

# Quality of life indicators - governance and basic rights

Statistics Explained

*Data from October 2024*

*Planned article update: October 2029*

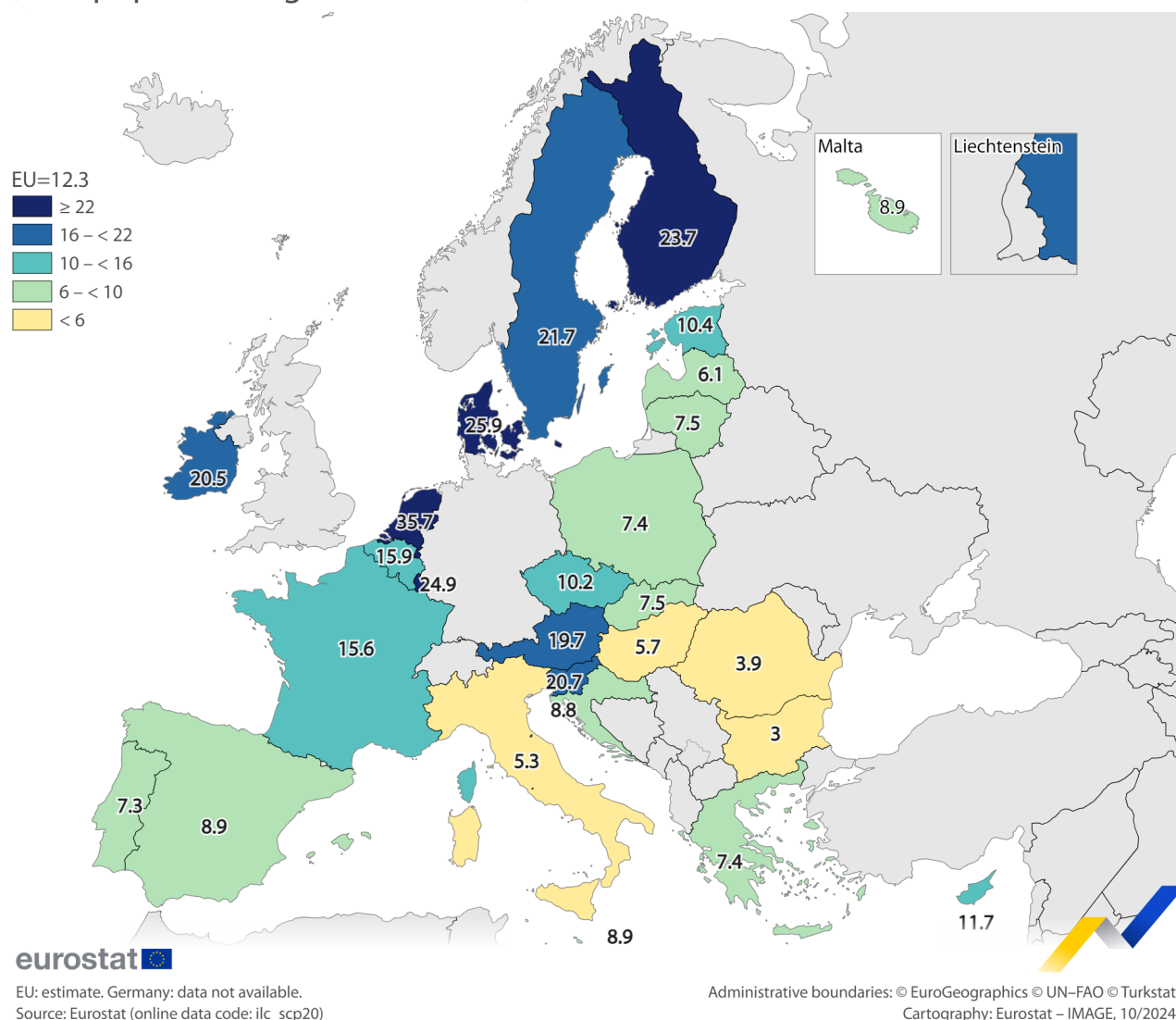
**" In 2024, 50.7% of eligible voters turned out to vote for the European Parliament, increasing from 42.6% in 2014. "**

