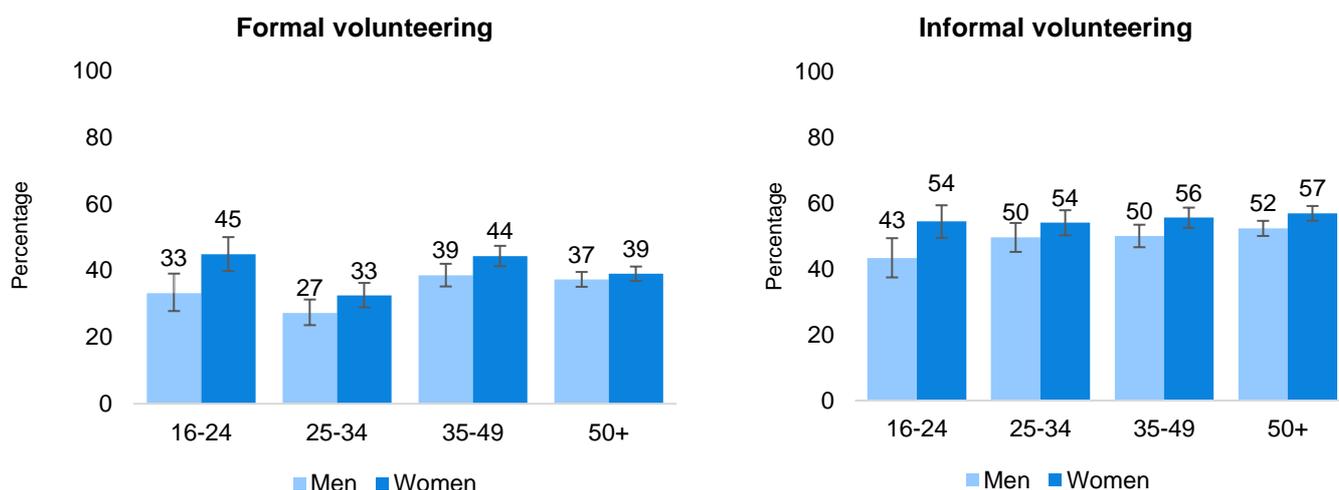
Community Life Survey definitions

Formal volunteering: Giving unpaid help through clubs or organisations.

Informal volunteering: Giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not a relative.

Community Life Survey 2017-18 statistical release and factsheets on volunteering give national figures and details for those who volunteer at least once per month. These are available at: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-2017-18.

Figure 1.1: Participation in formal and informal volunteering at least once in the past 12 months, split by age and gender



Community Life Survey 2017-18; online and paper estimates.

┆ 95% confidence interval

Formal volunteering

Among women, 45% of 16-24 year olds had formally volunteered at least once in the past year. For those aged 25-34 it was 33%: the lowest rate among all age groups for women. Among men, 25-34 year olds were less likely to have volunteered than those aged 35-49 and 50+.

Formal volunteering estimates for men aged 16-24 were lower than those for women of the same age (33% compared with 45%). These estimates for those aged 35-49 were also lower for men than for women (39% and 44% respectively).

These data suggest that gender could be a determinant of participation in formal volunteering for 16-24 year olds and 35-49 year olds. They also suggest that there may be specific reasons for formal volunteering among 16-24 year olds and 35-49 year olds which are not felt to the same extent by 25-34 year olds. Chapter 2 explores motivators to volunteering in more detail.

