Volunteering trajectories: individual patterns of volunteering over the lifecourse
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This chapter examines the evidence for individual patterns of volunteering behaviour, tracking the trajectories into and out of volunteering of BHPS/US participants, and the Mass Observation Project (MOP) writers, over time. The chapter focuses on the strengths of using a longitudinal, lifecourse approach, demonstrating that this enables us to identify a much larger proportion of individuals as being involved in voluntary action than can be identified when using cross-sectional surveys. This type of approach also enables us to identify considerable individual movement in and out of volunteering over time. We examine the volunteering lifecourses of MOP writers and show that more than a fifth of writers had stayed committed to an individual organisation or cause; and more than half regularly swapped the roles or domains in which they volunteered. We argue that individual volunteering patterns evolve, change, or continue across the lifecourse, and that it is better to resist categorising people as volunteers, ex-volunteers, or non-volunteers, which can act as a barrier to conceptualising volunteering patterns.