**" In 2022, 12.3% of the EU adult population above 16 participated in formal voluntary activities, ranging from 35.7% in the Netherlands to 3.0% in Bulgaria. "**

**" In 2022, in the EU, 19.5% of those with tertiary education, 11.2% with secondary education and 6.6% with primary level education participated in formal voluntary activities. "**

# Formal volunteering in the EU, 2022

(% of population aged 16 and over)



## Participation in formal voluntary activities in the EU, 2022 (% of population aged 16 and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc\_scp20)

This article is part of a [Eurostat](#) online publication that focuses on [quality of life indicators](#), providing statistics for the [European Union \(EU\)](#). The publication presents an analysis of various aspects of quality of life that can form the basis for a more in-depth analysis.

The focus of this article is on **governance and basic rights** — the seventh of nine [quality of life indicators](#) dimensions that form part of a framework endorsed by an [expert group on quality of life indicators](#).

Active participation in cultural and social life is thought to be closely linked to an individual's quality of life. Governance issues – such as institutional checks and balances, transparency and freedom of access to information – are often promoted as important for ensuring accountability, giving people a greater sense of ownership and fostering a willingness to participate in the interests of a healthy society.

Election turnout results provide a snapshot indication of citizens' trust and engagement in governance. Turnout is often used as a proxy for democratic engagement: across the EU it averaged 50.74% in the 2024 European Parliament elections (see Map 1). This article will complement this indicator with an analysis of data on active citizenship and volunteering, both formal (organised) and informal (for a detailed explanation on these please see

the Data sources section).

## Voter turnout

In 2024, 50.7% of eligible voters turned out to vote in [European Parliament](#) elections. The results varied greatly among EU countries. In some EU countries, the elections were combined with national ones, and in some voting is compulsory. Nevertheless, the considerable variations in voter turnout may reflect, at least to some extent, the varying degrees of trust that people have in political systems.

Voter turnout in the European Parliament elections in 2024 was at its highest for the past 20 years (since 1994).

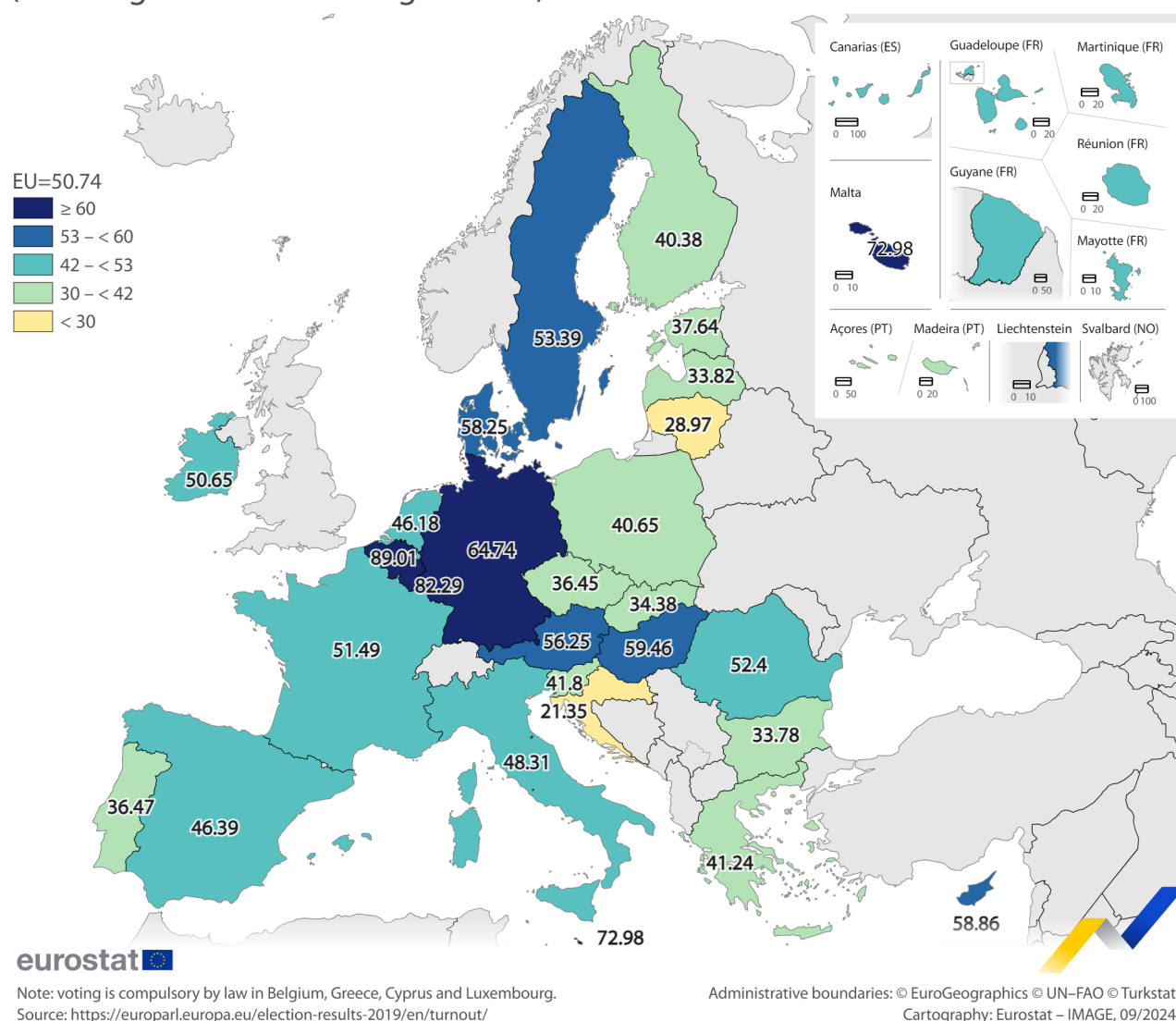
Between 1979 and 2014 there was a steady decline in voter turnout in European Parliament elections. The percentage of eligible voters casting a ballot fell for seven consecutive elections from a high of almost 62% to 42.6%. However, in the 2019 election, voter turnout increased again to 50.66% and in the 2024 election to 50.74%. This EU average hides some major differences between the 27 EU countries.