Informal volunteering

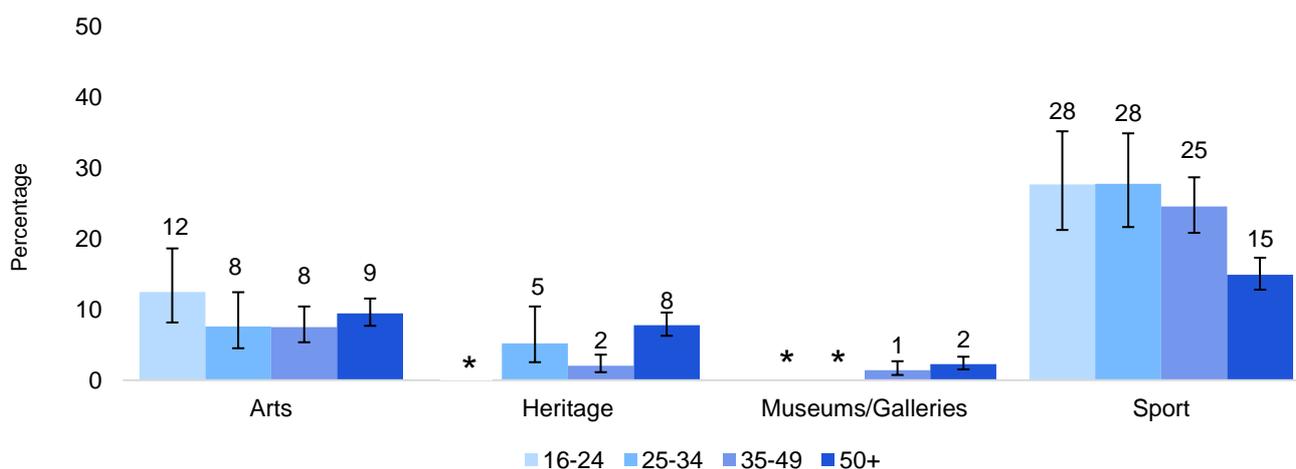
The overall findings from the Community Life Survey 2017-18 found that women were more likely to volunteer informally than men. This is reflected when looking at differences between men and women by age group, with the exception of the 25-34 year old age groups where differences are not statistically significant.

The data showed less difference in participation between age groups for informal volunteering than for formal volunteering. One exception to this was 16-24 year old men, who were less likely to volunteer informally than men aged 50+.

1.2: Volunteering in DCMS sectors by age

The Taking Part Survey collects data on the proportion of volunteers who volunteered within six specific sectors of interest to DCMS: Arts, Museums/Galleries, Heritage, Sport, Libraries and Archives. Analysis for volunteers in Libraries and Archives are not included here due to the low numbers of respondents volunteering in these sectors.

Figure 1.2: Percentage of volunteers who volunteered in DCMS sectors by age, 2017-18



Taking Part Survey 2017-18.

*Figures suppressed due to low numbers of respondents.

┆ 95% confidence interval

Volunteering estimates within DCMS sectors show little difference between age groups, except in sport, where those aged 50+ were significantly less likely to participate than any other age group. By contrast, more volunteers aged 50+ volunteered in Heritage compared to those aged 35-49.

The lower rate of volunteering in Sport within the 50+ age group may reflect the lower rates of participation in sport among older people more generally.⁹ Volunteering in sport does not necessarily require more physical activity than in any other sector, but older people may perceive similar barriers to volunteering in sport as they do for participating in sport.

⁹ Sport England, *Active Lives Adult Survey: November 17-18 Report*, published April 2019, shows how levels of activity decrease, and levels of inactivity increase, with age.

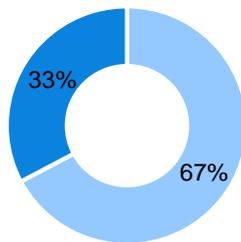
1.3: Volunteering in DCMS sectors by gender

A greater proportion of volunteers in the Sport and Heritage sectors were men than women in 2017-18. Of volunteers in Sport, 66% were male and 34% female. In Heritage, 67% of volunteers were male and 33% were female.

Differences for the Museums/Galleries, Arts, and Libraries sectors were not statistically significant. Data for Archives were again excluded from analysis due to small numbers of volunteers in this sector.

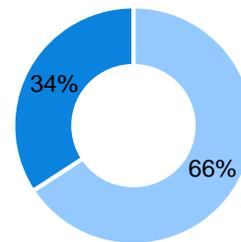
Figure 1.3: Volunteers in DCMS sectors by gender, 2017-18

Heritage volunteers by gender



■ Men ■ Women

Sport volunteers by gender



■ Men ■ Women

Taking Part Survey 2017-18.

The Taking Part Survey does not collect data on the reasons why individuals volunteer, or why they do not. Yet the difference in volunteering participation figures in Sport and Heritage suggests that men are more attracted to volunteering in these sectors than women are, or that they experience less of a barrier to it than women do.

