

**SPOTLIGHT
ON VOLUNTEERING
AND LOWER
SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS**

Active Lives Adult Survey
May 2017-18

WELCOME

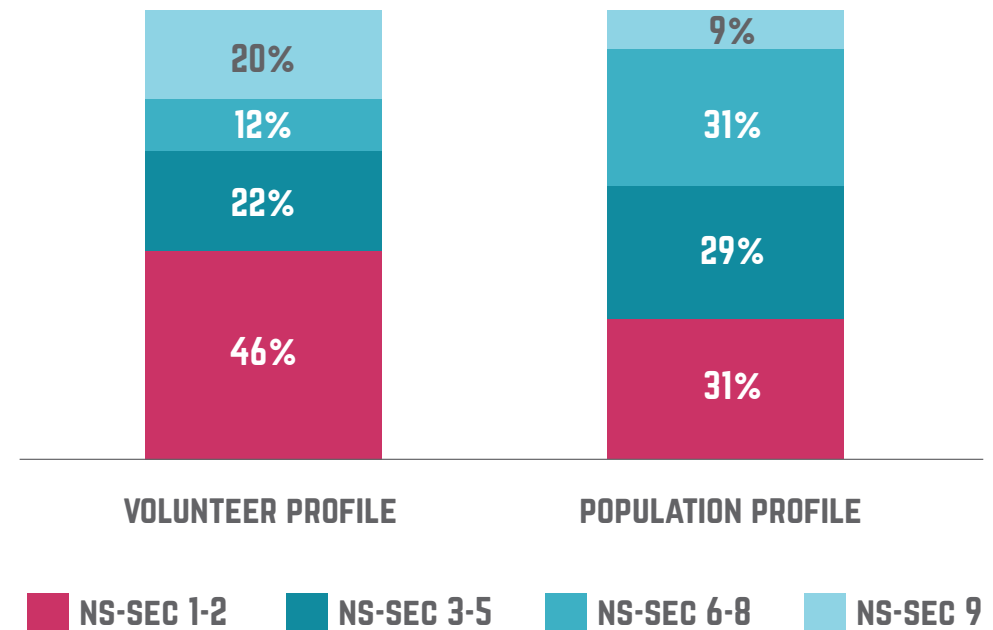
Our [Active Lives Survey](#) shows that 6.3 million adults (14% of adults in England) volunteered at least twice in the last year to support sport and physical activity. However, those who volunteer in sport don't currently represent the diversity of the wider population. People from lower socio-economic groups make up 31% of the population aged 16-74 but only 12% of volunteers. This audience is also diverse, with a range of cultural and demographic backgrounds, occupations, and experiences.

Volunteers in the sports sector are overwhelmingly from more affluent socio-economic groups. This is something we aim to change.

This report seeks to explore in greater detail some of the interconnected and complex elements that make up people's lives and influence their likelihood to volunteer in sport and physical activity, and highlight how these play out for those in different socio-economic groups. We are particularly focussing on the impact of locality, working status and the range of volunteer roles.

Volunteering to support sport and physical activity can be powerful, benefiting those who give their time as well as those they support.

Our [report on social outcomes](#) showed that there is a positive association between volunteering in sport and physical activity and mental wellbeing, individual development and social and community development. It also showed those who take part in sport and physical activity and volunteer achieve even higher outcome scores across all outcome measures.



KEY FINDINGS WHICH WILL BE EXPLORED IN MORE DETAIL

- Volunteering has a strong positive impact on mental wellbeing and individual development for individuals in lower socio-economic groups
- Living in a deprived area reduces the likelihood of volunteering
- Those not working face more significant barriers to volunteering than those who are employed.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Data from the [Active Lives Survey](#) shows there is a greater impact upon the outcome scores for adults in lower socio-economic groups who volunteer than those observed for more affluent volunteers.