Voter turnout in the 2024 European Parliament elections ranged from highs of 89.0% and 82.3% in Belgium and Luxembourg (note that voting is compulsory in these two countries, as well as in Cyprus and Greece) down to less than one quarter of all eligible voters in Croatia (with the lowest level of voter turnout, at 21.3%).

There was a significant increase in voter turnout in 8 EU countries in 2024. In 11 countries, turnout was virtually unchanged (no more than 2 [Percentage points \(pp\)](#) higher or lower than in 2019), and in 8 countries it fell. The biggest increases compared to the 2019 elections were recorded in Hungary, Cyprus and Slovenia (+16.1 pp, +13.9 pp and +12.9 pp respectively), and the biggest decreases were seen in Lithuania (-24.5 pp) and Greece (-17.5 pp).

# Voter turnout in European Parliament elections, 2024

(% of eligible voters casting a ballot)



Map 1: Voter turnout in the European Parliament elections, 2024 (% of eligible voters casting a ballot) Source: <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/turnout/>

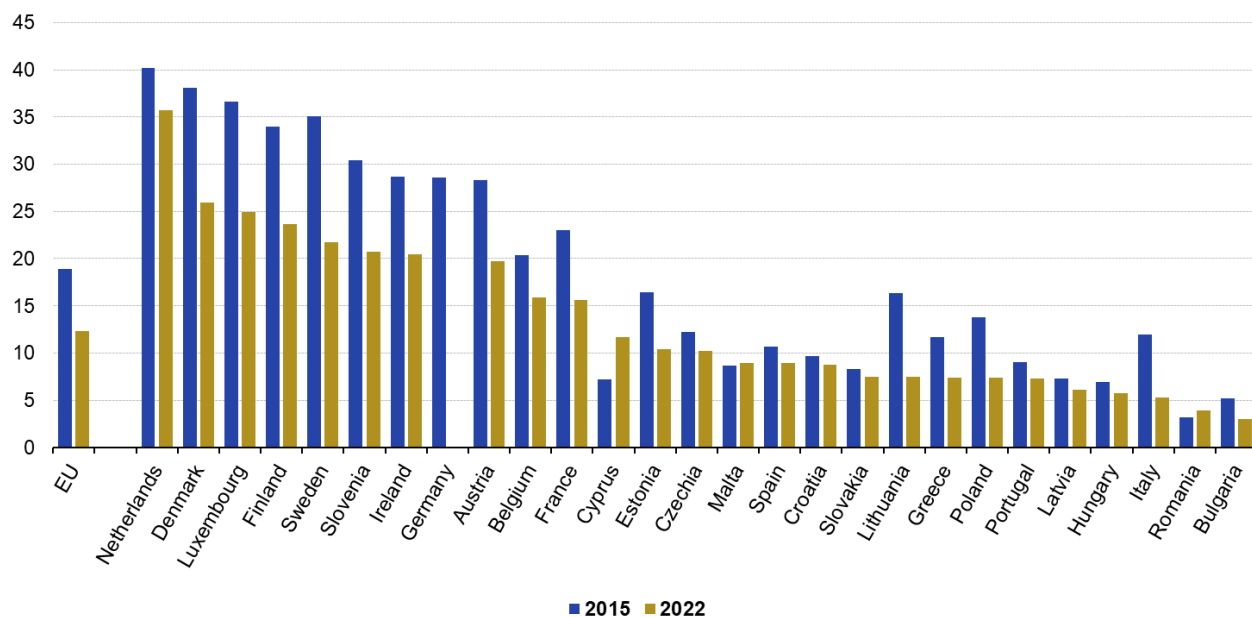
## Public engagement

Dedicating one's free time to voluntary activities has been shown to enhance wellbeing and quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

In 2022, 12.3% of the EU adult population aged 16 or over participated in formal voluntary activities. This is a decrease from 18.9% in 2015, when this data was last collected. A pronounced decline in formal volunteering was seen in most EU countries during this period, which included the years of the COVID-19 lockdowns. The biggest decreases were recorded in Sweden (-13.4 pp), Denmark (-12.2 pp), Luxembourg (-11.7 pp) and Finland (-10.3 pp). In Italy and Lithuania, the share of people participating in formal volunteering activities dropped by half (from 12% to 5.3% in Italy and from 16.3% to 7.5% in Lithuania).

<sup>1</sup>see for example Anderson, N. D., Damianakis, T., Kröger, E., Wagner, L. M., Dawson, D. R., Binns, M. A., Bernstein, S., Caspi, E., Cook, S. L., & The BRAVO Team. (2014). The benefits associated with volunteering among seniors: A critical review and recommendations for future research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(6), 1505-1533.

## Formal volunteering, 2015 and 2022



2022: EU is estimate. Germany: data not available.

