

# SPORTAUS

## AUSPLAY™

### A focus on volunteering in sport

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[sportaus.gov.au](http://sportaus.gov.au)



# A focus on volunteering in sport

Sport is an important part of Australian culture. Around 12 million adults aged 15+ in Australia participate in some kind of sport-related activity every year. Much of this is 'organised' sport where we participate through a club, association or venue and some is more independent where, for example, we go for a bike ride with our family or for a run on our own.

But involvement in and enjoyment of sport is not limited to playing or participating. Many of us take on those essential jobs – non-playing roles such as coaches, officials, administrators or team managers – that allow organised sport to happen all over the country.

Being involved in sport in any way has many benefits and these relate to more than fitness and physical health – we know that many participants in sport are motivated by social aspects such as being part of a team, meeting up with friends, having fun or managing their mental health. And these benefits are not limited to players – they can also be experienced by those who are involved in sport in other ways.

In AusPlay, we count the number of adults aged 15+ who take on non-playing roles in sport. Although younger Australians aren't included in this count, we shouldn't forget that junior sport is also supported by those under the age of 15 – any sports field on a weekend is likely to have under-15s officiating and helping out with the youngest players and teams.

This report presents high-level information on non-playing roles across all sport and physical activities. It then focuses on those in organised sport since this is where the vast majority occur. It examines whether these roles are all taken on by volunteers, who gets involved the most, what roles they take on and in which sports. The report also draws on other research projects conducted by Sport Australia that have identified different volunteer types and what drives them to become involved.

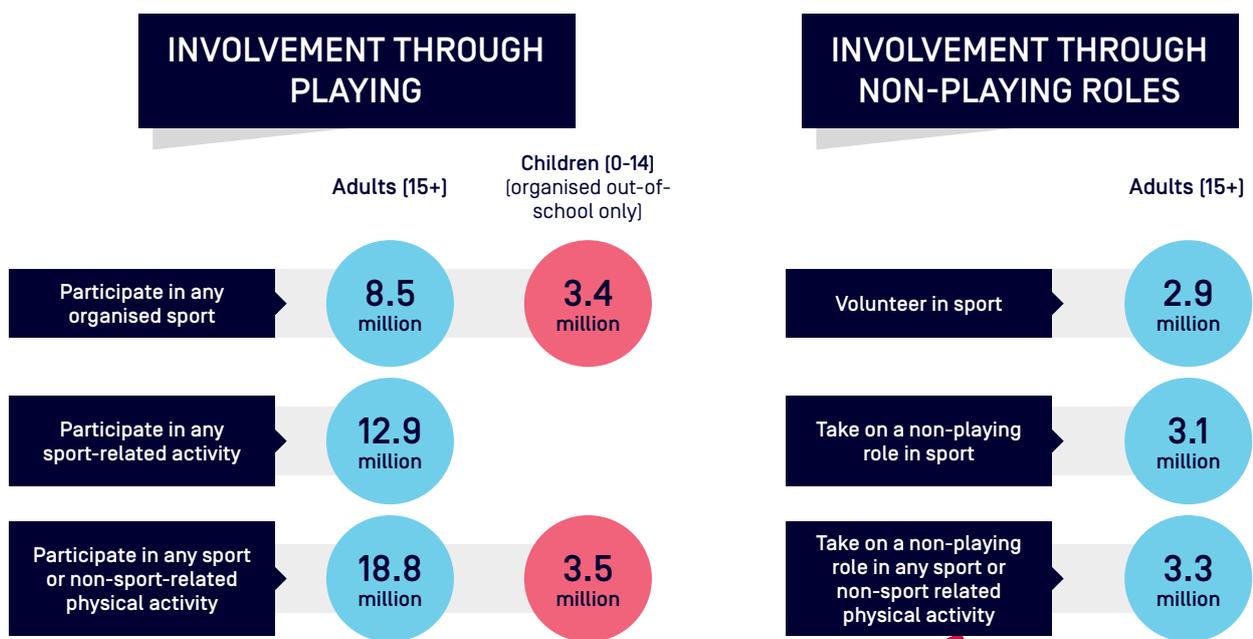


# Volunteering in sport – key findings

Each year in Australia, **8.5 million adults** aged 15+ and **3.4 million children** aged 0-14 participate in organised sport. That equates to **40% of adults** and **69% of children**.

The nature of organised sport is such that it doesn't happen on its own. Without a substantial amount of effort, it wouldn't happen at all. Tasks such as maintaining and setting up venues, developing fixtures, coaching or managing teams, sitting on club committees or cooking sausages on the BBQ all combine to enable sport to run.

In AusPlay we call these tasks 'non-playing roles', and they are almost always undertaken by volunteers. Overall, 3.1 million Australians aged 15+ take on non-playing roles in sport and 2.9 million of these consider themselves to be volunteers (even if they receive some form of compensation).



The most common non-playing roles in sport are coach and official, followed by administrators and team managers.

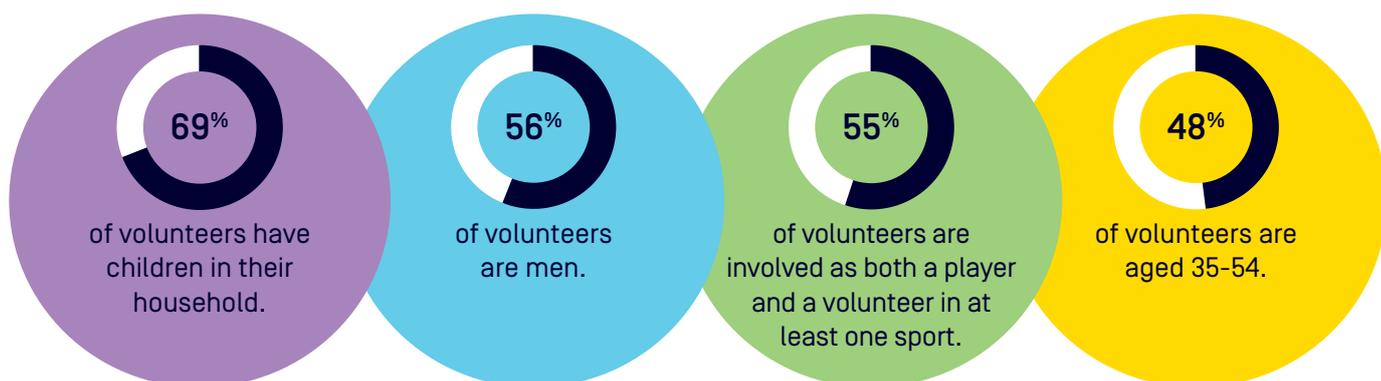
Coaches and officials are more likely to be men, while team managers are more often women.

Our youngest coaches and officials (aged 15-17) are more likely to be paid than older volunteers.

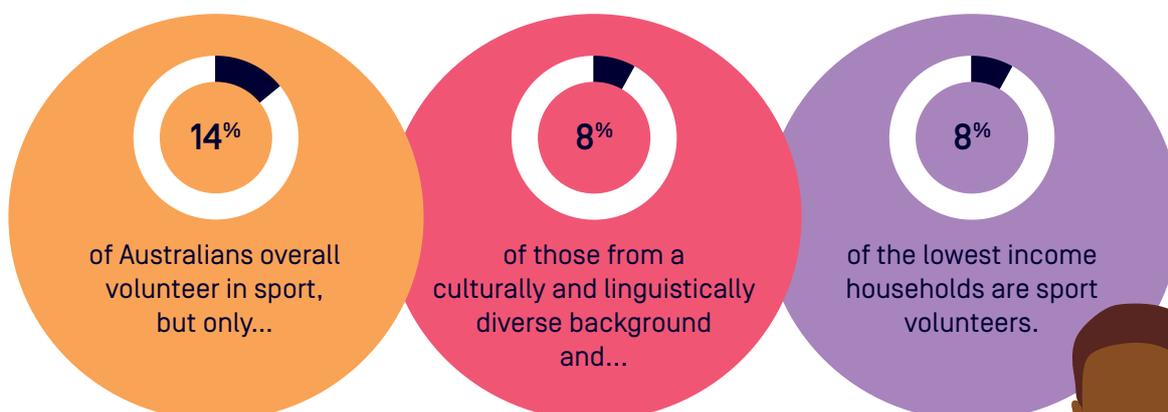


Most people who volunteer in a sport already have a strong connection to that sport – they are often players themselves or have children playing – and are motivated to volunteer simply to facilitate their own or their children’s activity.

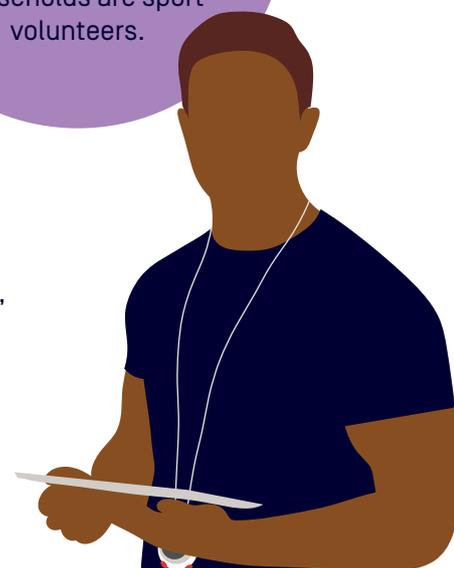
Volunteers in sport are slightly more likely to be male than female - reflecting the profile of participants – and in the 35-54 year old age group – reflecting the prevalence of parents in the volunteer workforce.



People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are less likely to both participate in organised sport and volunteer in sport than those from English-speaking backgrounds. Other groups that are under-represented in organised sport are people with disability and those on the lowest household incomes.



The sports with the most volunteers are, unsurprisingly, those that are most popular to play. Football/soccer takes out the top spot, with 467,000 volunteers, followed by Australian football [374,000] and Netball [305,000].



# About this report

## AusPlay

AusPlay is a national participation survey that commenced in 2015 and includes 20,000 telephone interviews among adults aged 15+ every year. Apart from providing information about their own participation, parents/guardians of children under the age of 15 are asked about the physical activities undertaken by one [randomly selected] child outside of school hours.

### AusPlay asks about more than playing sport

As well as measuring how many adults are players or participants in sport and physical activity, AusPlay also asks respondents about any non-playing roles they take on, giving us an all-round view of involvement. They are asked:

- If they take on any non-playing roles in up to three activities
- What roles they take on
- Whether they receive any compensation [payment or other benefits] for doing the role
- Whether they consider themselves a volunteer, even if they receive some form of compensation.

In order to provide the most reliable estimates possible, the data presented in this report is generated using an aggregated dataset covering multiple years of survey results. Unless otherwise stated, the time period used is July 2019 to June 2021, since this is when the questions on non-playing roles were expanded to include compensation.

## Sport Volunteering National Plan

Sport Australia is committed to helping sports grow their volunteer base and in August 2021 launched the **Sport Volunteering National Plan**. The plan provides insight into different types of volunteers who get involved for a wide range of reasons, drawing on recent stakeholder engagement<sup>1</sup> as well as earlier market segmentation work.<sup>2</sup> It presents a roadmap for how sports can attract and retain these different types of volunteers in the coming years and allow more Australians to enjoy the benefits of involvement in sport.