Women in sport volunteering

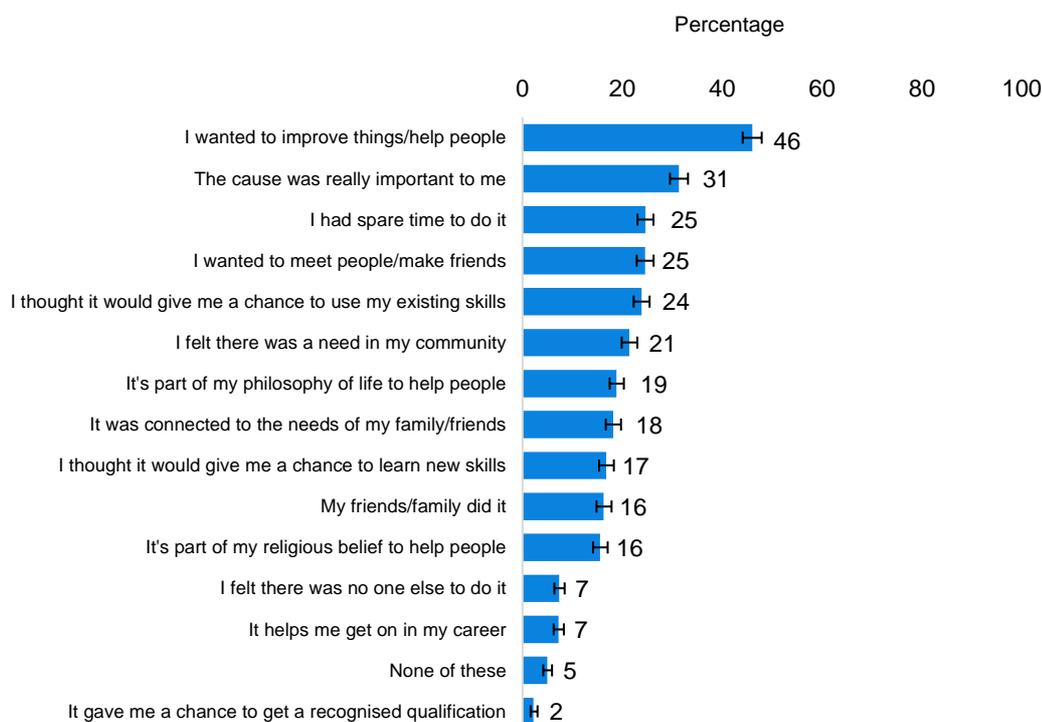
The Sport England report [Spotlight on Gender and Volunteering \(2018\)](#) offers in-depth insight into the gender gap in sport volunteering. The report identifies life stage and gender as jointly influential on volunteering behaviour. It also suggests that the gap in sport volunteering participation mirrors the gender gap in sporting participation itself.

Chapter 2: Motivators to volunteering

2.1 Reasons for formal volunteering

The Community Life Survey asks those who said they had volunteered formally at least once in the last 12 months about the reasons they have volunteering.

Figure 2.1 Reasons for formal volunteering among adults (16+)



Community Life Survey 2017-18; online and paper estimates.

— 95% confidence interval

Overall, the most common reasons people gave for formal volunteering were ‘I wanted to improve things/help people’ (46%) and ‘the cause was really important to me’ (31%). These were similar for men and women within most age groups. The next most common responses were ‘I had spare time to do it’ (25%) and ‘I wanted to meet people/make friends’ (25%).

Data collected on all volunteers (as in Figure 2.1) offers useful insight, but only tells part of the story. For example, women aged 16-24 were more driven by wanting to ‘get on in my career’ (31%) than women of any other age group. They were also more likely to say this than men of the same age (15%). The fact that younger people might be more likely to consider volunteering in the context of developing their career is unsurprising, but offers an illustration of how age and life stage might affect motivation. The difference between men and women in this age group is less easy to explain. It may suggest that they approach either their career planning, or how they spend their spare time, differently.