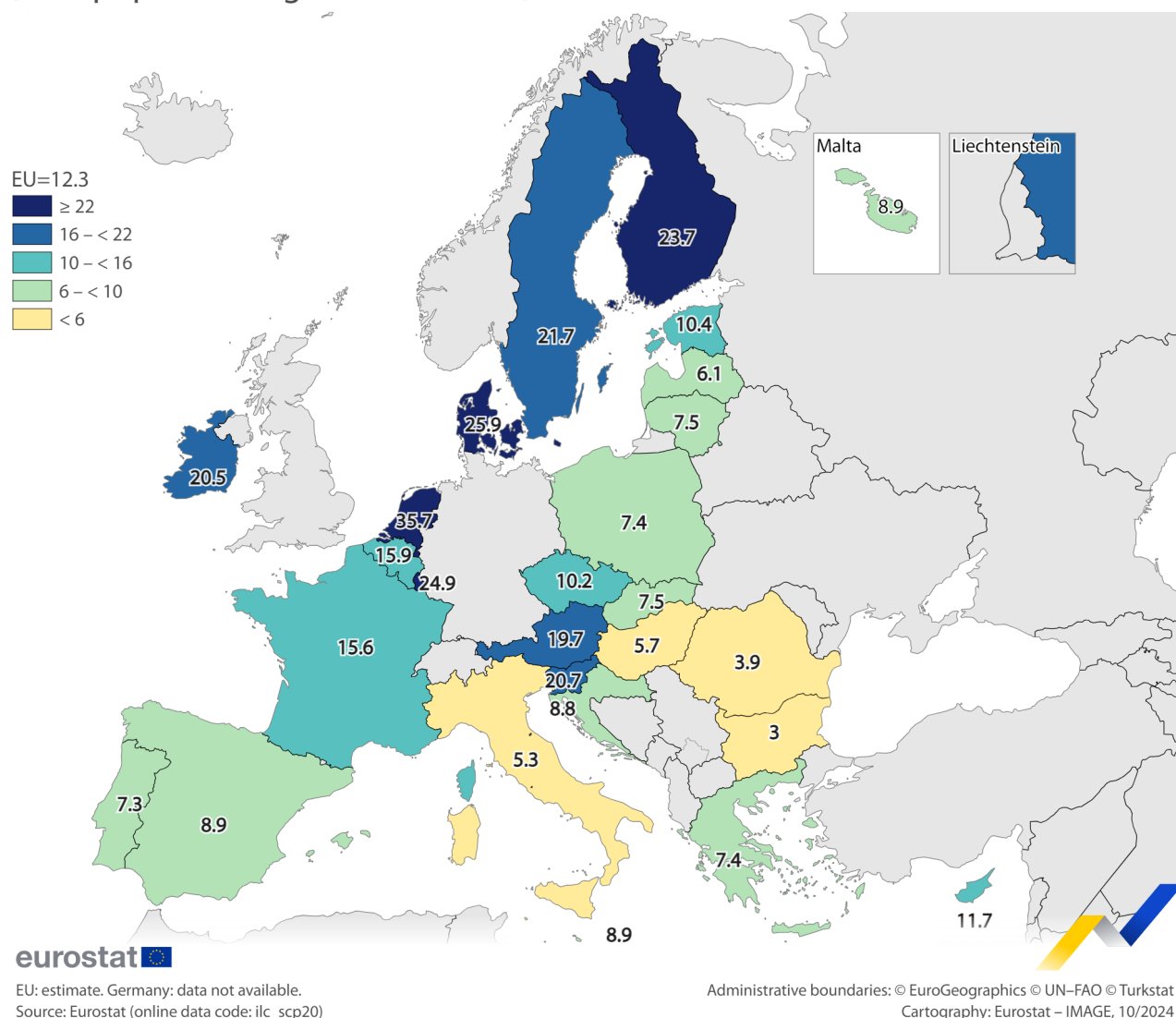
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**Figure 1: Participation in formal voluntary activities 2015 and 2022 (% of population aged 16 and over)**  
**Source: Eurostat (ilc\_scp20)**

Map 2 provides an insight into how participation in formal volunteering has changed across EU countries. Again, in the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg, more than 22% of people over 16 participate in some kind of voluntary activity. On the other hand, in Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary this share is below 6%.

# Formal volunteering in the EU, 2022

(% of population aged 16 and over)