### Did you know?

3.1 million Australians aged 15+ take on the non-playing roles that support organised sport and the 8.5 million adults and 3.4 million children who play it.



1. [Sport-Australia-The-Future-of-Sport-Volunteering-Insights-Report-2021.pdf \[sportaus.gov.au\]](#)

2. [Market Segmentation - Volunteers | Clearinghouse for Sport](#)

# Glossary



This report mentions both non-playing roles and volunteering. While these may seem like the same thing, there is a distinction between the two, outlined below. In reality we find that the vast majority of non-playing roles are undertaken by those who consider themselves to be volunteers.

## Australians

To be eligible for inclusion in AusPlay, a respondent needs to have been resident in Australia for the previous 12 months. This may include temporary and permanent residents as well as Australian citizens.

## Compensation

Something received in return for carrying out a non-playing role, including straightforward payment or other goods and services but excluding reimbursement of expenses for travel, meals or phone calls. Questions about compensation were added to AusPlay in July 2019.

## Non-playing roles

Roles such as coaches, officials, administrators or team managers, as well as carrying out more general tasks such as ground set up. The AusPlay survey includes questions about up to three non-playing roles undertaken by adults aged 15+ in up to three activities in the previous 12 months.

## Non-sport-related activity

Physical activity that is typically not associated with a sporting organisation, for example, gym/fitness, bushwalking, recreational dance.

## Organised sport

Sport-related activity that is done through an organisation (like a club or a gym) or at a venue (like an oval or pool).

## Participation

Unless otherwise stated, participation means taking part in a sport or physical activity at least once in the previous 12 months.

## Participation estimate

The estimated number of the target population (either adults or children) who would have provided a particular response had all Australian residents been asked.

## Participation rate

The proportion of Australians who self-report that they participated or were involved in a sport or physical activity at least once in the previous 12 months.

## Sport-related activity

Physical activity that is typically associated with a sporting organisation, for example, athletics, cycling, football/soccer, netball.

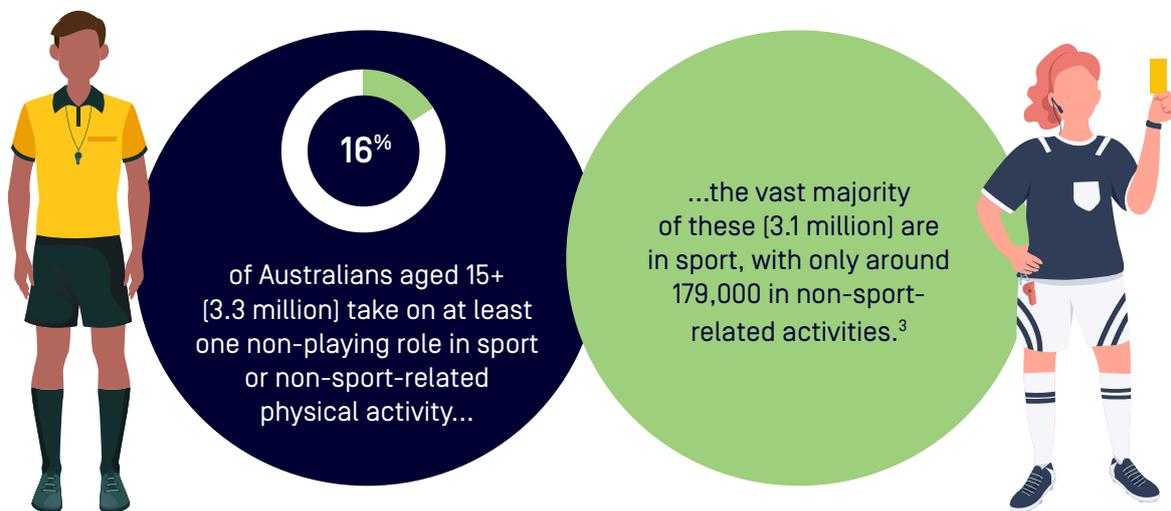
## Volunteers

Those who consider themselves a volunteer, even if they receive some form of compensation. This allows us to distinguish between those who carry out a non-playing role for a living or primarily for the benefits, and those who give up some of their leisure time to help run sport and may or may not receive something in return.

A smiling man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a white t-shirt and a pink visor. He is holding a black clipboard in his left hand and a whistle on a yellow lanyard in his right hand. The background is a solid blue color with a white diagonal shape on the left side.

# Non-playing roles

# Non-playing roles in all sport and non-sport-related physical activities



The proportion of Australians taking on non-playing roles had been relatively stable until the 2020/21 financial year, peaking at 17% in 2018/19. This peak was largely driven by increases in Queensland and Victoria.

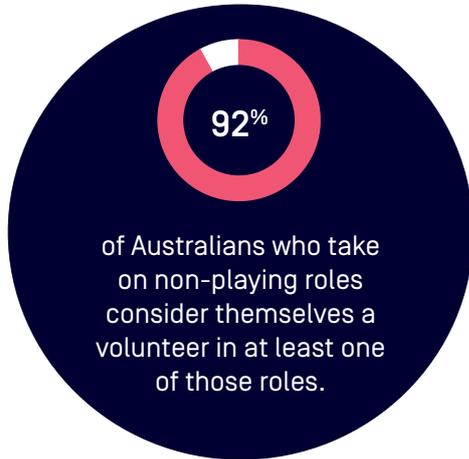
In the last financial year, we may be starting to see the effect of COVID-19 limiting the amount of organised sport and the reluctance of some volunteers to return, which was outlined in our [June 2021 COVID-19 update](#). The decrease in non-playing roles is most pronounced among men.

## NON-PLAYING ROLES OVER TIME\*

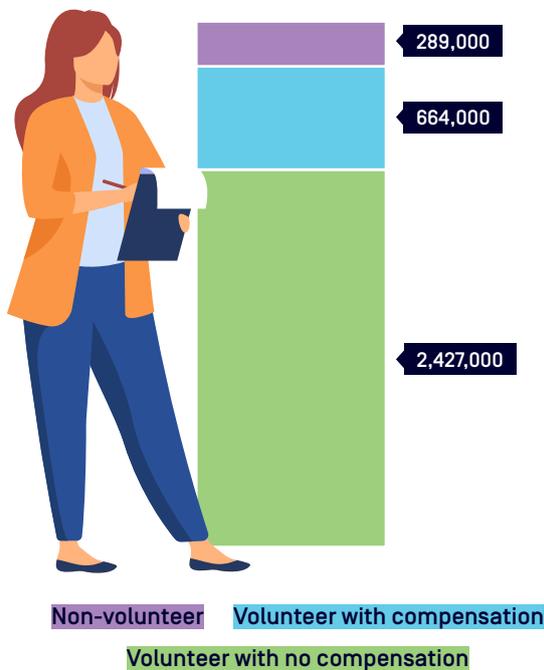


3. Based on aggregated data from October 2015 to June 2021

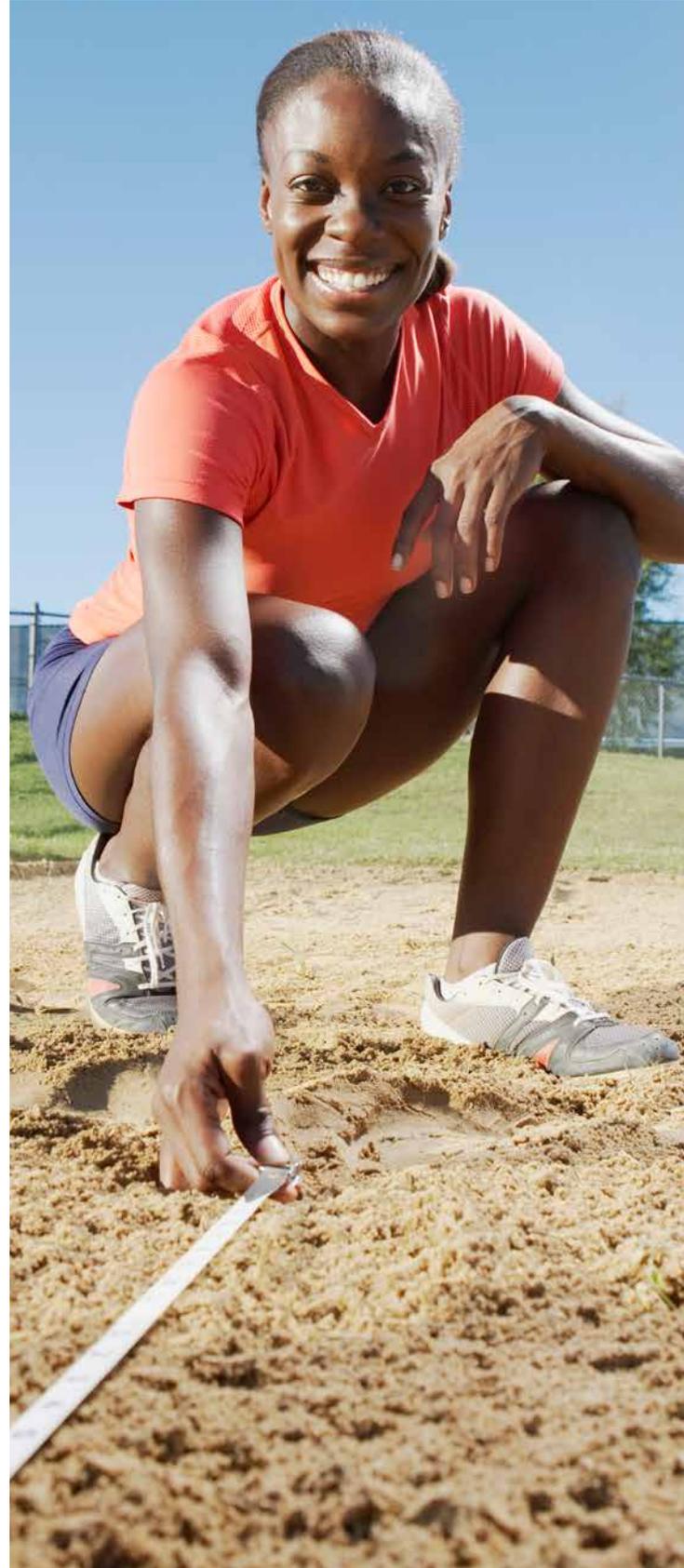
# Are all non-playing roles filled by volunteers?



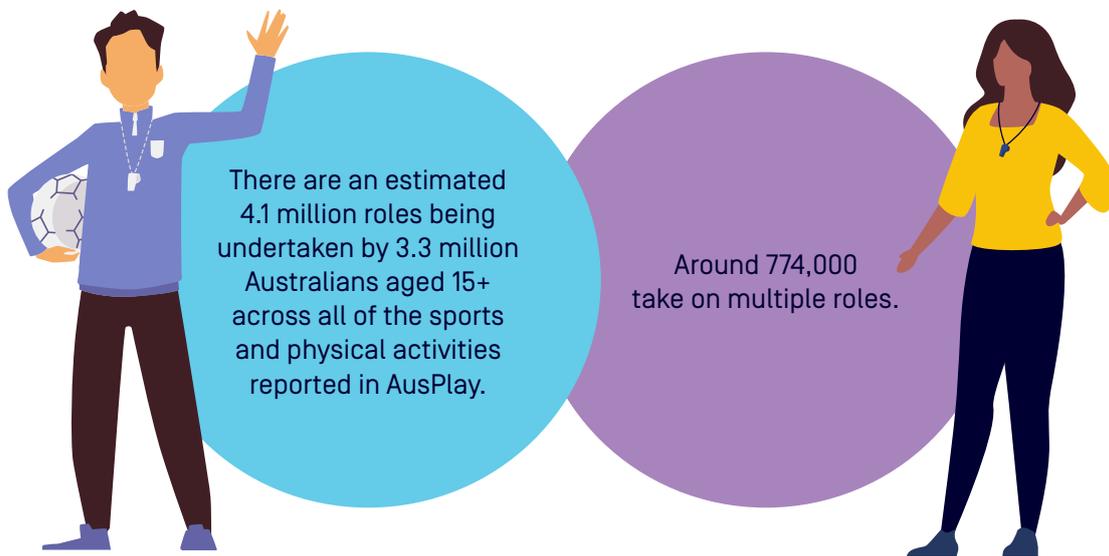
Some receive payment and/or other benefits but most are involved without receiving any compensation.