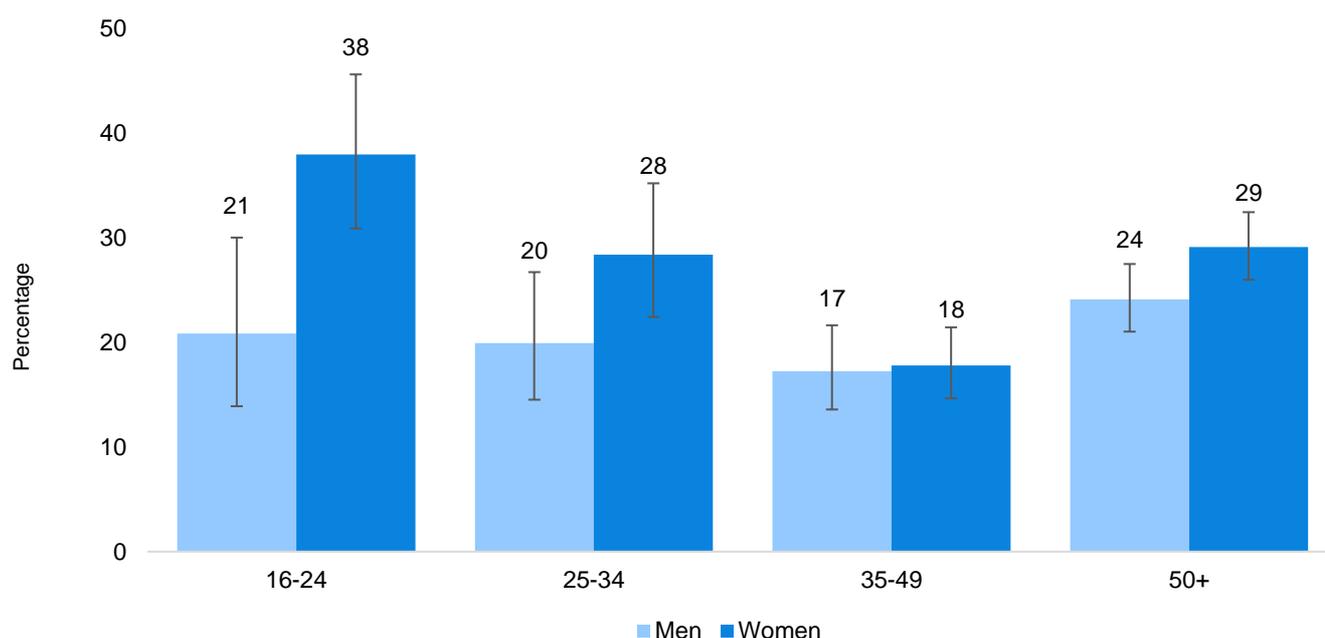
The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has shown that people tend to move in and out of volunteering over the course of their lives ([Time Well Spent, 2019](#)). Understanding the needs of these groups better might help attract more people into volunteering and to make the experience of volunteering more enjoyable.

Men and women aged 50+ were more likely than most other age groups to feel they ‘had spare time to do it’ (31% and 32% respectively), although it was also true for around a quarter of women aged 16-24 (26%). The percentages of men and women aged 25-34 and 35-49 who ‘wanted to improve things/help people’ were all between 47% and 51%.

2.2 Volunteering to meet people or to make friends

Some of the other reasons for volunteering showed more variation between age groups and between men and women.

Figure 2.2 Reasons for formal volunteering: ‘I wanted to meet people/make friends’



Community Life Survey 2017-18; online and paper estimates.

┆ 95% confidence interval

There were no significant differences in the percentage of men who volunteered because they ‘wanted to meet people/make friends’ between any age groups. By contrast, among women there were differences between different age groups. Women aged 16-24 (38%) were more likely than those aged 35-49 or 50+ to identify this as a reason for volunteering. The same was true for women aged 25-34 compared to women aged 35-49 (18%).