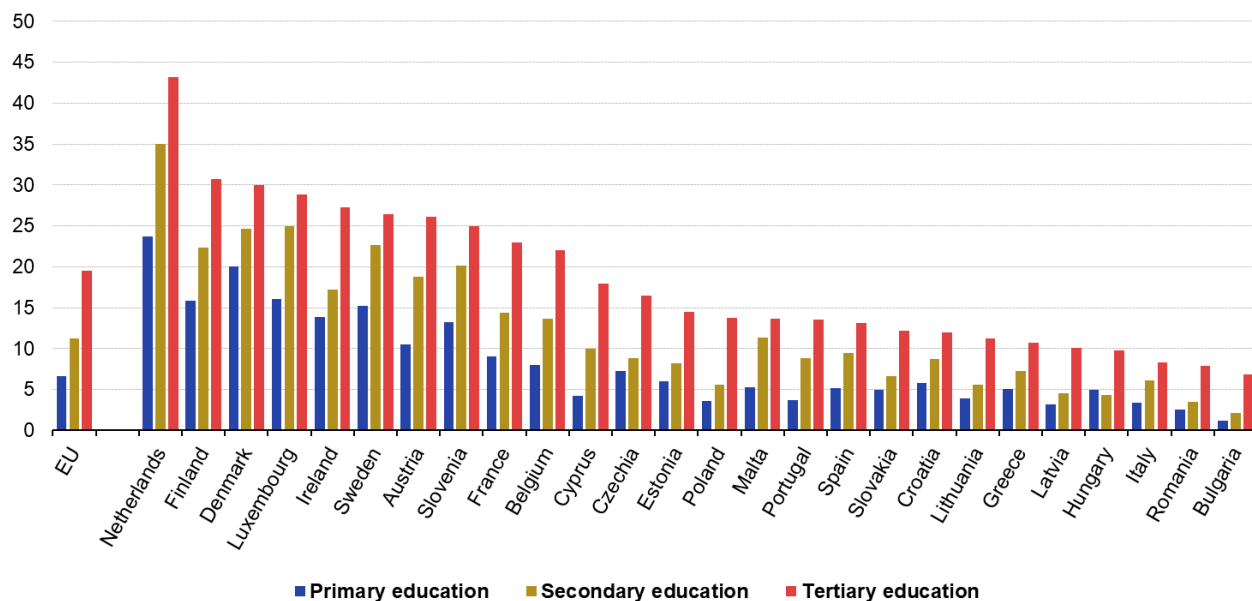


**Map 2: Participation in formal voluntary activities in the EU, 2022 (% of population aged 16 and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc\_scp20)**

Figure 2 reveals that people with tertiary education were most likely to participate in formal voluntary activities in every EU country. At EU level, 19.5% of those with tertiary education participated in formal voluntary activities, while this share was 11.2% among those with secondary education and 6.6% among those with primary level education. The same pattern applies to almost all EU countries. There is only one exception: Hungary, where, in 2022, the share of those participating in voluntary activities among people with primary education was slightly higher than among those with secondary education (4.9% vs 4.3%).