Note: The total number shown here exceeds 3.3 million because those who take on two or more non-playing roles and get compensated for one but not the others will be counted twice.

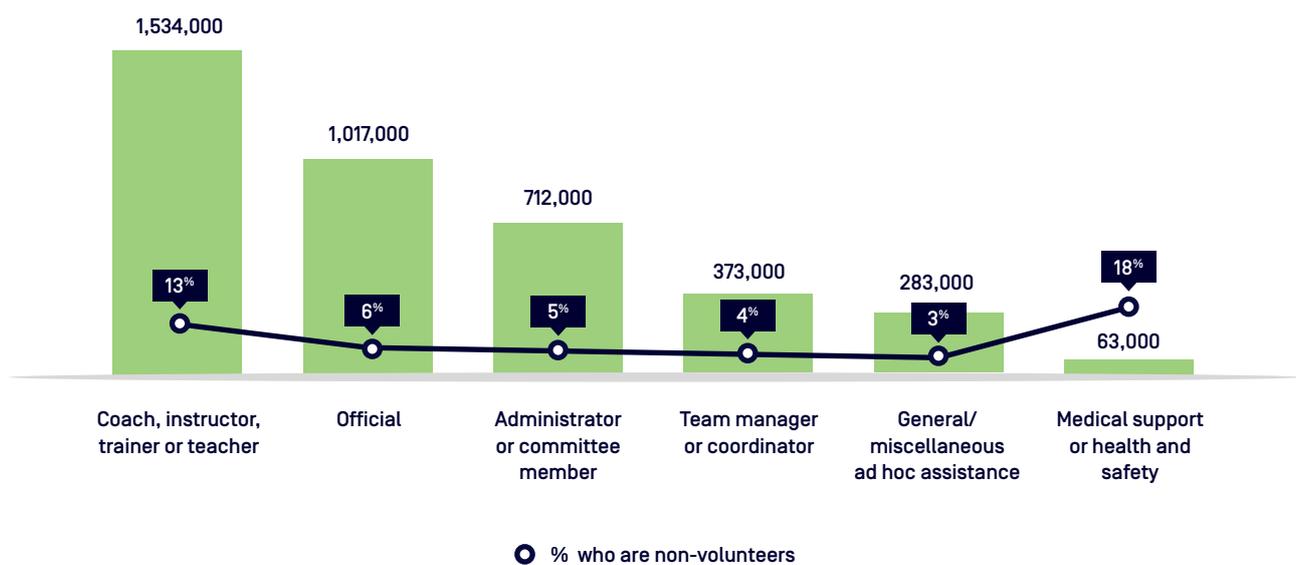


# The most common non-playing role is coaching



As we saw earlier, only a small proportion of non-playing roles in sport and physical activity are carried out by non-volunteers but this varies by role. Those providing medical or health and safety support are most likely to be non-volunteers.

## NON-PLAYING ROLES IN ALL SPORT AND NON-SPORT-RELATED ACTIVITIES

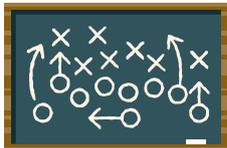


Note: the total number of roles exceeds the total number of people performing them as some people take on multiple roles



# Volunteers in sport

# Why do people volunteer in sport?



This section concentrates on those who consider themselves to be volunteers in sport-related activities, even if they receive some form of compensation. Overall, 14% of adults aged 15+ volunteer in sport – that's around 2.9 million volunteers.

Previous research can provide context to the AusPlay volunteering data. Our market segmentation for volunteers<sup>4</sup> research and the development work for the Sport Volunteering National Plan identified different types of volunteers and how motivations to get involved change with age and life stage.

We found that there are four broad types of volunteers:

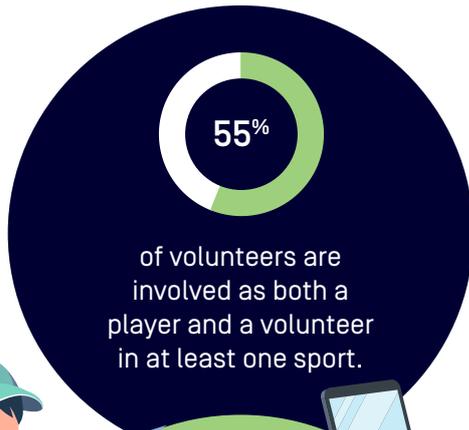


While AusPlay doesn't ask people **why** they volunteer in sport, the data clearly highlights the importance of the first two of these broad types – players and family members [particularly parents].

4. [Market Segmentation - Volunteers | Clearinghouse for Sport](#)

# Who volunteers in sport?

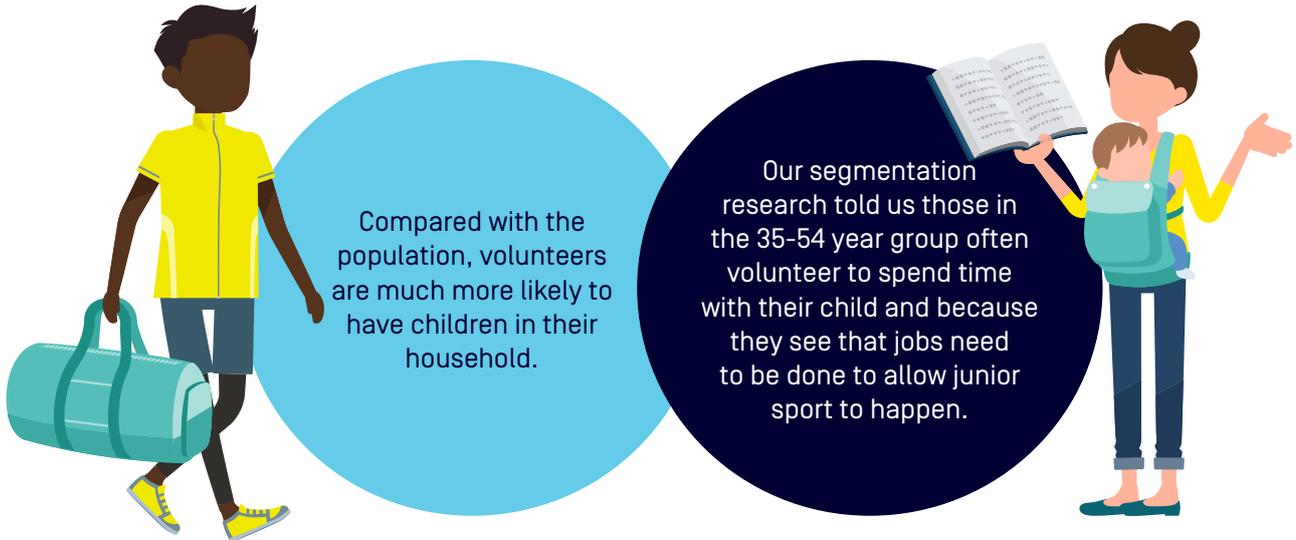
## Players



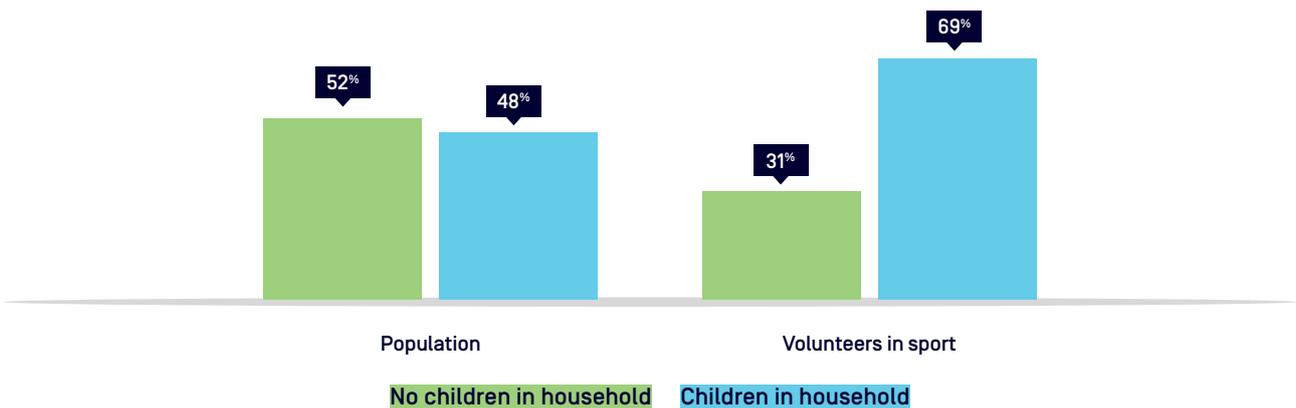
It's not asked in AusPlay but our segmentation research found that ex-players also stay involved beyond their playing days.



## Parents



### VOLUNTEERING IN SPORT BY HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

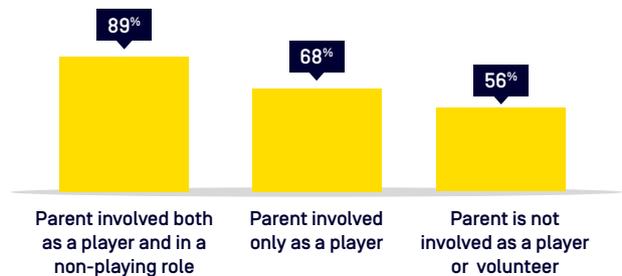


#### Parents and children influence each other

With parents making up more than two-thirds of volunteers, it might be assumed that this is driven by children's participation – children start playing sport and parents help out.

Some of the time this will be the case, but the opposite can also occur. If parents are actively involved in sport, their children are also more likely to play, giving them the opportunity to reap the benefits of sport throughout their lives.

#### CHILD PARTICIPATION BASED ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT<sup>5</sup>



5. AusPlay collects data from only one randomly selected parent and only one randomly selected child in the same household. This data therefore does not consider the influence of both parents on child participation.

## Volunteering peaks in the 35-54 year age group

The prevalence of parents in the volunteering ranks is reflected in the age profile of volunteers – almost half are in the 35-54 age group, an age when parents are most likely to have children playing organised sport.

This means that there are:

- 813,000 15-34 year olds
- 1.4 million 35-54 year olds
- 700,000 over-55s

... giving up their time to keep community sport running. In the population, these age groups are roughly equal, at about a third each.