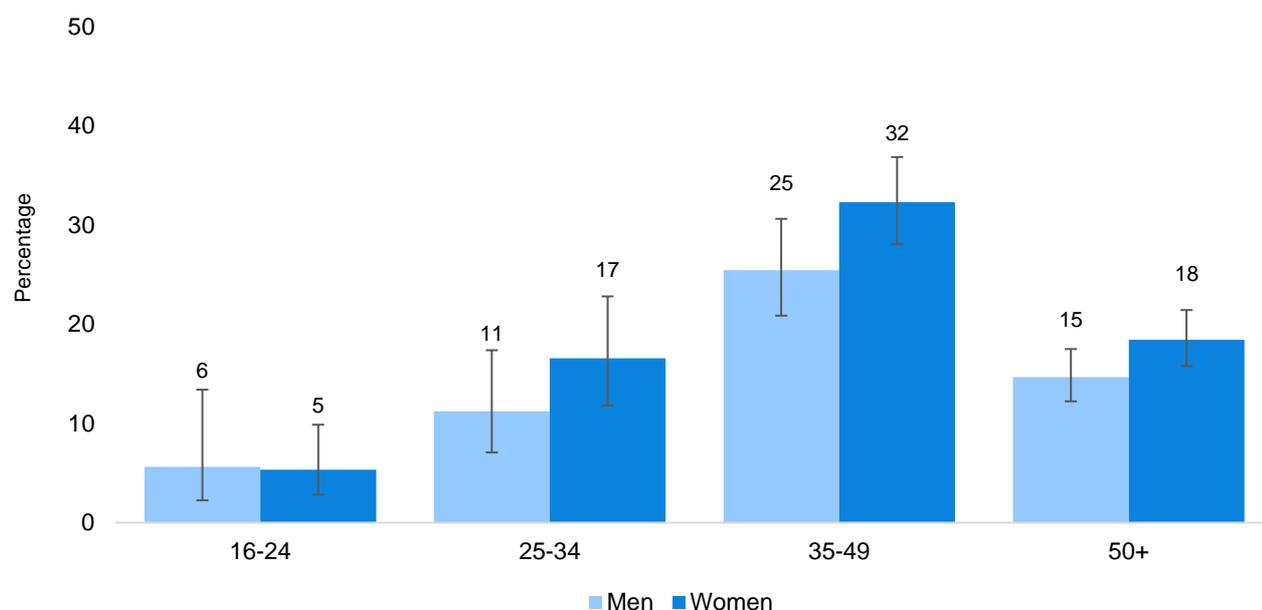
Volunteering and loneliness

The [Community Life Survey: Focus on Loneliness](#) report, published January 2019, showed that 16-34 year olds were more likely to report feeling often/always lonely than those aged 50+. Making the opportunity to meet people or make friends through volunteering may be a positive way to attract people into volunteering, as well as to address loneliness: an important government policy priority (see [A Connected Society](#), 2018).

2.3 Volunteering connected to the needs of family and friends

The most common drivers of participation in volunteering were a desire to help others, or to support a cause that the individual felt was important. Yet many respondents also identified volunteering as important in meeting different kinds of need, including those of their family and friends or their communities.

Figure 2.3: Reasons for volunteering: 'It was connected with the needs of my family/friends'



Community Life Survey 2017-18; online and paper estimates.

┆ 95% confidence interval

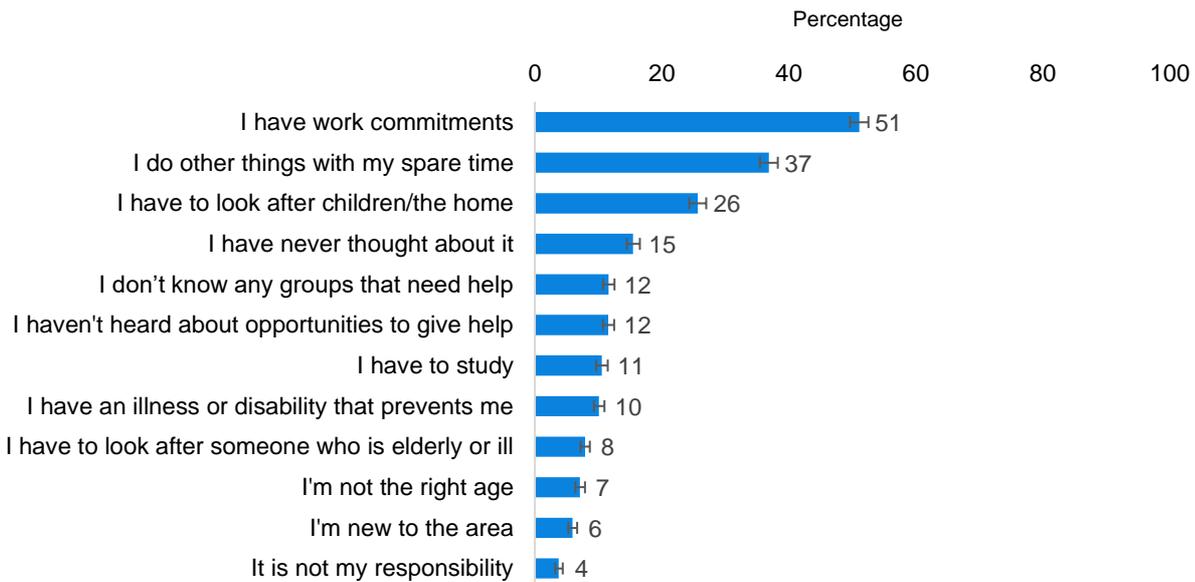
Within any given age group, there were no differences between men and women who connected their volunteering with the needs of family and friends. Yet there were some significant differences between particular age groups. Considering men and women separately, those aged 35-49 were more likely to identify this reason than in any other age group. Women aged 16-24 were also less likely than women in any other age group to do so.