The biggest differences between the share of people with tertiary education and share of people with primary level education participating in volunteering were observed in the Netherlands (19.5 pp difference), Austria (15.6 pp) and Finland (14.9 pp), while the smallest difference was seen in Italy and Hungary (both 4.9 pp). In relative terms, the largest differences were in Bulgaria, where people with higher level education were 5.7 times more likely than those with primary level education to volunteer, Cyprus (4.3 times more likely), Poland (3.8 times) and Portugal (3.6 times).

## Participation in formal voluntary activities by level of education, 2022



EU: estimate

Germany: data not available

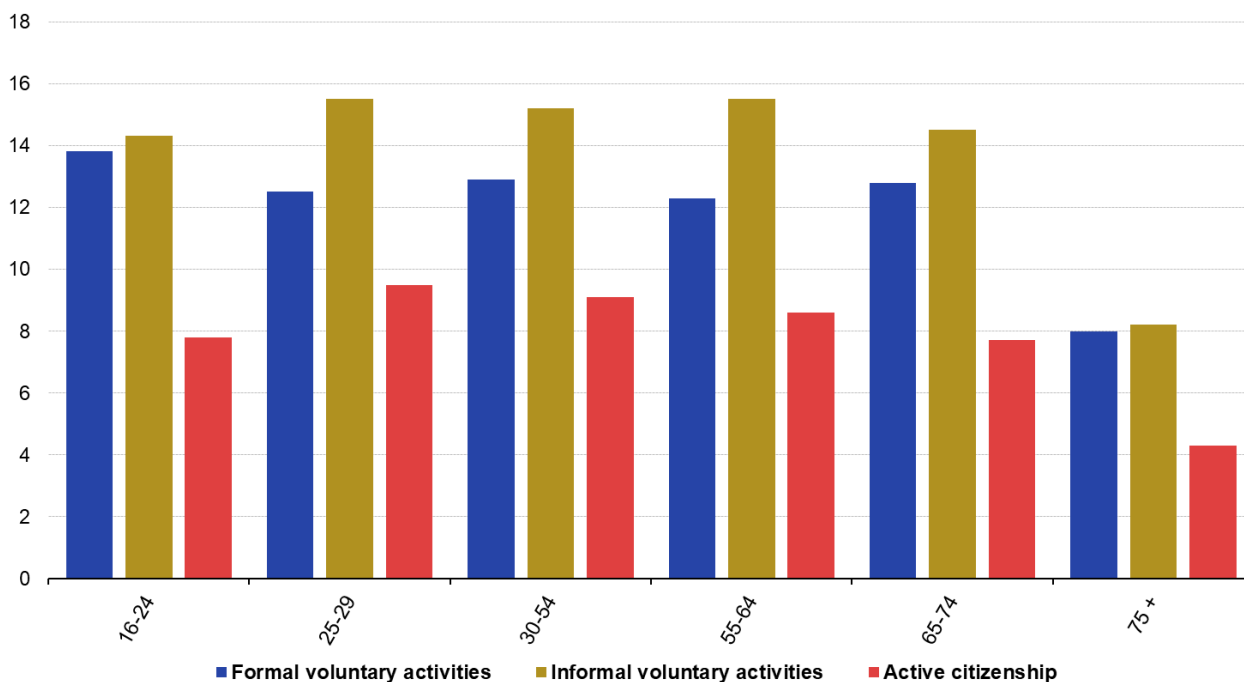
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc\_scp19)