### VOLUNTEERS BY AGE



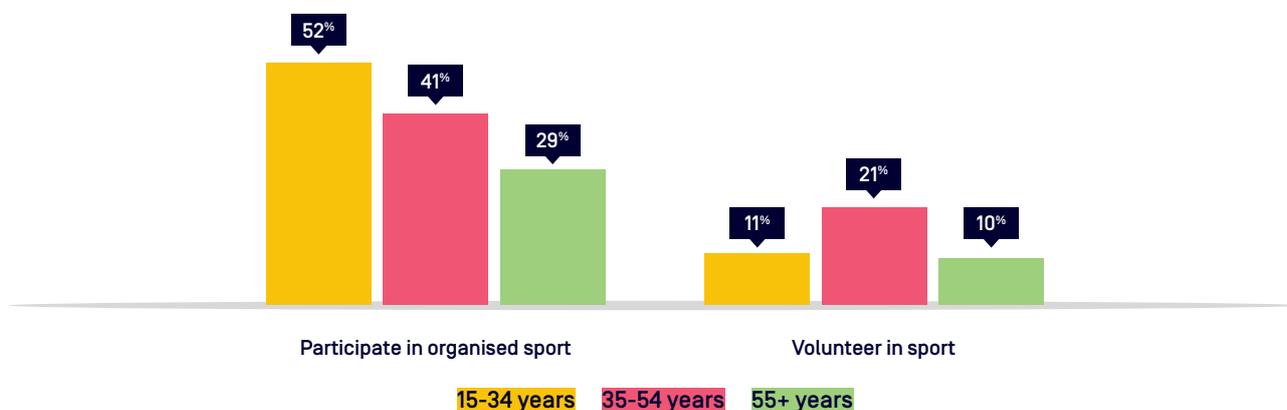
The importance of the 35-54 year age group in volunteering is also illustrated when we look at their participation rates...

... they are less likely to participate in organised sport but more likely to volunteer than younger Australians.



Although they volunteer less, the younger and older age groups also make a significant contribution to organised sport. Our segmentation research told us that young people often volunteer to gain experience to put on their resumé, while older volunteers are frequently motivated by social reasons or because they want to give back to their community.

### PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING RATES IN SPORT BY AGE\*



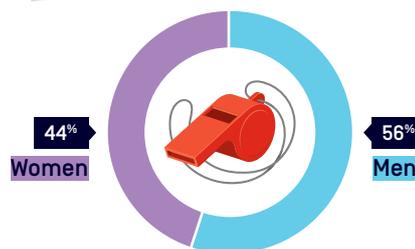
\* % of population in each age group

## Just over half of volunteers in sport are men

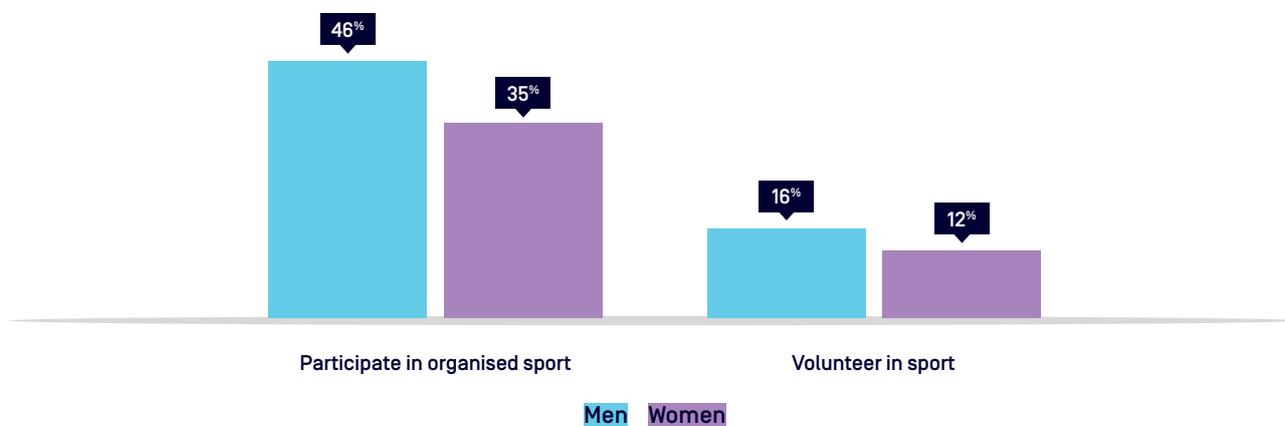
There are 1.6 million men and 1.3 million women volunteering in sport in Australia.

This reflects the profile of organised sport participants generally – women are less likely than men to participate or volunteer.

### VOLUNTEERS BY GENDER



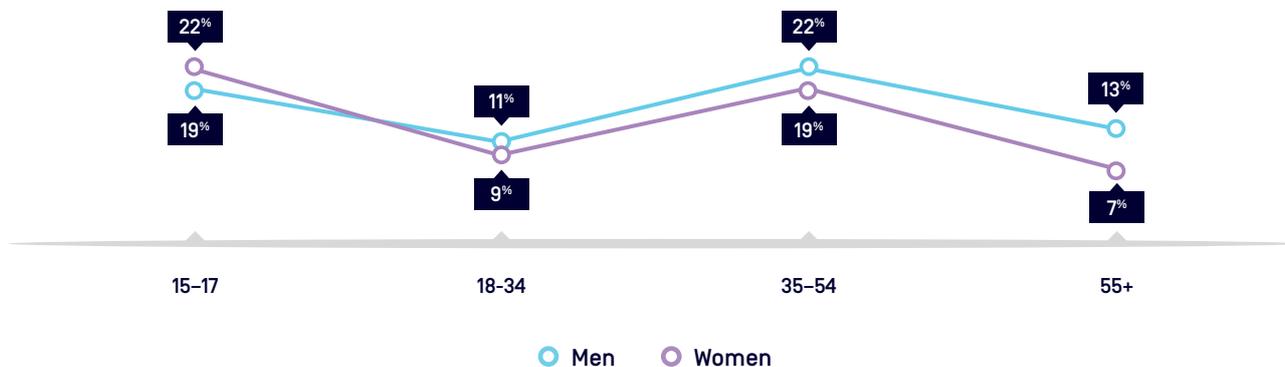
### PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING IN SPORT BY GENDER\*



\* % of adult 15+ population

There is some indication that young adult women may volunteer in sport more than young adult men but this difference is not statistically significant and should be treated with caution.

### VOLUNTEERING IN SPORT BY GENDER AND AGE\*

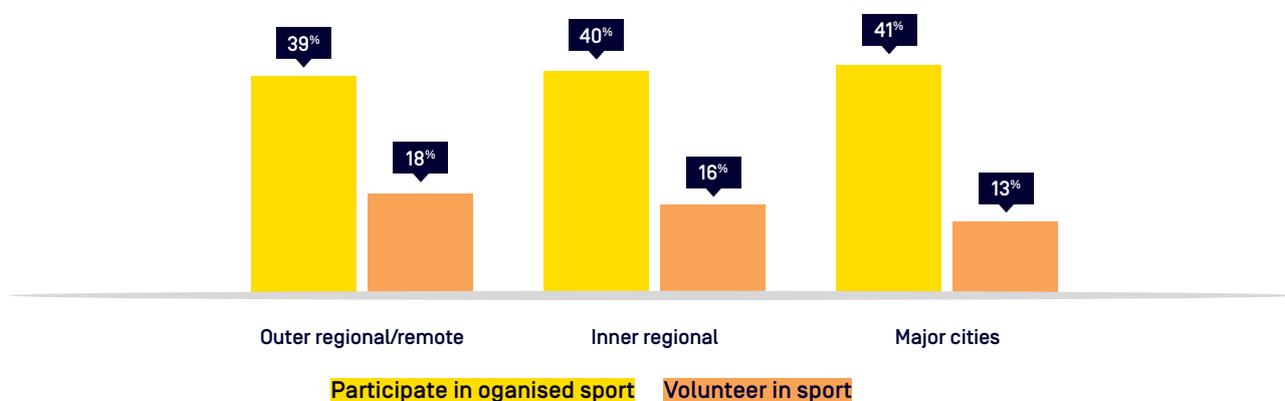


\* % of population in each age group

# Does volunteering differ by location?

Volunteering is more common outside of the major cities where population density is lower, despite participation rates for organised sport being similar across regions. This perhaps reflects the strong role sports clubs play in rural and regional social and community life.

## PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING IN SPORT BY REGION\*



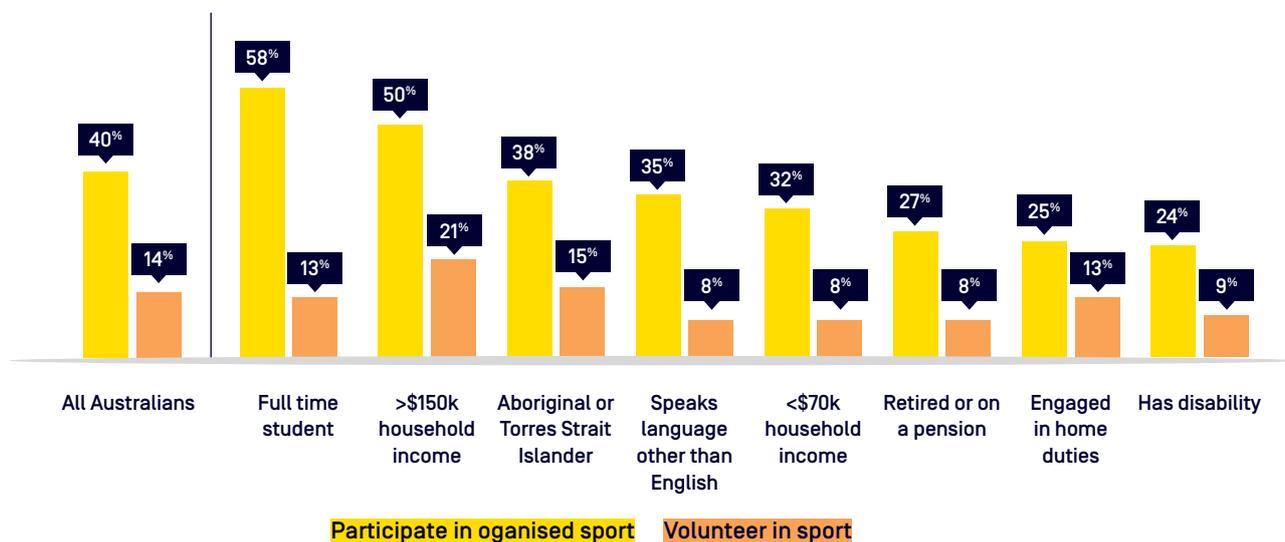
\* % of adult 15+ population in each geographical area



