

**Institute for  
Volunteering  
Research**

# research bulletin

National survey of volunteering and charitable giving

## Volunteering among groups deemed at risk of social exclusion

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**CabinetOffice**  
Office of the **Third Sector**

**This research bulletin is one of a series published by the Institute for Volunteering Research to explore and disseminate aspects of *Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving (2007)*.**

The Cabinet Office 2004 Spending Review Public Service Agreement 4 (PSA 4), Element 1 aimed:

‘to increase voluntary and community engagement, especially amongst those at risk of social exclusion.’

Individuals who belong to certain Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, have a disability or limiting, long-term illness (LLI), or have no formal qualifications were seen as at particular risk of social exclusion <sup>1,2</sup>.

Helping Out is the most in-depth and comprehensive study of volunteering and charitable giving ever undertaken in England. The study provides a detailed insight into volunteering and giving behaviour, particularly among those at risk of social exclusion, as these groups were deliberately over-sampled.

The focus of Helping Out is on formal volunteering (through an organisation), and PSA 4 is targeted on regular (at least once a month) volunteering, and so this bulletin concentrates on regular formal volunteering. However those volunteers at risk of social exclusion are proportionately more likely to participate informally <sup>3</sup>. Thus, the findings presented here do not tell the whole story, and should be seen only as an indicator of changes in formal volunteering behaviour, itself only one part of the PSA 4 target.

## Has volunteering increased among people from groups at risk of social exclusion?

According to Helping Out, among the groups deemed at risk of social exclusion the level of regular formal volunteering in the past twelve months was 32 per cent, as compared to 42 per cent for those not at risk, and 39 per cent for all respondents.

Table 1 shows the changes in regular formal volunteering over a one year period (approximately the years 2005 and 2006), as reported by respondents to Helping Out <sup>4</sup>. Only the fall in volunteering among those with a LLI is statistically significant. The proportion of all people formally volunteering on a regular basis is shown to have risen slightly. However, volunteering among the at risk group appears to have fallen. The fall is largely attributable to a significant decline in volunteering among those with a LLI <sup>5</sup>. This conceals an increase in participation among Black respondents. At the time of Helping Out, volunteers from all at risk groups were underrepresented. However, Black volunteers appeared to have closed the gap somewhat.

**Table 1: Extent of regular formal volunteering by groups at risk of social exclusion**

	At risk %	Of which:				Not at risk %	All sample %
		LLI %	No quals %	Black %	Asian %		
Regular formal volunteers (2006)	32	28	31	36	29	42	39
Regular formal volunteers (2005)	33	30	31	33	30	41	38
Base (unweighted)	797	457	334	189	348	1358	2155

Base: All respondents answering volunteering questions. Don't know/refusal responses excluded.

## Where do at risk groups volunteer?

Volunteers from at risk groups were overrepresented in the voluntary and community sector, and underrepresented in the public and private sectors <sup>\*6</sup>. They were more likely than the core sample to volunteer in religious organisations <sup>\*</sup> (although this was almost wholly attributable to BME groups <sup>\*7</sup>), and also in the field of health and disability, particularly those volunteers with a LLI <sup>8</sup>. Volunteers with a LLI were also overrepresented in local community groups <sup>9</sup>. This may be attributable to people being involved in self-help groups relating to their disability.

Volunteers from all at risk groups were underrepresented in sports volunteering <sup>\*10</sup>. White respondents were three times as likely to volunteer in sport as Black respondents. BME volunteers were twice as likely as those not at risk of exclusion to be involved in overseas aid, and disaster relief volunteering. This may represent a commitment to their countries of origin. Only 22 per cent of volunteers with no qualifications <sup>\*</sup> and 20 per cent of those with a LLI participated in an educational group <sup>\*</sup>, compared to 31 per cent of all volunteers. Finally, all at risk groups were relatively excluded from volunteering in the conservation field <sup>11</sup>.

## Which roles are at risk groups underrepresented in?

At risk groups were less likely than the core sample to volunteer in roles requiring managerial and/or organisational skills. Those with no qualifications were unlikely to be involved as a committee member <sup>\*12</sup>. Only 17 per cent of Asian volunteers were involved in this capacity <sup>\*</sup>. Whereas Black people were more likely to help by organising or running events <sup>13</sup>, relatively few (35%) of those with no qualifications were involved in this way <sup>\*</sup>.