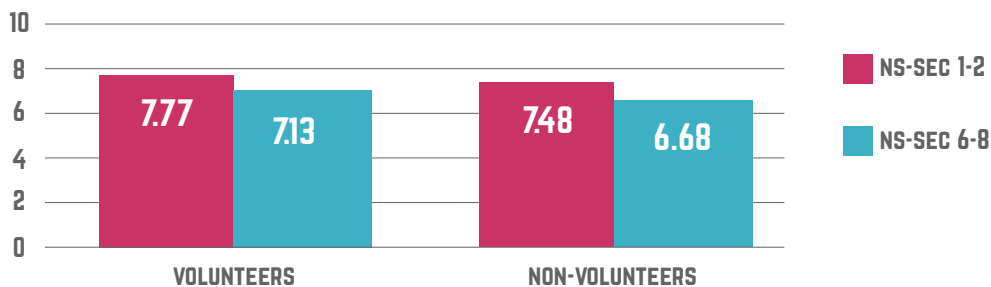
This is shown in the graphs for two questions: one on mental wellbeing, asking respondents to rate out of 10 the extent to which they agree that 'things I do in life are worthwhile', and one on individual development, asking respondents to rate out of five the extent to which they agree that 'I can achieve most of the goals I set myself'.

This suggests that those in lower socio-economic groups potentially have the most to gain from volunteering in terms of an improvement in these outcomes.

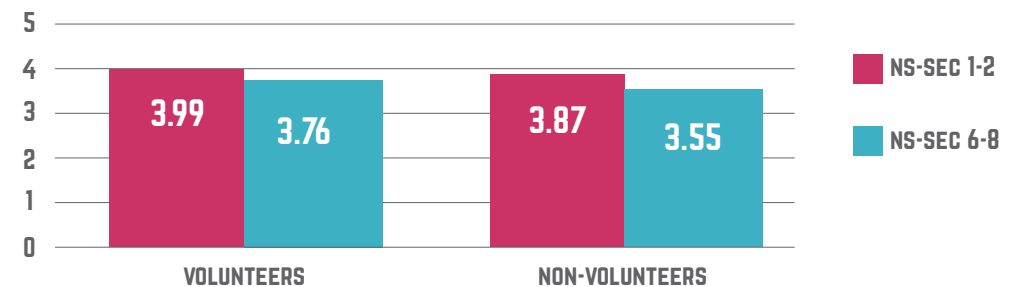
We also see a relationship between activity levels and volunteering across socio-economic groups. People in lower-socio economic groups are twice as likely to be inactive (less than 30 minutes activity per week) compared to higher socio-economic groups who are more active and more likely to volunteer. This means that more people from lower socio-economic groups, as a significant proportion of the population, are missing out on the positive outcomes associated with both physical activity and volunteering.

If we're to achieve our ambition for everyone in England, regardless of age, background or ability to volunteer and take part in sport or activity, then we need to understand what the barriers are for lower socio-economic groups.

THINGS I DO IN LIFE ARE WORTHWHILE (MEAN SCORE OUT OF 10)



I CAN ACHIEVE MOST OF THE GOALS I SET MYSELF (MEAN SCORE OUT OF 5)



WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Volunteering habits, or the likelihood to volunteer, can be affected by elements within an individual's life, such as activity levels, disability, where they live and their working status.

Health problems and disability can create additional challenges to volunteering, with 9% of disabled people volunteering compared to 14% overall. People in lower socio-economic groups are twice as likely to have a disability as those in higher socio-economic groups.

TALKING POINTS

People from lower socio-economic groups face multi-layered issues that reduce the likelihood of volunteering, including disability and unemployment. These need to be taken into consideration and inform how we approach developing roles that are more accessible in the future.

In a similar way to sport and physical activity, volunteering is competing with a number of other priorities in people's lives and there is a need to make opportunities more accessible to support people to fit volunteering into a busy routine. This could include offering more ad hoc roles so people can fit volunteering around irregular work patterns whilst also appealing to motivations at the same time.