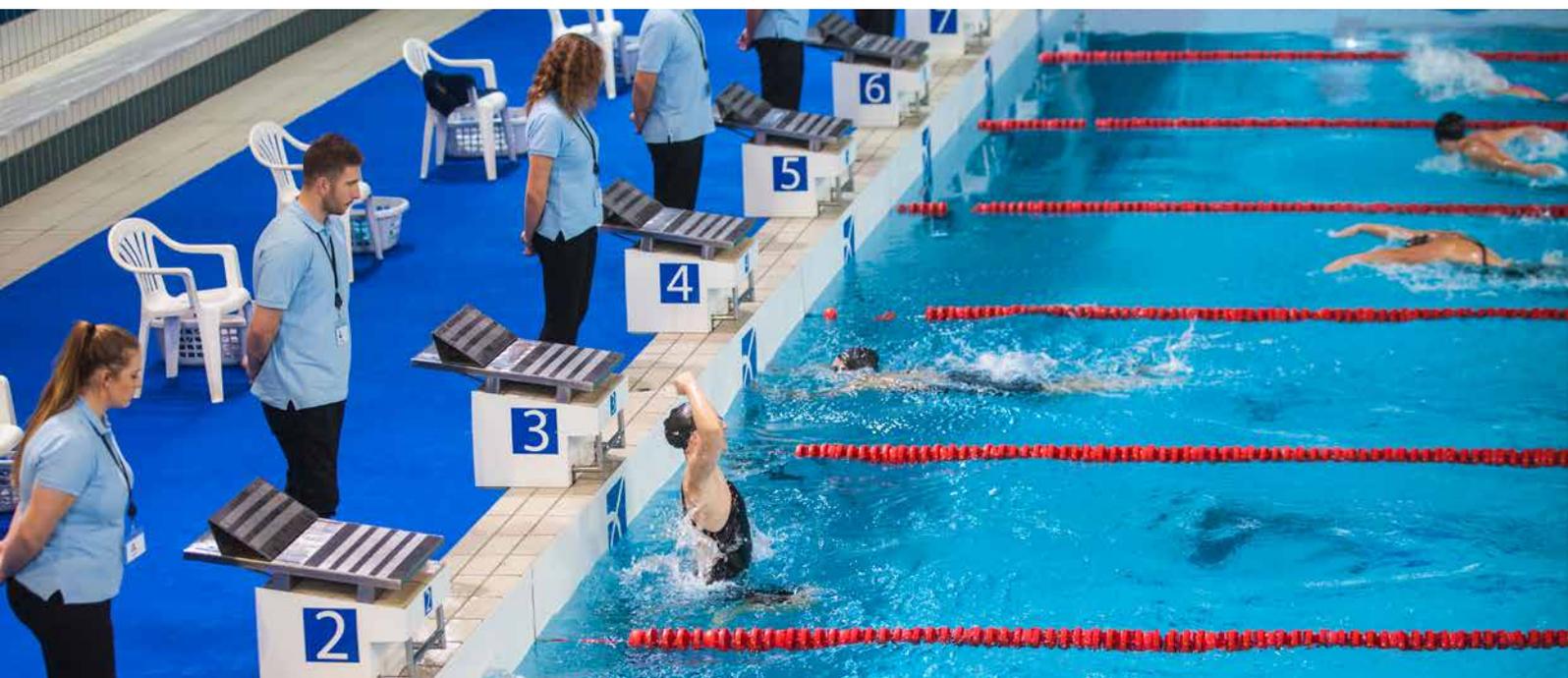
# Can anyone be involved in sport?

We want everyone in the community to have the opportunity to be involved in sport regardless of their background, socio-economic status or physical ability. This section examines if this is currently the case and identifies which groups are under-represented in both participating in organised sport and volunteering in sport.

## INCLUSIVITY OF INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISED SPORT\*



\* % of adult 15+ population in each group





Participation in organised sport is lower than average among those who:

- Have disability
- Are engaged in home duties
- Retired or on a pension
- Have the lowest household incomes
- Speak a language other than English at home.

Not all of these groups are under-represented when it come to volunteering – those engaged in home duties have similar levels of involvement as Australians overall.

There are opportunities to increase both participation in organised sport and volunteering among those in our community who:

- Speak a language other than English at home
- Have the lowest household incomes
- Are retired or on a pension
- Have disability.



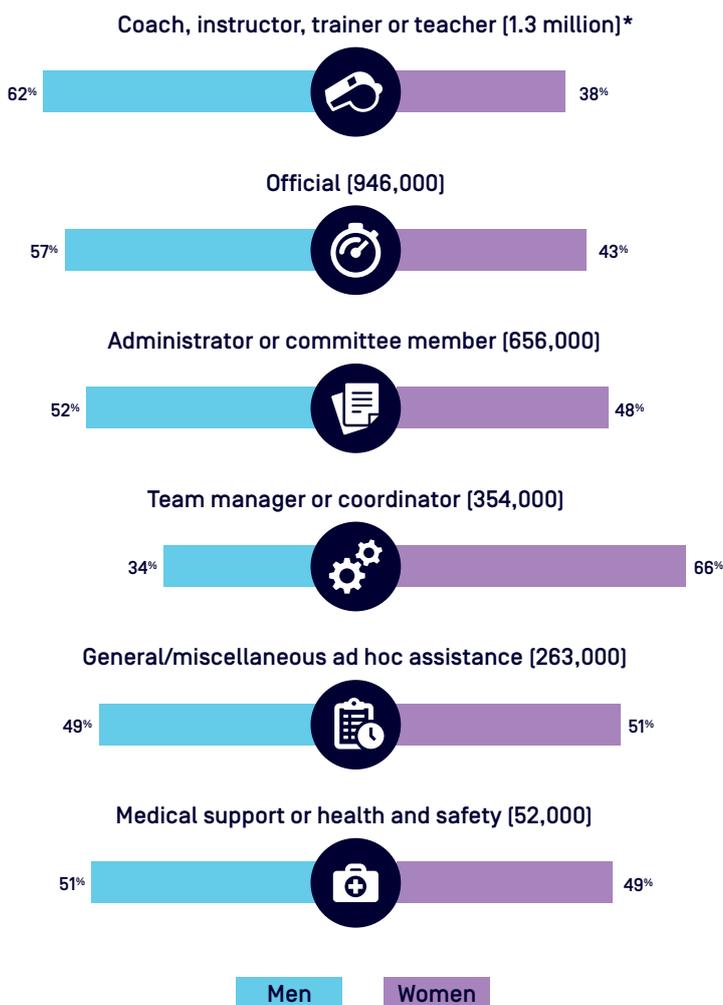
Sport Australia will be working with sports over the coming years, through the **Sport Volunteering National Plan**, to find ways to improve the volunteering experience, broaden its appeal and encourage more of us to get involved.



# Roles in sport volunteering

The gender profiles of three of the six main volunteering roles – general assistance, administrators and medical support – are roughly equal between men and women. Team manager roles are predominantly taken on by women, while coaching and official roles are more likely to be undertaken by men.

## VOLUNTEER ROLES IN SPORT BY GENDER



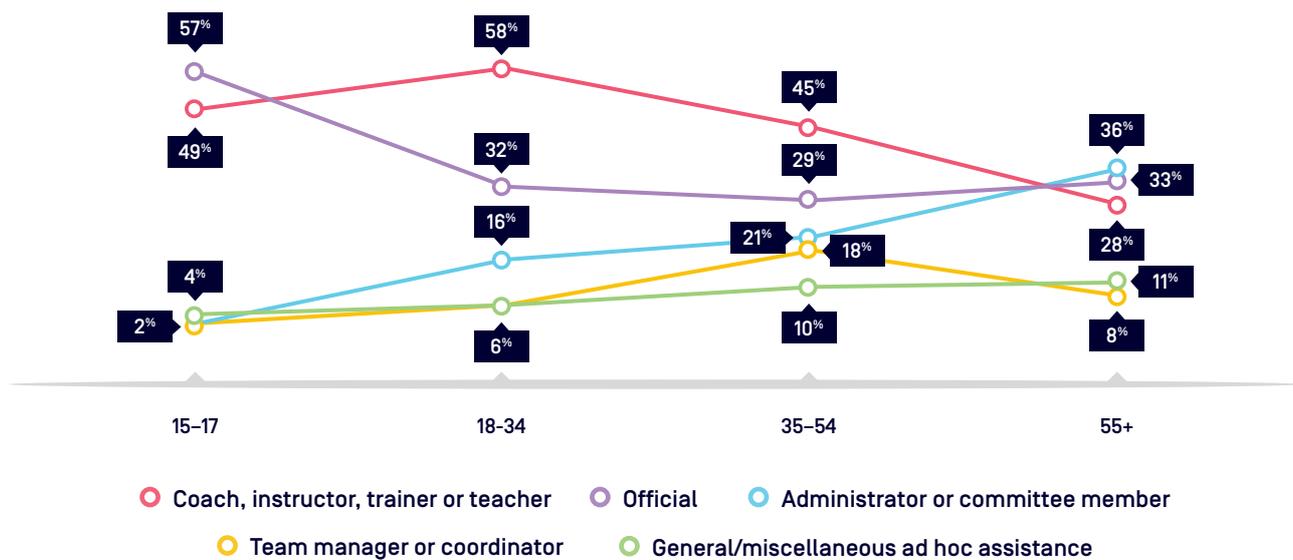
\*numbers of volunteer roles



## Roles change as we get older

Our youngest adult volunteers almost always take on the role of official or coach; among 15-17 year old volunteers, 57% officiate and 49% coach (and some do both). As we get older we are more likely to take on other roles – in particular, the likelihood of getting involved as an administrator or committee member increases with age.

**VOLUNTEER ROLES IN SPORT BY AGE GROUP\***

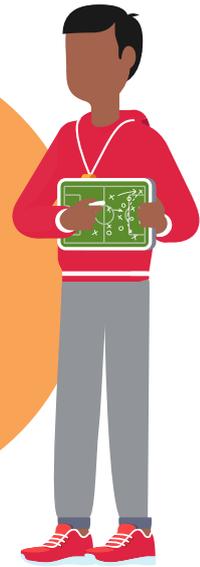
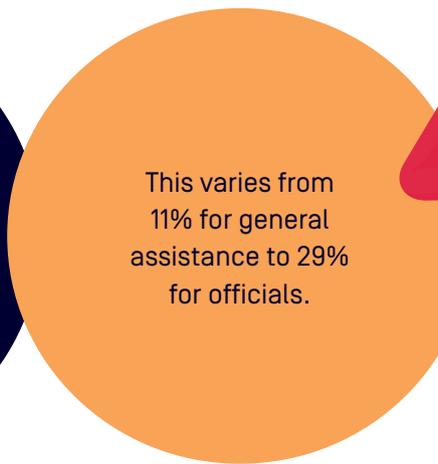
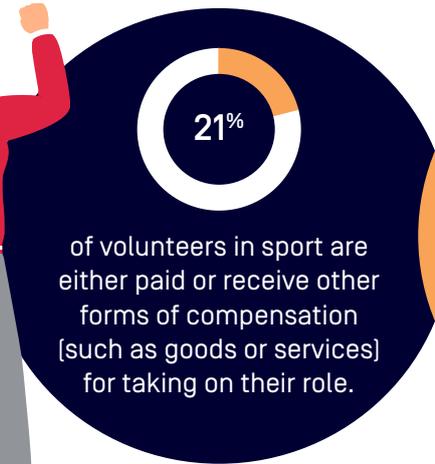