Chapter 3: Barriers to volunteering

3.1 Barriers to volunteering

Understanding and addressing the reasons people have for not volunteering may offer opportunities to attract more people to participate. Those who did not volunteer formally in the last 12 months and those who did volunteer but who did so less frequently than once a month, were asked about the reasons for not doing so.

Figure 3.1: Reasons for not volunteering formally or for not volunteering formally more frequently among adults (16+)



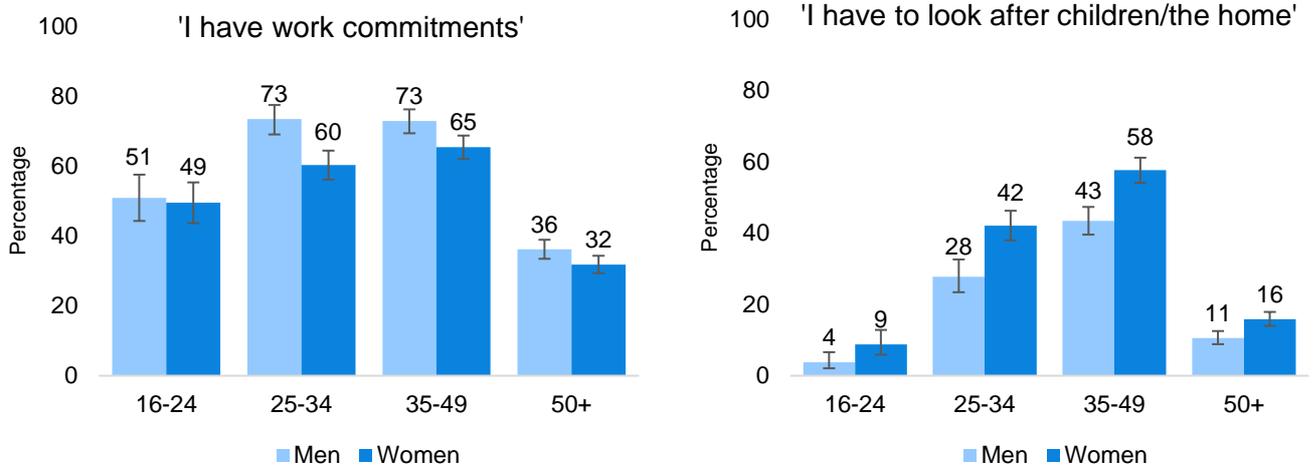
Community Life Survey 2017-18; online and paper estimates.

— 95% confidence interval

3.2 Work and home commitments

The three most common barriers to volunteering across all respondents were 'I have work commitments' (51%), 'I do other things with my spare time' (37%) and 'I have to look after children/the home' (26%). Yet breaking the data down by age and gender shows important differences in how these barriers were felt by different groups.

Figure 3.2 Barriers to volunteering: 'I have work commitments' and 'I have to look after children/the home'



Community Life Survey 2017-18; online and paper estimates.

┆ 95% confidence interval

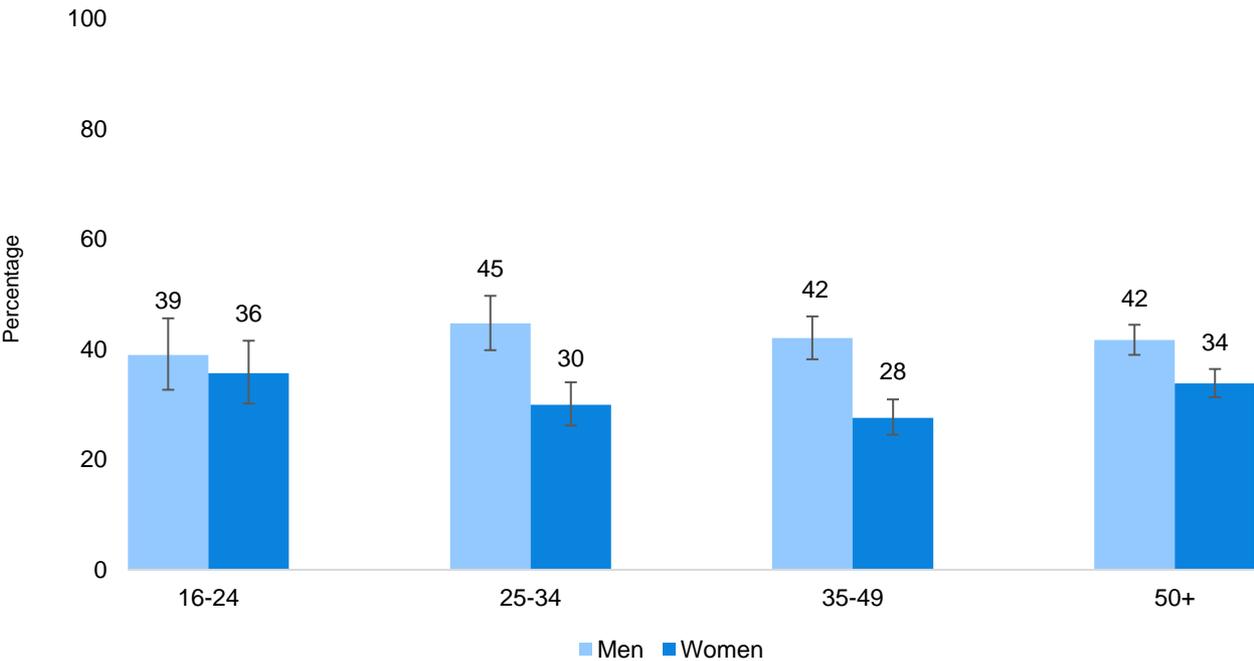
The data show that both men and women perceive work and home commitments as barriers to volunteering particularly between the ages of 25 and 49. Yet there are significant differences between men and women aged 25-34 and 35-49 identifying work and home commitments as barriers to volunteering.