There are 12 million people within these lower-socio economic groups. How we offer a diverse range of accessible volunteering opportunities, that meet their needs and aspirations, and that are appealing to them, will be important too.

FURTHER INSIGHT

This is not a challenge unique to the sport and physical activity sector. People from lower socio-economic groups are underrepresented in volunteering across all other sectors which supports the case that the challenges for these groups are complex. The Community Life Survey shows disparities in monthly volunteering: people in higher managerial and professional occupations are most likely to volunteer formally once a month (30%) compared to intermediate (24%), and routine and manual (17%) occupations. The [Time Well Spent](#) report by NCVO explores further the range of factors that have an impact on peoples' ability to volunteer.

[The 2016 Givers report](#) by Join In and the 2019 ['Happy Days'](#) research by Jump, explore further the positive outcomes associated with volunteering across different socio-economic groups. Formal volunteering, in particular volunteering through organised groups and clubs, is associated with higher wellbeing on a number of measures.

HOW DO WE DEFINE LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS?

We use the [National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification](#) (NS-SEC) to collect and define data on socio-economic groups. The lower socio-economic groups are defined as NS-SEC groups six to eight, and include people aged between 16 and 74 who work in semi-routine occupations (such as bus drivers or hairdressers), routine occupations (such as cleaners or waiters) or who have never worked or are long-term unemployed.

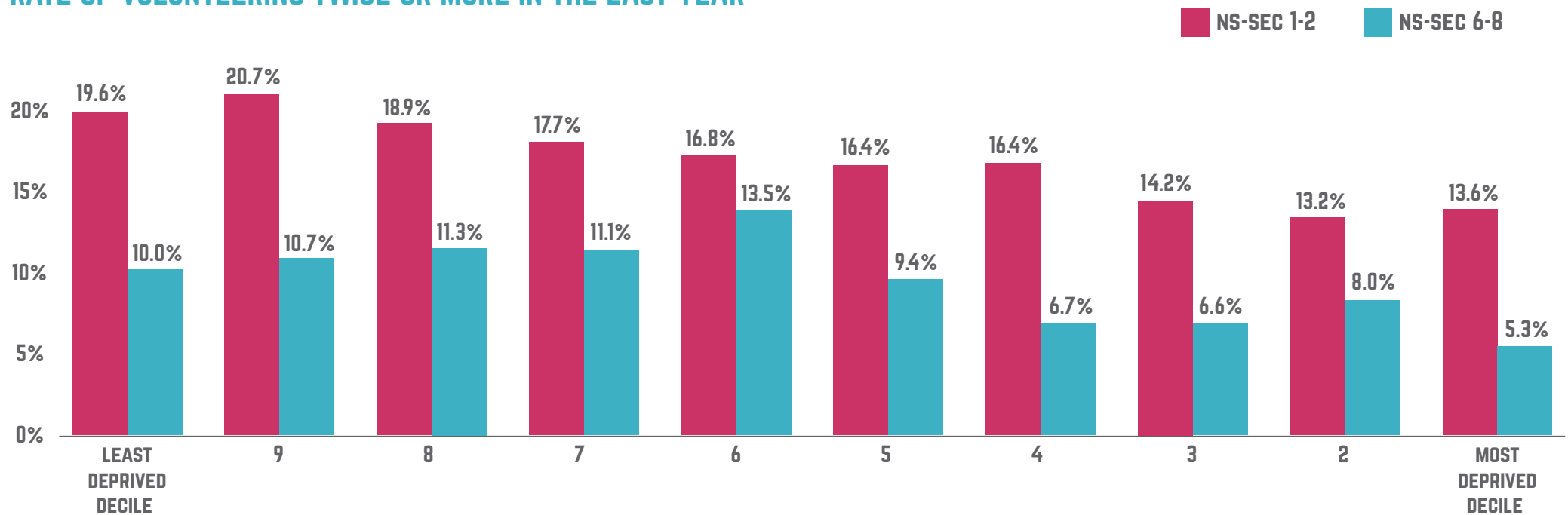
THE IMPACT OF LOCALITY

This section explores the impact of locality, how levels of deprivation (as measured by the IMD), can affect volunteering rates in local areas.