\* % of sport volunteers in each age group

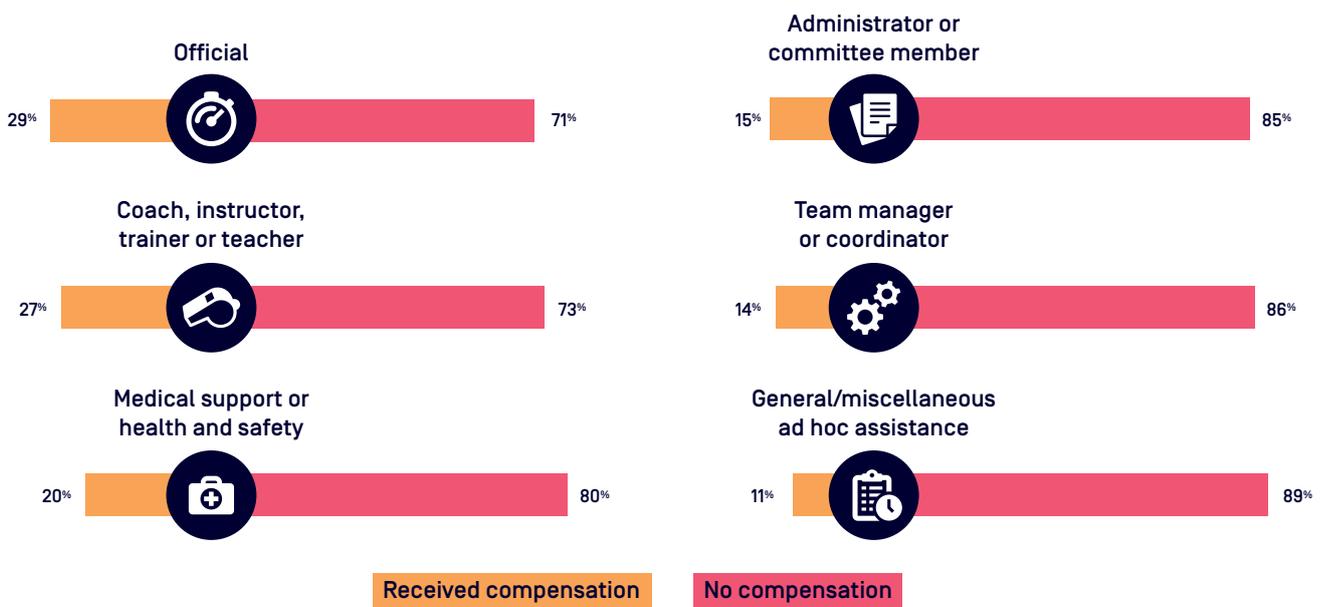
Note: percentages for each age group exceed 100% because some volunteers take on more than one role



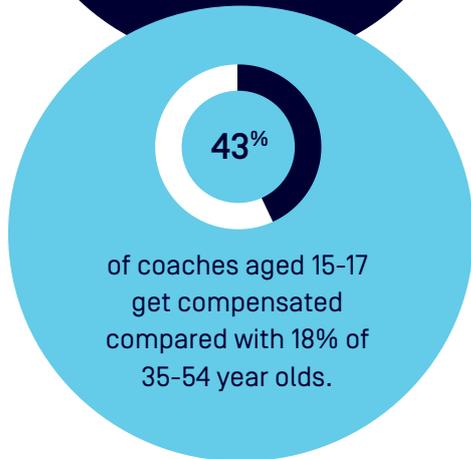
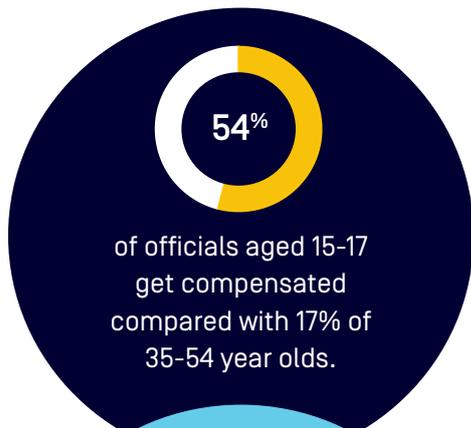
## Officials and coaches are most likely to receive compensation



### COMPENSATION BY ROLE

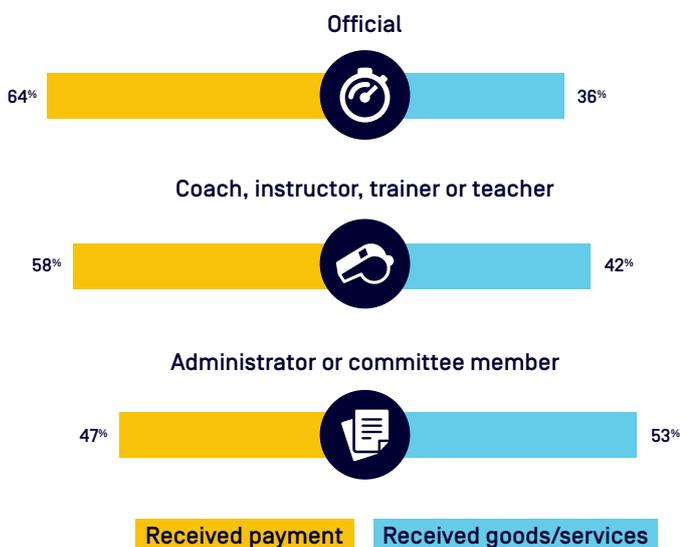


## Younger officials and coaches are more likely to receive compensation



Over half of officials and coaches who received some form of compensation were paid, while administrators were more likely to receive goods/services than payment.

### TYPE OF COMPENSATION



# Sports



# Which sports attract the most volunteers?



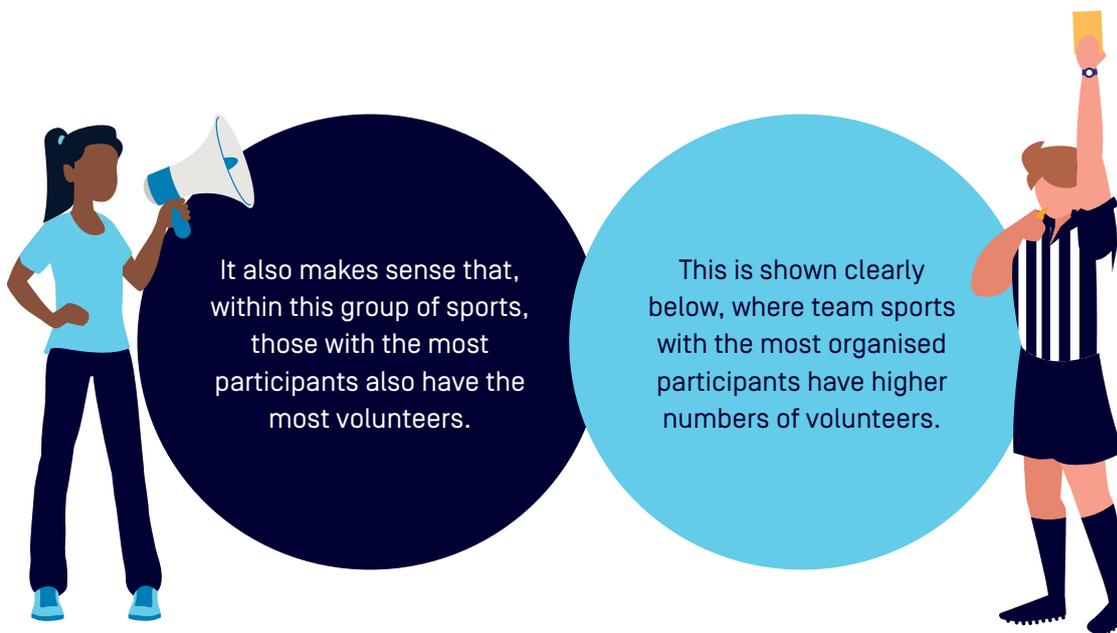
This section examines the sports that have the highest numbers of volunteers and how they differ by gender.



It stands to reason that the sports attracting the most volunteers are the same ones that are most often organised and played in a team environment...

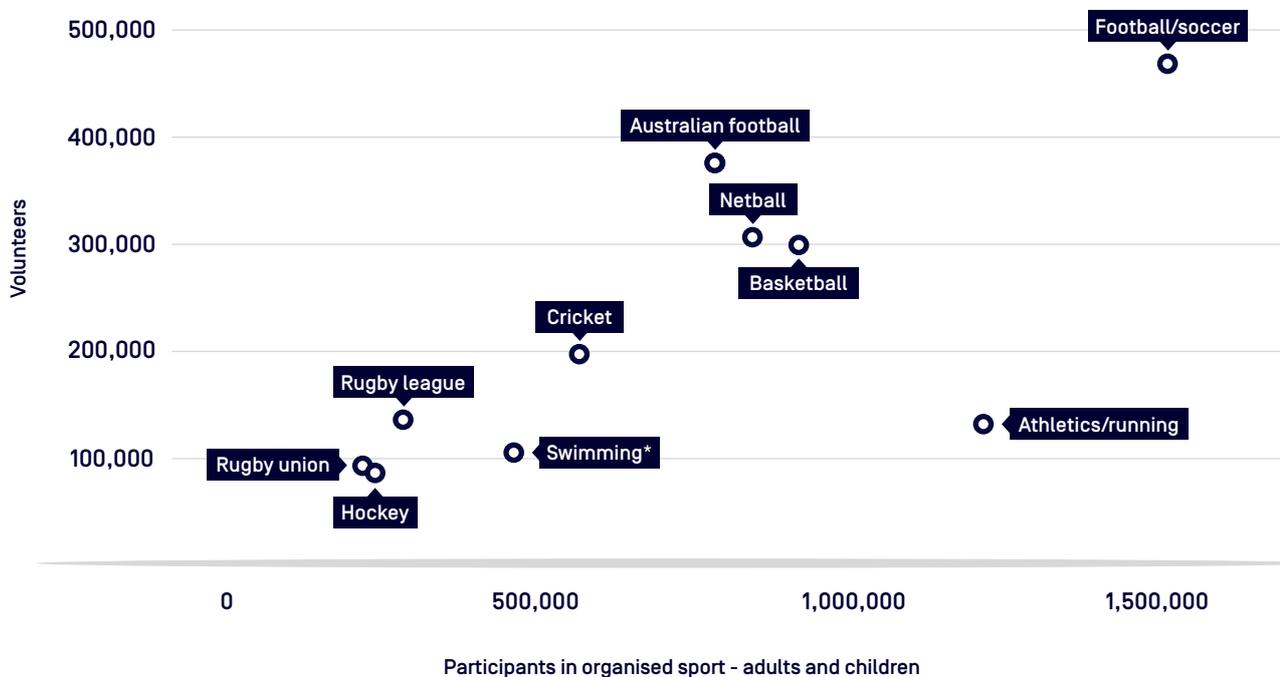
...someone is needed to coach and manage teams, set up grounds and run the canteen.





The one sport that doesn't follow the pattern is Athletics/running – it has a high number of organised participants but a low number of volunteers. This is due to the nature of organised Athletics/running compared with the other sports – organised participation will often include taking part in mass events such as fun runs or marathons. These events attract high numbers of participants but require relatively few volunteers to run them on the day.

### SPORTS WITH THE MOST VOLUNTEERS



\* to make it more comparable to other organised sports, in this analysis Swimming includes only squad training and lessons.

## Top 10 sports for volunteer roles by gender

Seven sports – Football/soccer, Australian football, Basketball, Cricket, Rugby league, Athletics/running and Netball – appear in the top ten for both men and women. For women, Swimming, Equestrian and Hockey are included; for men, the top ten includes Rugby union, Bowls and Golf.