For those aged 25-34, 73% of men felt work commitments were a barrier compared to 60% of women. Among 35-49 year olds, for men this figure was also 73%, while for women it was 65%. Responses among women aged 25-34 to 'I have to look after children/the home' were significantly higher than those from men of the same age (42% and 28% respectively); the same was true for 35-49 year olds (58% and 43% respectively).

3.3 Barriers to volunteering: the use of spare time

Whatever form it takes, volunteering involves giving time. The data show that specific commitments might prevent people from feeling able to volunteer. But the question of preference – how people choose to spend their spare time – is also an important factor.

Figure 3.2 Barriers to volunteering: 'I do other things in my spare time'



Community Life Survey 2017-18; online and paper estimates.

⊥ 95% confidence interval

'I do other things in my spare time' was more commonly identified as a reason for not volunteering by men than women in all age groups except 16-24 year olds. The percentage of men and women who identified this as a barrier to volunteering remained broadly consistent across most age groups. This suggests that gender has more of an influence on how people perceive of and use their spare time than age does.

Conclusions

Data from the Community Life Survey show that volunteering represents both a positive opportunity and one of a number of competing demands on adults' time. It also shows a need to consider the needs and desires of men and women of different ages carefully to maximise participation in volunteering. Pressures on time felt by men and women between the ages of 25 and 49 show important differences. Between these ages in particular then, there is clear value in splitting the data down into smaller groups for analysis. The themes emerging may have implications for policy makers and other stakeholders in volunteering.

Data on motivations and barriers to volunteering pertain only to formal volunteering. Yet the figures for adults of different ages participating in formal and informal volunteering suggest they may be driven (or limited) by different factors. Between the ages of 25 and 49, respondents' ability and desire to make a formal commitment appeared more limited, yet their informal engagement remained relatively high. These age groups appear to require flexibility. New developments in volunteering practices, including the growth of digital volunteering and microvolunteering – both of which can be more flexible around the individual and are often done remotely – may offer greater opportunities to engage more people.¹⁰

The imbalance of male and female volunteers, and volunteers of different ages, in some DCMS sectors presents challenges and opportunities. Data from the Taking Part Survey suggest that these sectors may be missing out on skills and experience from certain groups, and on the other hand, that those groups are currently less able to access the benefits of volunteering in those areas: an inversion of the dual benefit.

This is particularly prominent in Sport, the DCMS sector which engages with the highest proportion of volunteers. Addressing the relative lack of female volunteers, and volunteers over the age of 50, is an important extension to existing initiatives to increase participation in sport itself within these groups such as This Girl Can and the Active Ageing Fund. The Sport England report on gender and volunteering published in 2018 (Spotlight on Volunteering and Gender) is a positive step in this direction.

This report and the data tables supporting it offer more focused detail around trends in volunteering. It is hoped they will inform and assist those involved in volunteering by providing more insight into why these different groups may or may not currently be engaged with it. It does not deal with the reasons behind the statistics or the possible interaction with other socio-demographic factors. The questions around causality that it may provoke would require a different methodological approach but would continue to develop the evidence base in this area.