The IMD allows small areas to be ranked from highest to lowest deprivation. The graph below shows the volunteering rates for both higher and lower socio-economic groups across deprivation levels.

Some communities in the country are more affected by social and economic deprivation than others. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) combine data on a number of factors such as education, health, access to housing and services, crime and the living environment to provide a relative measure of deprivation for different areas.

RATE OF VOLUNTEERING TWICE OR MORE IN THE LAST YEAR



THE IMPACT OF LOCALITY (CONTINUED)

The socio-economic status of individuals, and the resources and opportunities available in the place in which they live, both have a strong and inter-related impact on volunteering. The overall rate of volunteering twice or more a year for those from higher socio-economic groups, at 16.9%, is double that of people from lower socio-economic groups (8.2%). Meanwhile, the rate of volunteering in the least deprived decile (17.8%) is nearly double the rate of the most deprived decile (9.5%).

The combined effect of personal and place-based factors is shown by rates of volunteering declining, both for people in higher and lower socio-economic groups, the more deprived an area is. The rate of volunteering among those from lower socio-economic groups in the most deprived areas is particularly low. The rate of volunteering drops to 5.3% in the most deprived areas, and is also particularly low in deciles 2-4.

TALKING POINTS

Place is an important factor to consider in understanding what the barriers may be for lower socio-economic groups. Deprived communities may have fewer resources in a number of ways - lack of green space, less good transport provision, and a lower number of facilities and clubs. In addressing barriers to volunteering for lower socio-economic groups we may need to look beyond just individuals to the place and develop the assets and resources around them.

Sport and physical activity can be a route to achieving positive social change; addressing challenges like social isolation and supporting social cohesion. How can sport and physical activity empower communities to address some of the challenges they face and make the most of existing assets in their community? These can be the physical assets of a place like a park or a local community space or the skills and knowledge of people in the community.

FURTHER INSIGHT

[*Pathways through Participation*](#) found that drivers of participation, like personal motivations, can be tempered by people's access to resources. As well as having time to volunteer people also need access to money, transport and good health. A physical place also provides the framework for participation; groups and organisations through which people can get involved, structures, processes and culture within those groups and local spaces, events and institutions.

