



People across Europe agree holidays are important:

'Holidays – the smile on my children's faces says it all' (FRANCE)

'We did not know anyone, now we say hello to our neighbours'. (FRANCE)

'My children felt left out at school, now they cannot stop talking to their friends about the fun they had' (UK)

'I now know how to use the bus and train' (FLANDERS, BELGIUM)

'The holiday established me in my parenting role – now I feel like a mother' (FLANDERS, BELGIUM)

'Lots of good things happened since and I found a job!' (UK)



Giving Europe a break

Why social tourism is important



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A common view from three different organisations working in Belgium, France and the UK

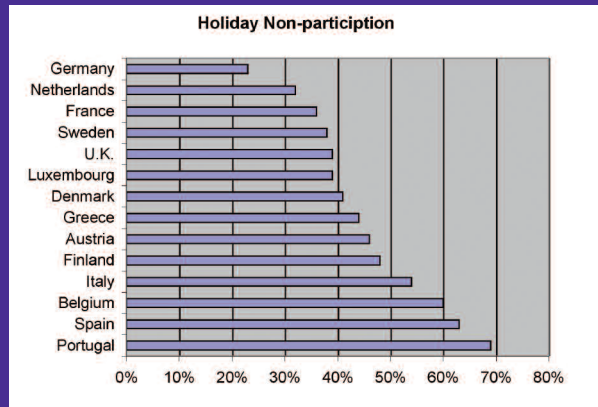
Three organisations – one aim

A charity in the UK, an association established by a former trade-union leader in France and a government agency in Flanders, Belgium – three different organisations working in three different countries providing different services but with the same objective of including people living on a low income in holiday and leisure activities.

A holiday (four nights or more away from home) is more than a rest after work - it is a time for leisure, a time for others and oneself and an opportunity for learning and widening of horizons.

To promote access to holidays for all is to work towards a social Europe.

Holiday participation across Europe



These Eurostat figures for 2002 show that 42% of the population do not go on holiday. More recent figures from the UK suggest that non-participation is closer to 50%. While some people don't take holidays for personal reasons, the majority of people are unable to go on holiday because of lack of money.

In a recent study of families in need, holidays were identified by parents as particularly beneficial in a variety of ways, yet, it was found to be the most common area of expenditure to be sacrificed by those living in poverty.



The benefits of holidays:

- improve well-being and reduce stress;
- increase self-esteem and confidence;
- strengthen family communication and bonding;
- provide new skills, widen perspectives and enhance employability;
- and give long lasting memories.

Holidays result in happier, stronger families and a more inclusive society.

One in three families in the UK cannot afford a holiday

For the past thirty years the Family Holiday Association has been the only UK charity solely dedicated to helping provide holidays to families in need. Some seven million people in the UK are effectively excluded from holidays because of a lack of money. Over 1.5 million families can't even afford a day at the seaside.

Social tourism is a concept rarely mentioned or even understood in the UK and yet social survey after social survey shows that the vast majority of Britons consider holidays a social necessity.

Recently, the charity has sought to build a more robust case for the importance of holidays through publishing research into the benefits of holidays for families in need, staging conferences bringing together interested parties, and raising public awareness about the scale and scope of the problem.



Holidays prepare people for life

Established in 1990, Vacances Ouvertes is an association where tourism meets social welfare. Today, in partnership with 500 grass-root organisations, it helps over 10,000 people plan and enjoy a holiday.

Families and young people are supported locally with a range of services to organise their holiday. They are active project participants and holidays are seen as a way of overcoming social exclusion.

Vacances Ouvertes works with local authorities on many of its initiatives and with local employment and skills advice agencies, to build sustainability. Holidays provide an opportunity to experience and develop skills to travel outside the local area – an important job-seeking competence.



Tourism, a right for everyone

Since 1936 Flanders has recognised the value of social tourism. Tourist Office for Flanders helps thousands of individuals, families and groups access holidays in a variety of ways.

Recently, their policies have been strengthened to reflect government support for tourism for all – they focus their work more directly on people living on or under the poverty line, people with disabilities, children, young people and families, senior citizens and socio-cultural groups.

With the cooperation of 500 partners in the tourism industry nearly 20,000 people on a low income were able to enjoy a holiday or day trip in 2005.

