

Study: Volunteering in Canada: Challenges and opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic

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In 2018, almost 12.7 million Canadians engaged in formal volunteering, with a total of approximately 1.7 billion hours of their time given to charities, non-profits and community organizations—equivalent to more than 863,000 full-time year-round jobs. Today, Canadians are courageously volunteering in the midst of one of the largest health, economic and social challenges of our lifetime.

The study, "[Volunteering in Canada: Challenges and opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," based upon the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS GVP), measures the contributions of those who have given their time. While these data are from prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they provide insight into challenges and opportunities facing volunteerism in the current situation.

Baby boomers and matures more likely to be top volunteers

One challenge facing volunteer organizations during the pandemic is that Canada's most dedicated volunteers are also among those most vulnerable to COVID-19. In 2018, matures (40%) and baby boomers (31%) were more likely than iGens (18%) to be top volunteers, that is, volunteers who contributed 132 hours or more.

Although iGens were less likely than other generations to be top volunteers, they contributed an average of 82 unpaid hours to charitable organizations in 2018 and had the highest overall volunteer rate (52%).

Hospitals, religious organizations and sports and recreation benefit the most from volunteers

Another challenge during the pandemic is that many of the activities people volunteer for are no longer occurring. Hospitals, for example, have suspended most volunteer programs to protect the health of those involved. Religious, sports and recreation, as well as arts and cultural gatherings and events have also been cancelled, with some activity moving online.

Formal volunteers, that is, those who volunteered on behalf of organizations, dedicated the most hours on average to hospitals (111 hours) in 2018, followed closely by religious organizations (110 hours) and sports and recreation associations (105 hours).

Almost three-quarters of Canadians engage in informal volunteering

Almost 22.7 million people or almost three-quarters of Canadians aged 15 and older (74%) devoted approximately 3.4 billion hours to informal volunteering in 2018, equivalent to roughly 1.8 million full-time year-round jobs.

Informal volunteering, which includes directly helping people outside the household or improving the community not on behalf of a group or organization, was more prevalent among iGens (78%) than baby boomers (73%) or matures (58%).



Note to readers

Statistics Canada also releases today the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS GVP) microdata file. This survey is an important source of information on the contributory behavior of Canadians regarding donations, volunteer activities and participation.

This release is based on data from the 2018 GSS GVP. The survey interviewed individuals 15 years of age and older in the provinces from September to December 2018. The survey excluded residents of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, as well as full-time residents of institutions.

The "Volunteering in Canada, 2018" booklet, as well as a series of tables on volunteering and charitable giving are under development and will be released shortly; stay tuned!

Generations are groups of people who experience the same significant societal events, or similar cultural experiences, within a time period. Although there is no agreed upon name and designated age range for generations, the following specifications are used in this release:

- **iGen:** 1996 and up (15 to 22 years of age), accounting for 11% of the total population
- **Millennials:** 1981 to 1995 (23 to 37 years of age), accounting for 25% of the total population
- **Gen X:** 1966 to 1980 (38 to 52 years of age), accounting for 23% of the total population
- **Baby boomers:** 1946 to 1965 (53 to 72 years of age), accounting for 30% of the total population
- **Matures:** 1918 to 1945 (73 to 100 years of age), accounting for 10% of the total population

Formal volunteers include those who did any activities without pay on behalf of a group or organization, at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Top volunteers are the 25% of volunteers who contributed the most hours. In 2018, these people volunteered 132 hours or more in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4430](#).

The article "[Volunteering in Canada: Challenges and opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," released as part of the publication *StatCan COVID-19: Data to insights for a better Canada* ([45280001](#)), is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).