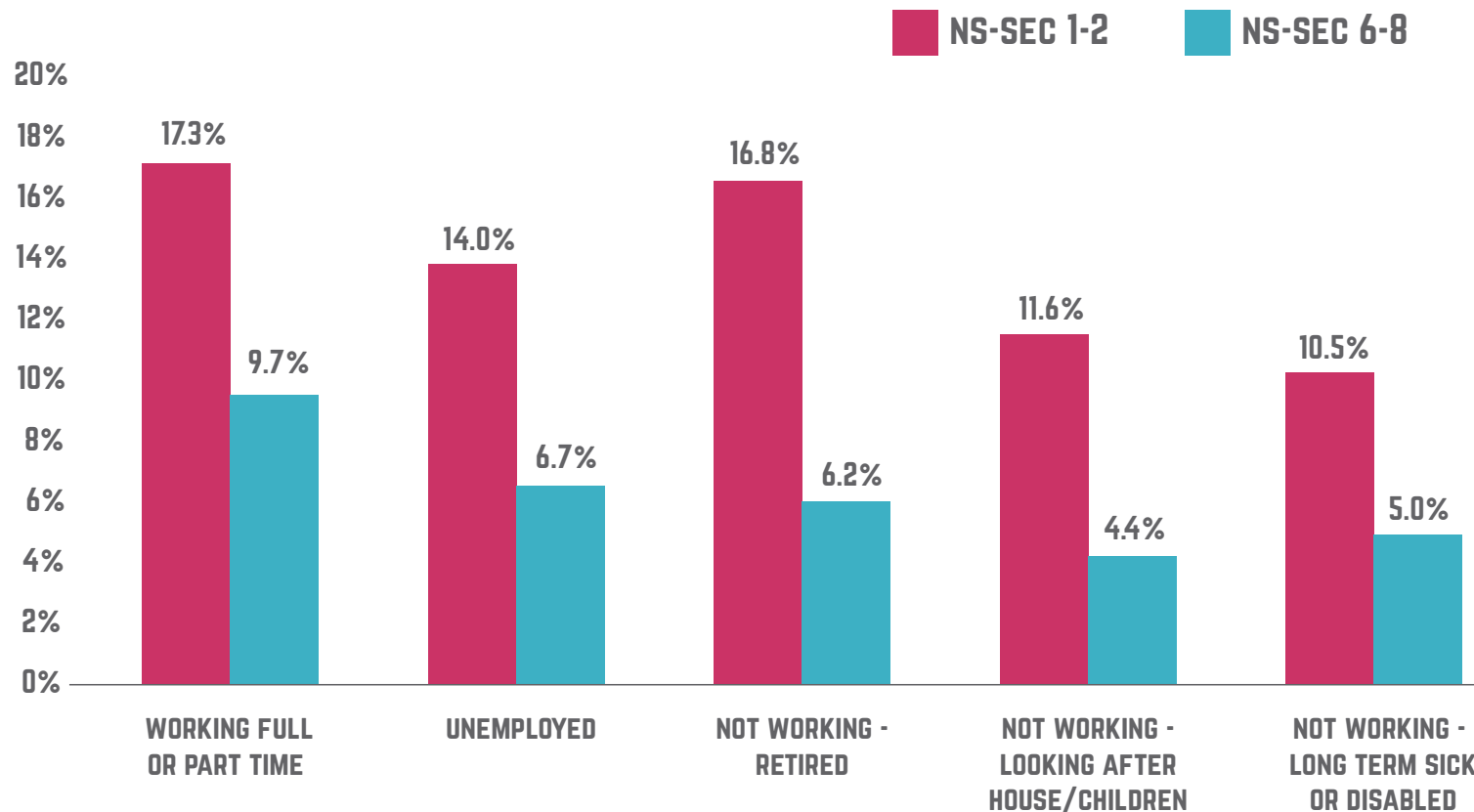
[*Research by Sheffield Hallam University*](#) shows that sports clubs exist in greater numbers in more affluent communities than in more deprived ones, with only 6% of clubs being in the most deprived areas. Football, boxing, swimming and gymnastics have larger numbers of clubs in deprived areas.

WORKING STATUS

Personal circumstances can have an important influence on someone's ability to volunteer and the types of roles they get involved in. Although volunteering rates are greater for higher socio-economic groups than for lower socio-economic groups for all working statuses, the differences between the two are more pronounced for those not working – in particular, where they are looking after the house or children, and when they are long term sick or disabled.

This suggests there may be specific barriers to volunteering for people from lower socio-economic groups in these situations.

RATES OF VOLUNTEERING BY WORKING STATUS



WORKING STATUS (CONTINUED)

TALKING POINTS

It would be wrong to assume that those not working have time to volunteer. Opportunities still need to be accessible and appeal to the motivations of this audience if we are to encourage them to volunteer. For example, those with health issues or a disability may find it difficult at times to commit to an ongoing role and may need more flexible volunteering opportunities.

FURTHER INSIGHT

The [GIVERS](#) survey of sports volunteers and wider literature review showed that for unemployed people they are motivated to volunteer by the opportunity to get a recognised qualification, because it gives them more confidence and a chance to improve their employability. Adults from lower socio-economic groups cite family responsibilities, not being asked and not being aware of opportunities that would interest them as barriers to volunteering.