## What routes do at risk groups take into volunteering?

Routes into volunteering were broadly similar for all groups of volunteers. A main difference was that at risk groups (other than Asians) were less likely to have been attracted by a leaflet or poster \*. Asian volunteers were more likely to have used technology, either television \*<sup>14</sup> or the internet \*<sup>15</sup> to find out about volunteering. Those with no qualifications (5 per cent), a LLI (3 per cent) or from an Asian background (5 per cent) were less likely to have found out through their employer than all volunteers (7 per cent); this may be explained by these groups being less likely to be in employment \*<sup>16</sup>.

## What motivates at risk groups to volunteer?

Generally at risk groups' motivations for volunteering were similar to those of the core sample. However, at risk groups were more likely to start volunteering as part of their religious belief \*<sup>17</sup>, or because they saw a need in the community <sup>18</sup>. The first difference is largely attributable to the high proportion of Asian and Black people actively practising their religion. Asian and Black volunteers were more likely to cite a need in the community as a reason for starting to volunteer \*<sup>19</sup>. This was also a high motivating factor for 39 per cent of volunteers with a LLI.

People from all at risk groups were less likely to cite the needs or interests of family and friends as a reason for starting to volunteer \*<sup>20</sup>. This was across the board, but particularly apparent among Asian volunteers (15 per cent of whom cited this as a reason). It may be that this reflects a relative social isolation among this group.

## What are the benefits of volunteering for at risk groups?

Volunteers with no qualifications or a LLI were more likely to recognise the personal benefits of volunteering than those not at risk of exclusion. Members of at risk groups were more likely to cite personal achievement \*<sup>21</sup>, gaining new skills \*<sup>22</sup> and enhanced employability \*<sup>23</sup> as a benefit. Volunteering may be perceived as a more accessible way of gaining skills and experience, which is particularly important for entry into the labour market for these groups.

## Why aren't more people from at risk groups getting involved?

At risk groups were less likely to cite not having enough spare time as a reason for not volunteering \*<sup>24</sup>, perhaps because a higher proportion were not in employment. Those with a LLI \*<sup>25</sup>, and to lesser extent, with no qualifications \*<sup>26</sup> were more likely to cite illness or disability, and/or being too old <sup>27</sup> as a reason for not volunteering.

At risk groups were more likely to cite worries about a threat to safety <sup>28</sup>, and being out of pocket <sup>29</sup>. (Only 7 per cent of volunteers had all their expenses reimbursed.) Also fear of losing benefits was more likely to prevent those with no qualifications <sup>30</sup> or a LLI <sup>31</sup> from volunteering. The most popular response to the question ‘What would make it easier to get involved?’ among the PSA 4 group was ‘nothing’ <sup>\*32, 33</sup>.

## Implications

To meet the PSA 4 target, this analysis suggests that policy should aim to encourage the public and private sectors to involve more volunteers from at risk groups. The faith sector, local community groups, health and disability and disaster relief organisations are more likely to involve groups at risk of social exclusion. Volunteer intermediary bodies should use this knowledge to strengthen links with these organisations, and place individuals from the different groups accordingly. They should also consider ways in which volunteering opportunities can be organised to accommodate people with different personal circumstances, particularly those seeing their health as an obstacle. More use should be made of the internet in order to attract Asian volunteers in particular. More work is required to open up the fields of sport, education and conservation to groups at risk of social exclusion.

At risk groups appeared underrepresented in more skilled volunteering roles. Given that these respondents particularly recognised the skills development aspect of volunteering, it would seem reasonable for policy initiatives to encourage volunteering as a way of learning new skills. In turn, organisations involved in any policy initiative should be encouraged to involve newly skilled volunteers in an organisational capacity. Organisations should pay expenses as a matter of routine to ensure that disadvantaged groups are not financially penalised for volunteering. Simultaneously, the message that welfare benefits are not threatened by engaging in volunteering must be reinforced. At a local level, volunteering should be seen by Jobcentre Plus as a potential route into employment rather than a barrier to benefits entitlement.

Among those from at risk groups who do volunteer, this research has found they are more likely to cite religious belief and a need in the community as motivations. This might suggest that respondents saw the notion of community more as a sense of shared experience (ie illness or ethnicity) than of place, and that there is more likely to be a need in these communities when people are socially excluded. The research has also shown that there are people in these communities prepared to tackle these needs. More attention and support should be given to exploring how voluntary action in mutual and self-help activities can act as a route away from exclusion.