eurostat

**Figure 2: Participation in formal voluntary activities by level of education, 2022 (% of population aged 16 and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc\_scp19)**

Figure 3 shows how the propensity to participate in active citizenship and formal and informal volunteering changes with age. Participation in formal volunteering is most prevalent among young people (16–24-year-olds): 13.8% of people in this age group participate in formal volunteering activities. Informal volunteering is more widespread amongst those aged 25-64 (ranging between 15.2% and 15.5%). Active citizenship engagement is comparatively lower for all age groups. The proportion of active citizens is highest amongst those aged between 25 and 54 (between 9.1% and 9.5%). The lowest rate of active engagement is among those aged 75 and over, for all three indicators.

### Public engagement by age group, 2022 (% of population aged 16 and over)



All data are estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc\_scp19)



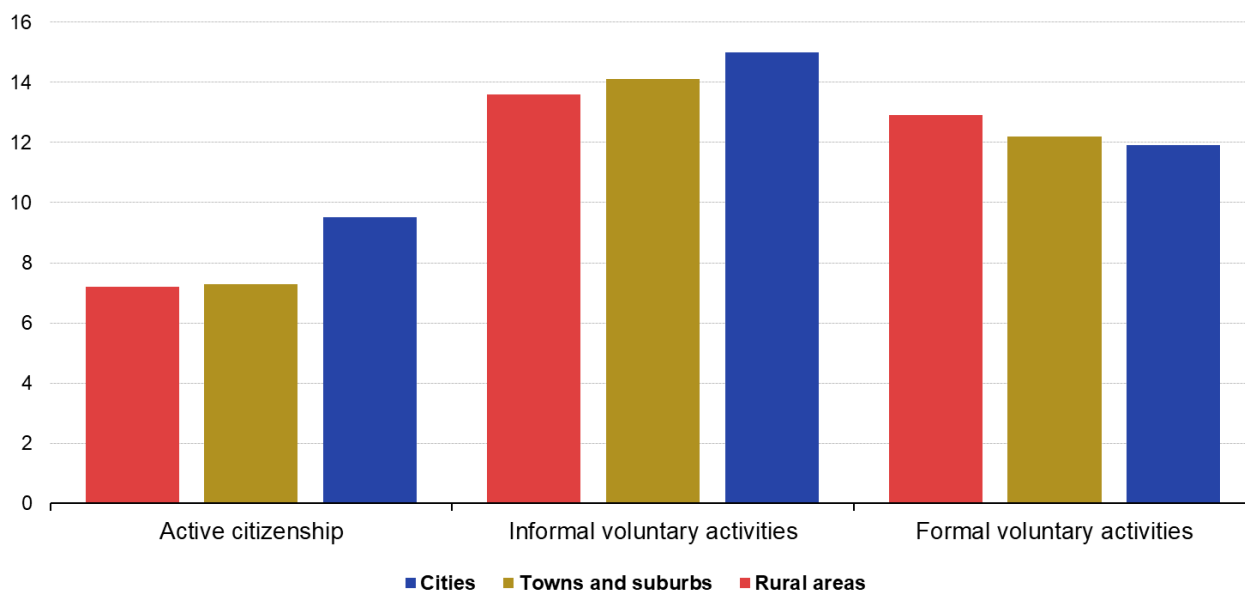
**Figure 3: Persons participating in formal/informal voluntary activities or active citizenship by age group, 2022 (% of population aged 16 and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc\_scp19)**

If we look at the effects of the degree of urbanisation on people’s propensity to participate in voluntary activities, we see that formal volunteering is less common in cities than in towns, suburbs and rural areas, but the opposite is true for informal volunteering and especially for active citizenship. The share of city-dwellers participating in active citizenship is 2.3 pp higher than the share of people living in rural areas. But the share of city-dwellers participating in formal voluntary activities is 1 pp lower than the share among the rural population (see Figure 4).