The [Activity Alliance](#) (formerly EFDS) has shown that disabled people have higher levels of interest and involvement in volunteering, but they are also more likely to have a negative experience and perceive barriers to volunteering. 59% of disabled people feel they are unable or unwilling to commit to a volunteering role long-term.

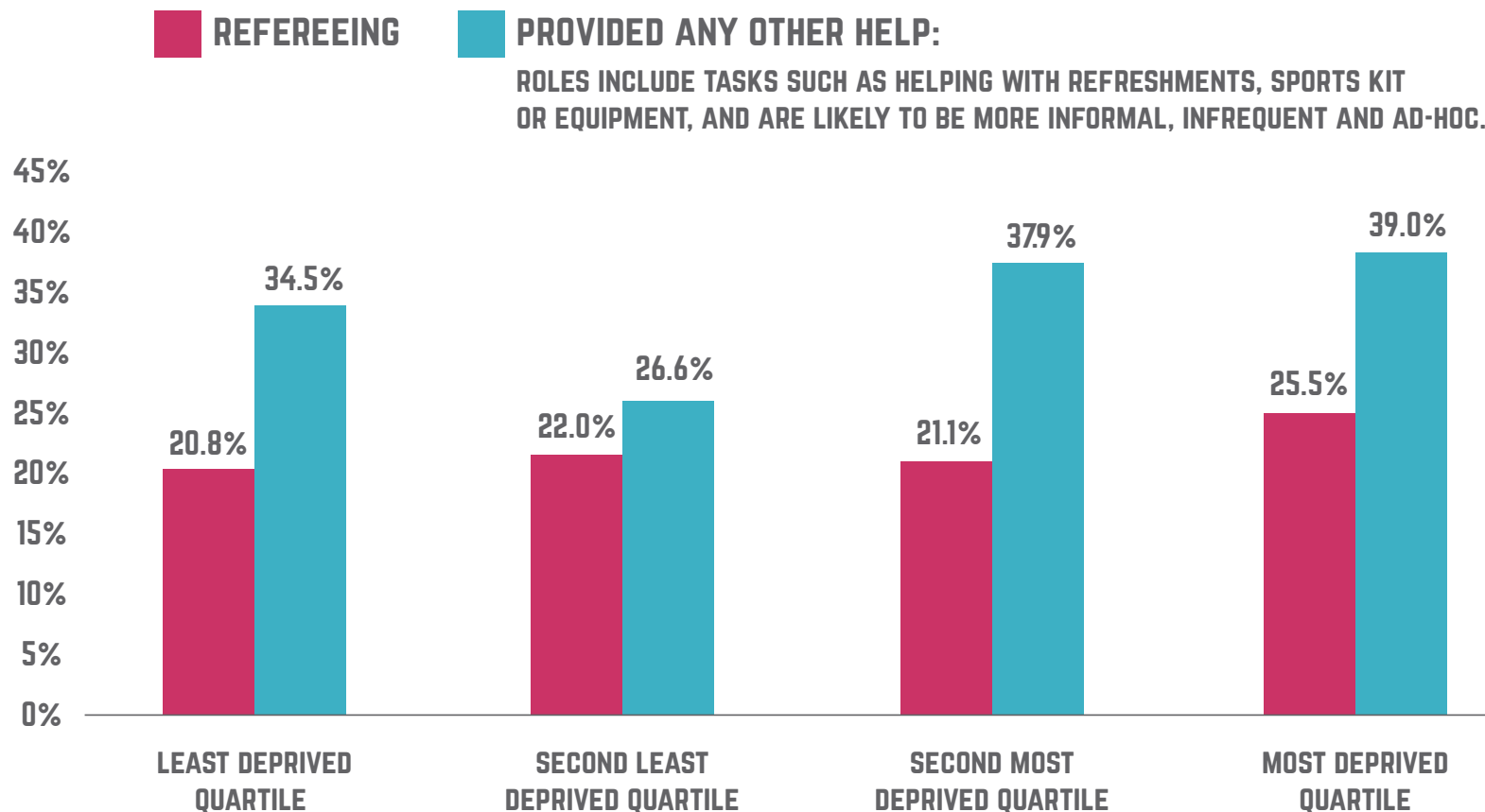
VOLUNTEERING ROLES

To gain a more granular understanding of volunteering in lower socio-economic groups, it's important to look at the various volunteering roles undertaken.