¹⁰ The National Council of Voluntary Organisations has published detailed reports on these issues. See for example Time well spent: A national survey on the volunteer experience, January 2019. Available at: https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/volunteering/Volunteer-experience_Full-Report.pdf; The value of giving a little time: Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering, November 2013. Available at: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/value-of-giving-a-little-time-understanding-the-potential-of-microvolunteering>.

Annex A: Background to the Community Life Survey

1. The Community Life Survey is commissioned by DCMS. The fieldwork is conducted by Kantar (formerly TNS-BMRB). It is an annual household survey, conducted via self-completion questionnaire.
2. This release is based on self-completion online/paper questionnaires, completed between August 2017 and March 2018. The exact total sample size for the 2017-18 period was 10,217. Sample sizes for each breakdown can be found in the accompanying tables. All households sampled were invited to complete the survey online with the option to request a paper version. A targeted sample were also sent two paper questionnaires in their second reminder letter. In 2017-18, 2,659 people (26%) completed paper version of the questionnaire and 7,558 (74%) completed the survey online. Due to space limitations in the paper questionnaire booklet, not all questions from the online survey are included in the paper version.
3. Stringent quality assurance procedures have been adopted for this statistical release. All data and analysis has been checked and verified by at least two different members of the DCMS team to ensure the highest level of quality. Descriptive statistics have been calculated using complex samples analysis. Upper and lower estimates may vary slightly from analysis using other methodology or different software packages.
4. The upper and lower estimates presented in this report and in the accompanying tables have been calculated using a 95% confidence interval. This means that had the sample been conducted 100 times, creating 100 confidence intervals, then 95 of these intervals would contain the true value. When the sample size is smaller, as is the case for certain groups, the confidence intervals are wider as we can be less certain that the individuals in the sample are representative of the population. This means that it is more difficult to draw inferences from the results.
5. Differences between groups have only been reported on in the text of this report where they are statistically significant at the 95% level. This means that we can be confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents are reflective of the population. Specifically, the statistical tests used mean we can be confident that if we carried out the same survey on different random samples of the population, 95 times out of 100 we would get similar findings. When sample sizes are smaller we can be less confident in our estimates so differences need to be greater to be considered statistically significant.

Annex B: Background to the Taking Part Survey

1. The Taking Part Survey is commissioned by DCMS and its partner Arm's Length Bodies (in 2017-18, these were Arts Council England, Historic England and Sport England).
2. The fieldwork for the Taking Part Survey was conducted by Ipsos Mori and NatGen Social Research for 2017-18.
3. Stringent quality assurance procedures have been adopted for this statistical release. All data and analysis has been checked and verified by at least two different members of the DCMS team to ensure the highest level of quality. Descriptive statistics have been calculated using complex samples analysis. Upper and lower estimates may vary slightly from analysis using other methodology or different software packages.
4. Guidance on the quality that is expected of Taking Part statistical releases is provided in a [quality indicators document](#). These quality indicators outline how statistics from the Taking Part Survey match up to the six dimensions of quality defined by the European Statistical System (ESS). These are: relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, comparability and coherence.
5. The Taking Part Survey measures participation by adults (aged 16 and over) and children (aged 5-10 and 11-15) living in private households in England. No geographical restriction is placed on where the activity or event occurred. Further information on data for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland can be found in question 2 of the "[Taking Part: Guidance Note](#)".
6. Sample sizes for each data breakdown can be found in the accompanying tables.
7. Changes over time and differences between groups are only reported on where they are statistically significant at the 95% level. This means that we can be confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents are reflective of the population. Specifically, the statistical tests used mean we can be confident that if we carried out the same survey on different random samples of the population, 95 times out of 100 we would get similar findings. When sample sizes are smaller we can be less confident in our estimates so differences need to be greater to be considered statistically significant.
8. The upper and lower bounds presented in this report have been calculated using a 95% confidence interval. This means that had the sample been conducted 100 times, creating 100 confidence intervals, then 95 of these intervals would contain the true value. When the sample size is smaller, as is the case for certain groups and in certain years, the confidence intervals are wider as we can be less certain that the individuals in the sample are representative of the population. This means that it is more difficult to draw inferences from the results.
9. The data are weighted to ensure representativeness of the Taking Part sample. These compensate for unequal probabilities of selection, and adjust for non-response. Weighting is based on mid-2016 population estimates from the Office for National Statistics.



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