## Public engagement by degree of urbanisation, 2022

(% of population aged 16 and over)



All data are estimates.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ilc\_scp20)

eurostat

**Figure 4: Public engagement by degree of urbanisation, 2022 (% of population aged 16 and over) Source: Eurostat (ilc\_scp20)**

### Source data for tables and graphs

- [Quality of life — Governance and basic rights](#)

### Data sources

The material in this article on active citizenship and volunteering is derived from the [EU's statistics on income and living conditions \(EU-SILC\)](#). Within the [quality of life module](#), 13 variables are collected on social and cultural participation as well as 7 on wellbeing. Data on active citizenship and formal and informal volunteering was collected in 2015 and 2022 and will be repeated every 6 years. For the purpose of the ad hoc module, active citizenship was defined as: • participation in the activities of a political party or a local interest group; • participation in a public consultation; • peaceful protest including signing a petition; participation in a demonstration; • writing a letter/email to a politician; • writing a letter/email to the media.

Attending meetings connected with these activities is included, while voting is not.

Formal volunteering is defined as any un-paid, non-compulsory activity that is structured through an organisation, a formal group or a club, including charitable or religious organisations. By contrast, informal volunteering activities are not part of any organisation. They encompass helping other people (including family members not living in the same household) for example, by cooking, taking care of people, taking people for a walk, or doing their shopping; helping animals; other informal voluntary activities such as cleaning a beach/forest. Respondents were asked whether or not they participated in such voluntary activities during the 12-month period prior to the data collection.

Data regarding voter turnout is made available by the [European Parliament](#). This information may be used to as a proxy measure for citizens' participation in EU, national or local public affairs. Turnout figures refer to the share of eligible voters who participate in an election; this includes people who cast a blank or invalid ballot paper. Note that in Belgium, Greece, Cyprus and Luxembourg, voting is compulsory.

## Context

The quality of democratic institutions, civil society and political culture generally constitutes an important aspect of the quality of life experienced by European citizens. The protection of human rights, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and the elimination of discrimination and corruption are all reflected in our levels of satisfaction with, and trust in, institutions. Moreover, active citizenship and participation in civic society, are fundamental aspects linked to an individual's quality of life, linked to the accountability of governments and public institutions.

The [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) brings together in a single document the fundamental rights protected in EU law in six different areas: dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice. The Charter became legally binding with the entry into force of the [Treaty of Lisbon](#) in December 2009.

The Europe for Citizens programme aimed to encourage direct participation by citizens in EU affairs, promoting dialogue between the EU institutions, civil society organisations and municipalities. The programme ran from 2004 and, in the 2014-2020 programming period, focused on actively involving European civil society in shaping EU policy (civil dialogue), as well as enhancing European citizens' awareness of remembrance and the history of the EU.

The [European Citizens' Initiative](#) is a mechanism through which citizens can participate in and influence EU policy. When an initiative has gathered 1 million signatures from European citizens, the European Commission must take follow-up action.

## Other articles

- [All articles on quality of life](#)
- [Quality of life indicators](#) (online publication)

## Database

- [Quality of life](#) , see:

Material living conditions (qol\_mlc)

Productive or other main activity (qol\_act)

Health (qol\_hlt)

Education (qol\_edu)

Leisure and social interactions (qol\_lei)

Economic security and physical safety (qol\_saf)

Governance and basic rights (qol\_gov)

Natural and living environment (qol\_env)

Overall experience of life (qol\_lif)

- [Income and living conditions \(ilc\)](#) , see:

EU SILC ad-hoc modules (ilc\_ahm)

2015 — Social and cultural participation (ilc\_scp)

2013 — Personal well-being indicators (ilc\_pw04)

## Dedicated section

- [Quality of life](#)
- [Income and living conditions](#)

## Publications

- [Quality of life in Europe - Facts and Views](#)

## External links

- [European Commission — European pillar of social rights](#)
- [European Commission — European Citizens' Initiative](#)

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