### TOP 10 VOLUNTEER SPORTS FOR MEN

Football/soccer	307,000
Australian football	249,000
Basketball	159,000
Cricket	153,000
Rugby league	94,000
Rugby union	71,000
Athletics/running	63,000
Netball	48,000
Bowls	45,000
Golf	40,000

### TOP 10 VOLUNTEER SPORTS FOR WOMEN

Netball	257,000
Football/soccer	160,000
Basketball	139,000
Australian football	125,000
Swimming	68,000
Athletics/running	68,000
Equestrian	58,000
Hockey	46,000
Rugby league	45,000
Cricket	41,000



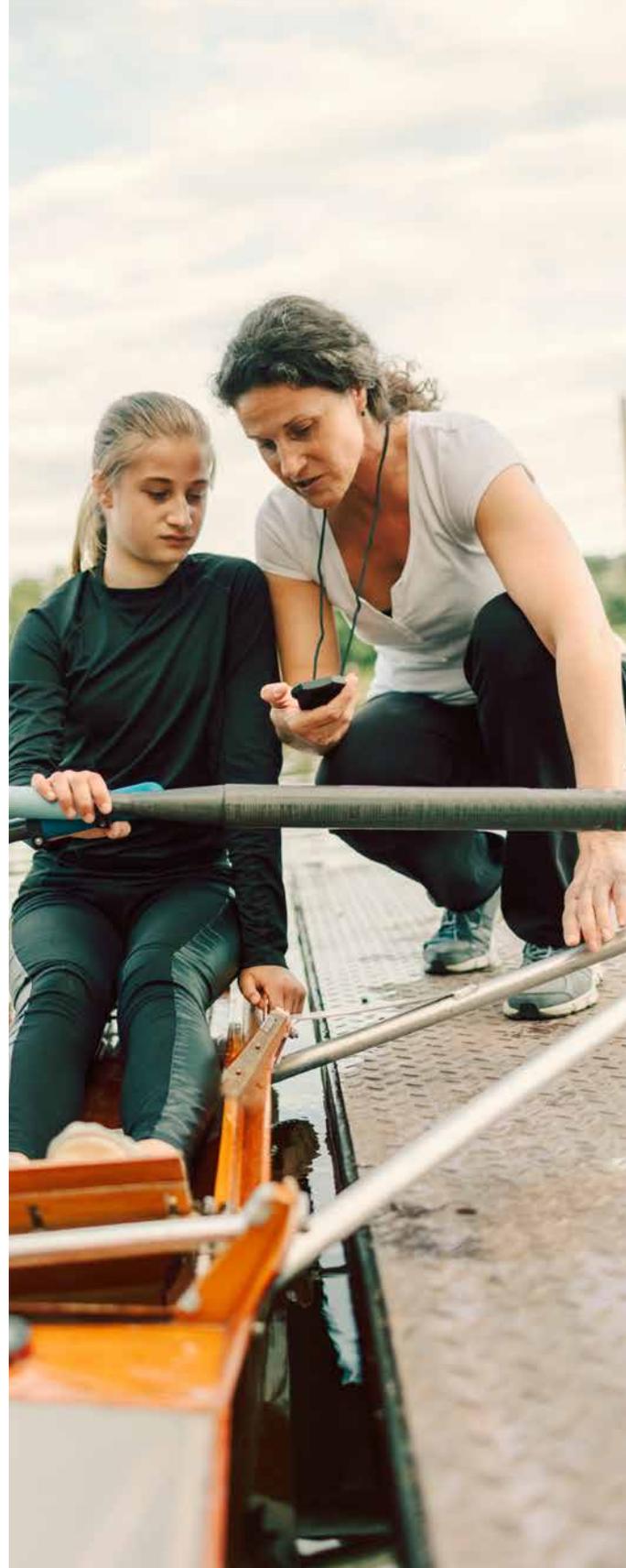
# Snapshot of the top 10 sports for volunteers

Here we take a closer look at the ten sports that have the most volunteer roles, and the profile of those volunteers compared with the sport's player profile. Note that only individual roles with more than 30,000 volunteers are shown due to the unreliability of estimates smaller than this.

There are some similarities across most sports:

The 35-54 year age group has the largest proportion of volunteers, regardless of the age profile of participants – Hockey and Netball stand out as having the most evenly spread volunteers by age.

The gender profile of volunteers generally follows the profile of the sport's adult participants.



# Football/soccer

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	1,156,000
Adult organised participants	843,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	682,000
Volunteers	467,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	226,000
Official	120,000
Team manager	93,000
Administrator/committee member	54,000
General/miscellaneous	32,000
Other roles	4,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

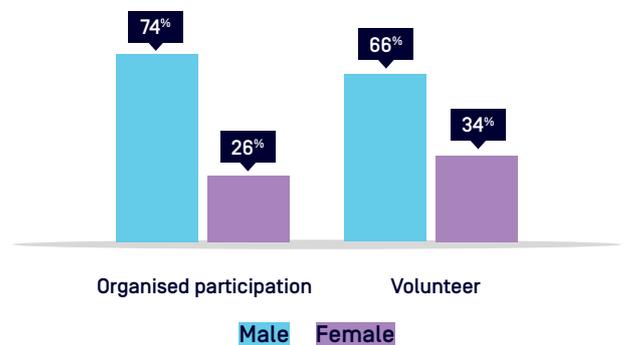


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

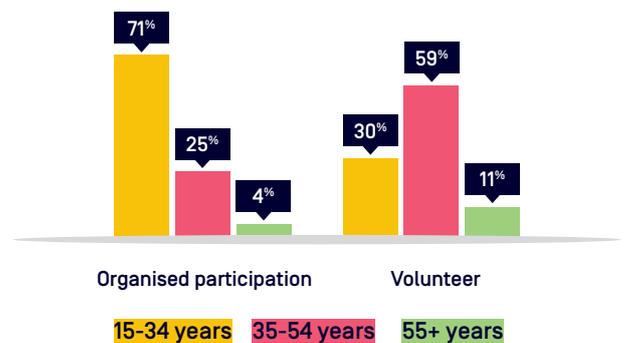
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Australian football

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	579,000
Adult organised participants	450,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	341,000
Volunteers	374,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

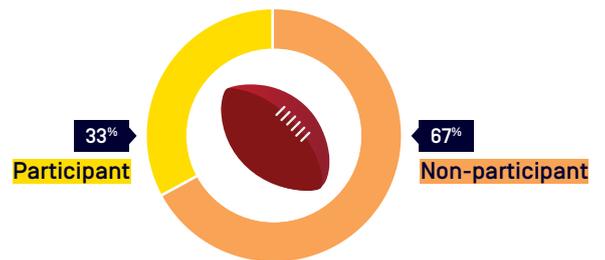
Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	133,000
Official	118,000
Administrator/committee member	58,000
General/miscellaneous	54,000
Team manager	38,000
Other roles	18,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

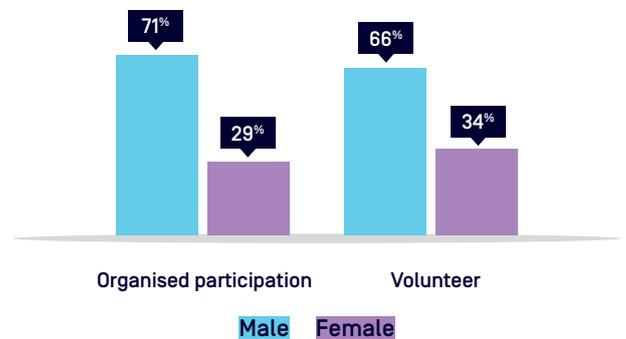


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

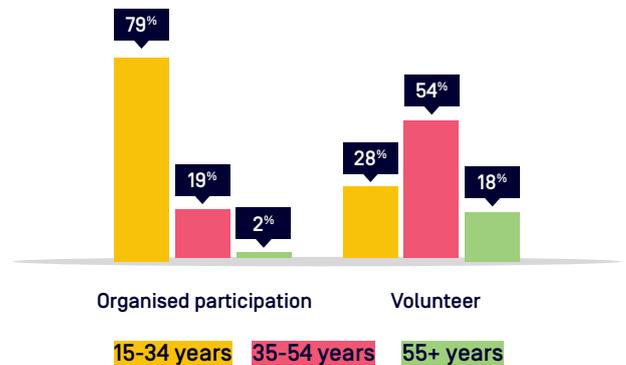
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Netball

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	608,000
Adult organised participants	556,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	297,000
Volunteers	305,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	141,000
Official	122,000
Team manager	49,000
Administrator/committee member	45,000
Other roles	17,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role



## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

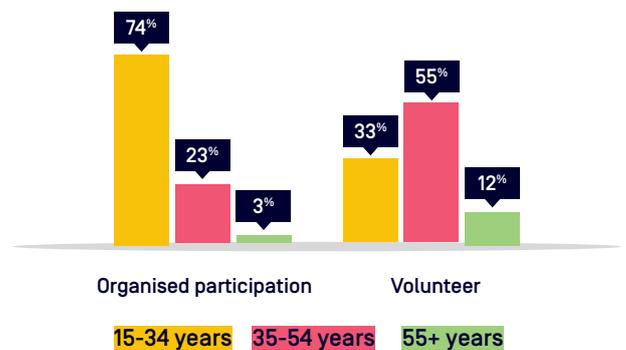
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Basketball

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	910,000
Adult organised participants	558,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	370,000
Volunteers	298,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

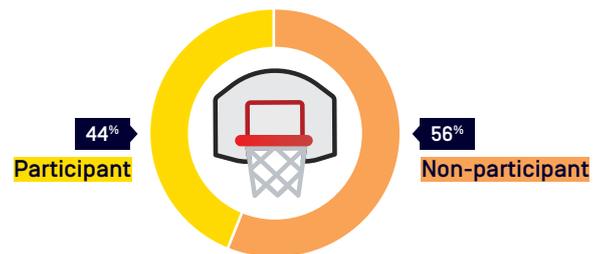
Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	147,000
Official	97,000
Team manager	50,000
Administrator/committee member	34,000
Other roles	12,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

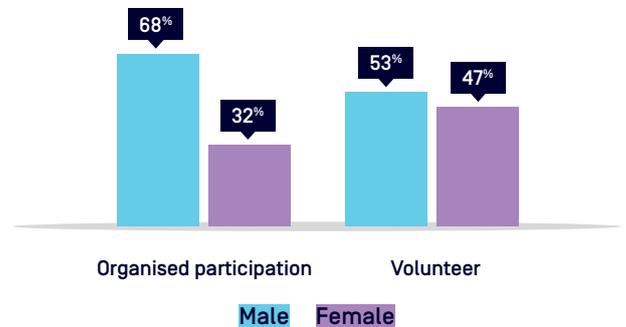


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

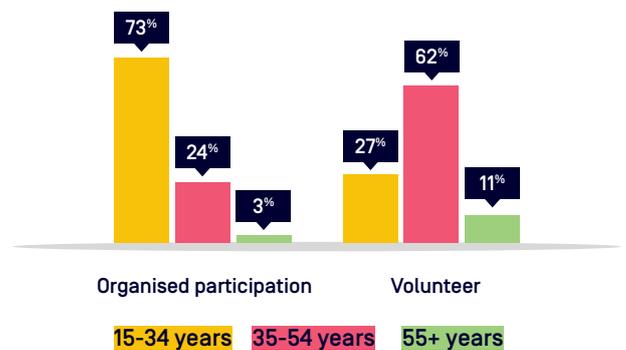
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Cricket

