

Study: Youth and the Environment

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The environment is a priority for many young people in Canada, and this priority is reflected through some of their behaviours and actions. For example, youth donate a larger proportion of their charitable donations to environmental organizations and are more likely than their older counterparts to use sustainable modes of transportation to get to work.

These findings are reported in [Chapter 5: Youth and the Environment](#) of *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report*, a publication that provides a comprehensive overview of Canadian youth, defined as those aged 15 to 30 years old. In the coming months, *Portrait of Youth in Canada* will continue to focus on specific themes, such as social engagement and well-being.

The chapter provides an overview of topics, such as environmental engagement through formal and informal volunteering activities as well as use of sustainable commute. It also examines youth satisfaction with their local environment and describes characteristics of that physical environment, such as greenness and neighbourhood walkability.

Youth volunteer for and donate to environmental organizations

Volunteering is one way to examine how engaged youth are with different organizations and causes. Similar to older Canadians, about 6% of youth volunteer their time on behalf of environmental organizations. However, when the hours spent volunteering are considered, youth spend proportionally more of their time working with environmental organizations (7% of hours volunteered) relative to older age groups (3% to 6% of hours volunteered).

Although total charitable donations made to organizations by youth were overall smaller than among older adults, youth donated a larger proportion of total donations to environmental organizations (5% vs. 2% to 3% among older adults).

Youth live in more walkable but less green neighbourhoods

Living in a neighbourhood with walkable amenities can encourage less reliance on vehicles and promote physical activity through active transit. Young adults aged 18 to 39 years tended to live in the most walkable neighbourhoods (20%) more often than youth aged 12 to 17 years (11%), or older adults (16%). However, this decision to live in walkable neighbourhoods has also meant that youth have less exposure to trees and vegetation, or greenness, around their home. In city cores, older youth in their late 20s live in some of the least "green" environments.

Despite this, youth aged 15 to 30 years were just as likely as older adults to report being satisfied with the quality of their local environment.

In their commute, youth use sustainable transit more often than older adults

Almost half of youth aged 15 to 30 years (46%) reported on the 2016 Census of Population that they use a sustainable mode of transit to commute, which included public transit, walking, cycling, or carpooling. By comparison, 28% of older adults used sustainable transit during their commute. The use of sustainable transit was higher among teenagers and among population groups designated as visible minorities. Reliance on sustainable transit among youth may be due, in part, to concern about the environment. However, limited access to a private vehicle, as well as cost and efficiency of this mode of transit, may be even more important considerations in this decision. Upcoming insights from the 2021 Census of Population will help us understand how the COVID-19 pandemic may have changed if and how Canadians commute to a workplace.



Note to readers

Data are derived from the 2016 Census of Population, the 2016 General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home, the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, the 2019 Households and the Environment Survey, and other published reports. The most walkable neighbourhoods are defined as those in Canadian Active Living Environment classes 4 and 5.

The chapter "[Chapter 5: Youth and the Environment](#)" is now available in the online issue of *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report* ([42280001](#)).

The accompanying infographic "[Portrait of youth in Canada: Environment](#)" is available as part of the online series *Statistics Canada – Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)).

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).