People from lower socio-economic groups are under-represented across all volunteering roles, but particularly so in administrative and committee roles.

There is also a relationship between the roles being undertaken and where people live. For most roles, the proportion of volunteers from lower socio-economic groups are similar in areas of high and low deprivation. However, for refereeing and 'other' volunteering roles, a greater proportion of volunteers living in deprived areas are carrying out these roles.

% OF ALL LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP VOLUNTEERS DOING ROLES, BY QUARTILE



VOLUNTEERING ROLES (CONTINUED)

TALKING POINTS

We see a different pattern with refereeing than with other roles when it comes to individuals in lower socio-economic groups. Football is a sport with high numbers of people from lower socio-economic groups regularly taking part – 10% of the 16-34 age group, a similar rate to those in higher socio-economic groups. It also has large numbers of clubs in more deprived areas, unlike some other sports where clubs are heavily concentrated in more affluent areas.

Football also needs a high number of volunteer referees to run their leagues and there is also an infrastructure in place at scale to support and develop these types of volunteer roles. It may be that this enables more people to take up referee roles in economically disadvantaged areas. It may also be that roles within particular sports appeal more to the motivations of lower socio-economic groups.

The nature of the roles that people in lower socio-economic groups undertake e.g. stewarding or marshalling are those which could be one-off and which may require less of an overall time commitment, both to undertake the role and for training. Whereas in roles like coaching and committee roles which require a more ongoing commitment, those from lower socio-economic groups are underrepresented. It may be that more flexible roles are much easier to fit in around other commitments in their lives.

FURTHER INSIGHT

Our [*Spotlight on Lower Socio-Economic Groups*](#) explores the types of physical activities which are common among those from lower socio-economic groups.

CONCLUSION

Evidence shows that those who give their time to volunteer within sport and physical activity benefit from a range of outcomes, including individual development and mental wellbeing. It also shows that these benefits can be greater for those from lower socio-economic groups than for other groups. However, people from lower socio-economic groups are the most under-represented amongst the sports volunteering community; they make up just 11% of the volunteering community compared to 31% of the population.

Volunteering rates for those in lower socio-economic groups are particularly low in deprived areas, demonstrating that the local infrastructure, opportunities and environment has an impact on the likelihood to volunteer. In addition, when looking at working status, the evidence shows those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are even less likely to volunteer if they have additional caring responsibilities, are long-term sick or disabled, or not working. This shows that personal circumstances have a greater impact on this group than on those from more affluent groups.

The different rates of volunteering in various roles suggests that the availability of appropriate opportunities suited to the circumstances and motivations of individuals is key. In order to increase volunteering among lower socio-economic groups, considerations need to be taken regarding the challenges that people in lower socio-economic groups face and the amount of commitment they are able to make. This is where the sport and physical activity sector, our partners and local communities can all act. In the places we invest in or carry out our activities in, we need to think about the people we would like to engage with and think about how they would like to be involved and supported.



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NOTES

TO READ ALL OUR ACTIVE LIVES ADULT REPORTS, VISIT: [SPORTENGLAND.ORG/ACTIVELIVES](https://www.sportengland.org/activelives).

TO CARRY OUT YOUR OWN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVE LIVES DATA, VISIT: [ACTIVELIVES.SPORTENGLAND.ORG](https://www.activelives.sportengland.org)

THE DATA INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT CAN BE FOUND IN OUR PUBLISHED DATA TABLES.