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	526,000
Adult organised participants	376,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	195,000
Volunteers	195,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

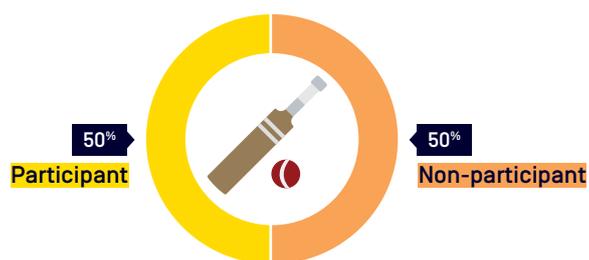
Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	82,000
Official	61,000
Administrator/committee member	49,000
Other roles	48,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

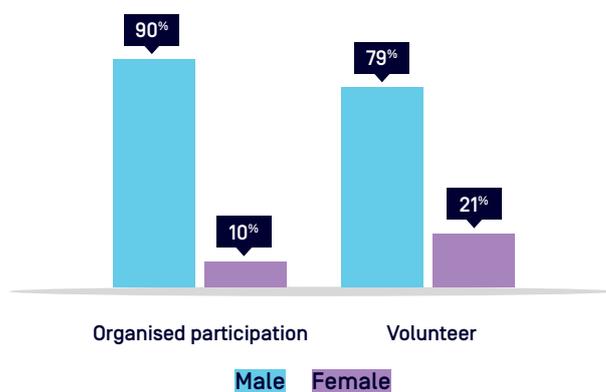


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

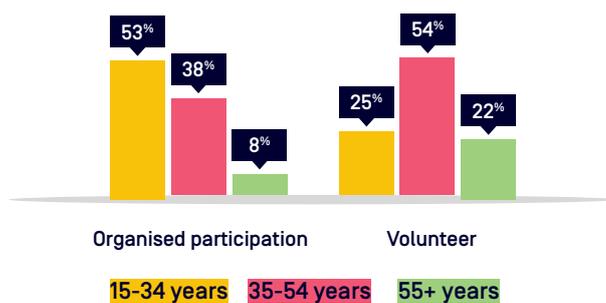
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Athletics/running

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	3,979,000
Adult organised participants	1,003,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	224,000
Volunteers	131,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

Official	47,000
Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	39,000
Other roles	65,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

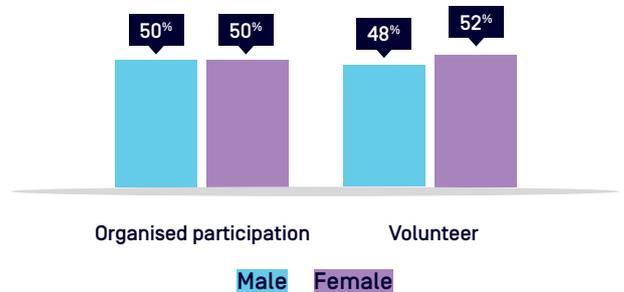


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

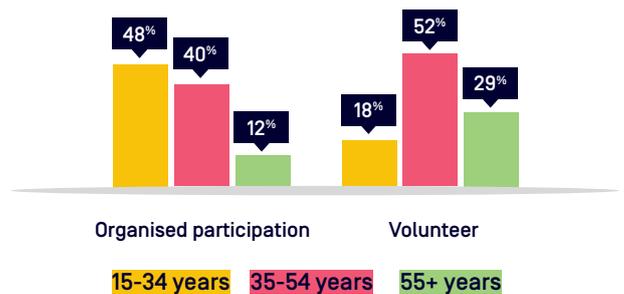
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Rugby league

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	163,000
Adult organised participants	132,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	152,000
Volunteers	139,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

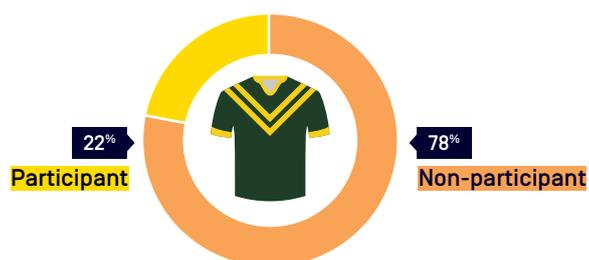
Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	65,000
Other roles	84,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

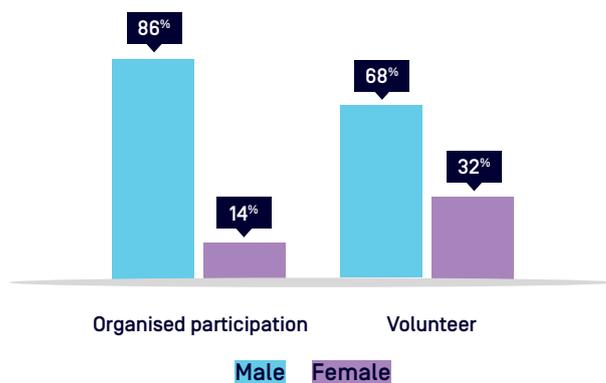


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

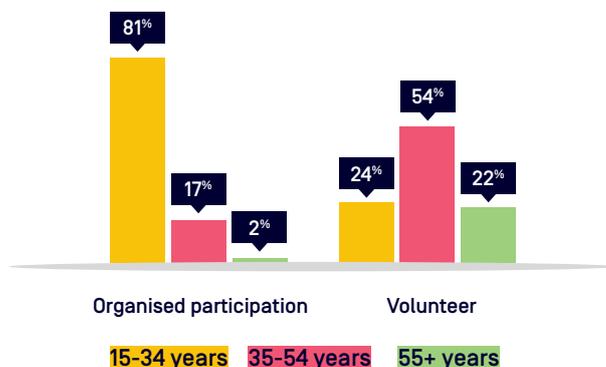
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Rugby union

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	143,000
Adult organised participants	130,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	90,000
Volunteers	97,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	48,000
Other roles	64,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role



## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

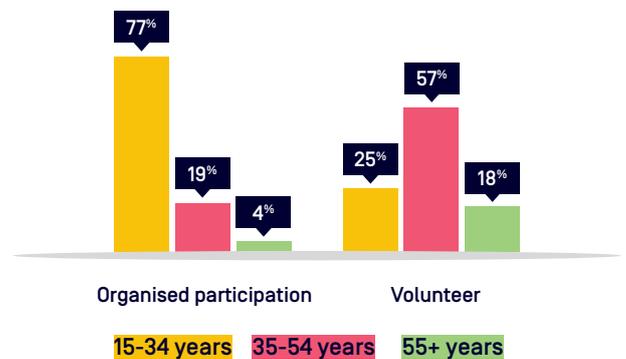
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Swimming

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	3,590,000
Adult organised participants*	174,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	1,656,000
Volunteers	103,000

\*squad/club training and lessons only, excludes use of venue for casual swimming

## VOLUNTEERS\*

Official	39,000
Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	35,000
Other roles	40,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

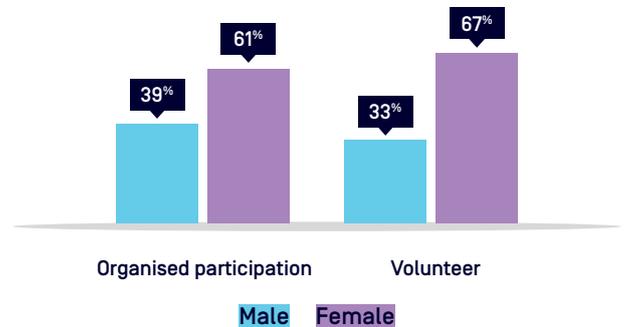


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

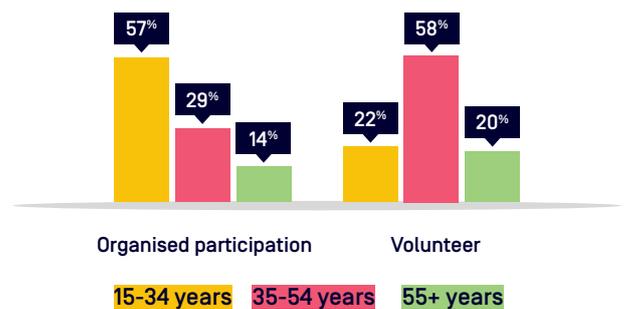
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Hockey

## INVOLVEMENT

Adult participants (at least once a year)	163,000
Adult organised participants	154,000
Child participants (organised out-of-school)	78,000
Volunteers	85,000

## VOLUNTEERS\*

Coach/trainer/instructor/teacher	43,000
Other roles	71,000

\*number of roles exceeds number of volunteers because some people take on more than one role

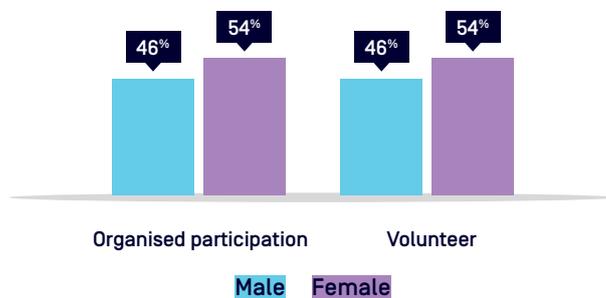


## PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

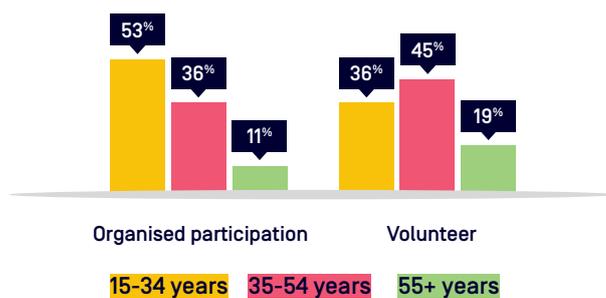
### By any participation



### By gender



### By age



# Volunteering beyond 2021

As with most aspects of life, volunteering in sport has been significantly affected by COVID-19, due to both organised sport being limited and concern among volunteers about returning.

In April-June 2021, Sport Australia's Community Perceptions Monitor<sup>6</sup> asked those who previously volunteered in sport whether they had returned to their roles since restrictions were eased...

61%

(or only three in five) were found to have done so.



The restrictions in the second half of 2021 will only exacerbate this issue and have added to the need for the considered and collaborative approach to attracting and retaining volunteers outlined in the [Sport Volunteering National Plan](#).

Sport Australia is looking forward to working with sports over the coming years to activate the plan and get more Australians involved in sport.

6. A monthly survey of 500 Australians aged 18+ about interest in and perceptions of a range of sport categories and topics. Data used here was collected during April to June 2021.





**Australian Government**  

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**Australian Sports Commission**

**SPORTAUS**  
**AUSPLAY™**

Any further questions about AusPlay  
[or queries for additional customised reporting/  
further analysis of the dataset] can be directed  
to the Insights team at Sport Australia via:

**[AusPlay@sportaus.gov.au](mailto:AusPlay@sportaus.gov.au)**