## The Helping Out study

The Helping Out study was carried out by NatCen and the Institute for Volunteering Research, on behalf of the Office of the Third Sector within the Cabinet Office. It was designed as a follow-up study to the 2005 Citizenship Survey, to represent the general (adult) population in England. Face-to-face interviews were carried out in October 2006 to February 2007. In total, 2,156 respondents were interviewed for the main sample (a response rate of 62 per cent), and 549 for a separate minority ethnic boost sample (to supplement the numbers of Black and Asian respondents interviewed; a response rate of 51 per cent).

This research bulletin presents additional findings relating to formal volunteering among groups at risk of social exclusion. The main findings can be found in Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis Paine, A. and Davis Smith, J. (2007) *Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving* London: the Cabinet Office. Full copies of the report are available on-line (pdf format) at: [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector/Research\\_and\\_statistics/third\\_sector\\_research.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Research_and_statistics/third_sector_research.aspx)

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## Notes

- 1 Cabinet Office (2006) *Autumn performance Report 2006*. London: the Cabinet Office.
- 2 These groups are referred to in Helping Out as groups at risk of social exclusion, and hence are referred to in the same way in this bulletin.
- 3 Kitchen, S., Michaelson, J., Wood, N. and John, P. (2006) *2005 Citizenship survey; active communities topic report* Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 4 Respondents were asked about their volunteering behaviour over the last 12 months, and one to two years ago. The latter period approximates to the period when the Citizenship Survey was carried out.
- 5 The \* symbol is used in this bulletin to indicate that any change or difference is statistically significant. Due to the small sample sizes for some analyses of sub-groups, analyses on these groups are less likely to prove statistically significant for a given difference than for larger sample sizes.
- 6 72 per cent of volunteers from groups at risk of social exclusion participated within the voluntary and community sector against 65 per cent of all volunteers. 19 per cent of volunteers from groups at risk participated within the public sector compared to 23 per cent of all volunteers. 9 per cent of volunteers from at risk groups were in the private sector compared to 11 per cent of all volunteers.
- 7 For example 49 per cent of Asian volunteers participated in religious organisations compared to 24 per cent of all volunteers.
- 8 33 per cent of volunteers with a LLI participated in the field of health and disability compared to 22 per cent of all volunteers.
- 9 25 per cent compared to 17 per cent of all volunteers.
- 10 14 per cent compared to 22 per cent of all volunteers.
- 11 5 per cent of volunteers classified as at risk compared to 8 per cent of all volunteers.
- 12 17 per cent compared to 28 per cent of all volunteers.
- 13 58 per cent compared to 50 per cent of all volunteers.
- 14 8 per cent compared to 2 per cent of all volunteers.
- 15 10 per cent compared to 4 per cent of all volunteers.
- 16 59 per cent of the PSA 4 group were classified as 'not working' compared to 40 per cent of the core sample.
- 17 23 per cent compared to 17 per cent of all volunteers.
- 18 35 per cent compared to 29 per cent of all volunteers.
- 19 40 and 39 per cent of Asian and Black volunteers respectively cited a need in the community as a motivation to start volunteering.
- 20 23 per cent compared to 29 per cent of all volunteers.
- 21 92 per cent compared to 88 per cent of all volunteers.
- 22 68 per cent compared to 61 per cent of all volunteers.
- 23 29 per cent compared to 23 per cent of all volunteers.
- 24 71 per cent compared to 82 per cent of all respondents who were not formal volunteers in the last year but would like to help.
- 25 84 per cent compared to 22 per cent of all respondents who were not formal volunteers in the last year but would like to help.
- 26 33 per cent compared to 22 per cent of all respondents who were not formal volunteers in the last year but would like to help.
- 27 50 per cent of those with a LLI, and 25 per cent of those with no qualifications compared to 20 per cent of all respondents.
- 28 37 per cent compared to 27 per cent of all respondents who were not formal volunteers in the last year but would like to help.
- 29 32 per cent compared to 25 per cent of all respondents who were not formal volunteers in the last year but would like to help.
- 30 15 per cent compared to 7 per cent of all respondents who were not formal volunteers in the last year but would like to help.
- 31 13 per cent compared to 7 per cent of all respondents who were not formal volunteers in the last year but would like to help.
- 32 24 per cent compared to 21 per cent of all respondents who were not volunteers in the last year.
- 33 For all respondents, the most popular response to this question was 'more spare time' (31 per cent.)



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