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Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018

by Tara Hahmann

Overview of the study

Using data from the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, this article presents information on the volunteer activities of Canadians, including volunteer rates and number of volunteer hours, the types of volunteering activities and the sectors benefiting from volunteerism.

- In 2018, over 24 million people volunteered, accounting for 79% of Canadians aged 15 and older.
- Volunteers dedicated approximately 5 billion hours to their volunteer activities, a number of hours equivalent to over 2.5 million full-time year-round jobs.
- There were generational differences in volunteering participation, the number of hours given, and the types of volunteer activities carried out. For example, formal volunteering, that is volunteering mediated by organizations, was more frequent among younger generations and less common among older generations.
- Although they had the lowest formal volunteer rate, mature volunteers (born between 1918 and 1945) contributed the most average hours per year, at 222. In contrast, iGens (born in 1996 and later) gave on average 82 hours of their time.
- iGens (78%) and Millennials (77%) were more likely to be informal volunteers, compared to the older generations of Baby Boomers (73%) and Matures (58%). However, the hours contributed by Matures (176 hours) and Baby Boomers (197 hours) nearly doubled the amount reported by iGens (99 hours).
- The type of informal volunteering differed by generation. Matures and Baby Boomers were most likely to participate in public meetings, while iGens and Millennials were more likely than older generations to disseminate information (online or elsewhere) to raise awareness of an issue.

Introduction

Volunteerism is the participation in purposeful helping activities without monetary compensation. It can involve a variety of activities, taking place occasionally over the course of a year, or a more consistent and sustained commitment, such as a weekly commitment to a specific cause. Volunteering benefits groups, persons or the community, and can either be mediated by organizations (formal volunteering), or be direct help without the involvement of an organization or group (informal volunteering).

Both forms of volunteering are important sources of support for a diverse breadth of causes, ranging from health care, education, fire and rescue to the arts

and sports. Formal volunteering can enable charities and non-profit organizations to deliver services and programs for the benefit of fellow citizens, while informal volunteering can often fill the gap, particularly in those regions with fewer charitable or non-governmental organizations or groups.

Like many parts and sectors of Canadian society, including businesses, schools and workplaces, the volunteer sector and volunteers had to adapt to increased public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sectors typically benefiting from volunteers, such as sports and recreation, along with the arts and culture, significantly reduced their activities during the pandemic period.

Also, hospitals, which typically receive the most hours of support on average, continued to receive volunteer support from students in health care programs and from retirees. At the same time, they also had to halt some volunteer services during the pandemic to curb the risk of virus transmission adding to staff shortages at a critical time.

While faced with challenges, many of these organizations found new ways of ensuring that their services could continue, such as volunteers providing online mental health services, mentoring and tutoring on various online learning platforms, and reaching out to seniors by phone. News reports also highlighted examples of direct helping activities, whether it involved delivering groceries to an elderly or at-risk neighbour, or making and donating masks to vulnerable populations who may not otherwise have access to them.

Perhaps now more than ever, Canadians are finding innovative ways of advancing social good, leveraging technology and social media platforms to not only broaden how they give back, but also to better integrate volunteering into their lives. Individuals are organizing hackathons, contributing to

crowdfunding, facilitating online petitions, and using social media to raise awareness of issues of concern to them.¹

Using data from the 2018 General Social Survey: Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (GVP), the objective of this article is to shed light on the characteristics of volunteering and volunteers going into the pandemic, providing non-profit organizations and the voluntary sector with an understanding of the nature and extent of formal and informal volunteering in Canada. This analysis could help frame the possible impact of the pandemic on volunteerism in Canada, and includes an expanded definition of informal volunteering – that captures volunteerism through the use of social media - which may serve as a barometer for volunteering trends.²

In providing an overview of volunteering in Canada, particular attention is paid to generational differences in volunteering. For example, according to previous research, younger generations, compared to their older counterparts, prefer volunteering their time to one-time/short-term volunteering, as opposed to ongoing/long-term volunteering commitments.³

Both ends of the age continuum have been affected by the pandemic. Older generations - Baby Boomers and Matures - are at highest risk of severe illness from COVID-19, and in turn, may be less likely to engage in certain volunteering activities during the pandemic, notably traditional in-person volunteering.

Meanwhile, among young people, the shift to online learning and the reduction in the number of community involvement hours required for graduation may suggest a decrease in formal volunteering activities. Conversely, this situation may present unique engagement opportunities for students. With fewer time constraints and emerging needs, it is possible that young people dedicated more time to informal forms of volunteering, such as helping to run errands for those at increased risk of COVID. Additionally, new formal volunteering opportunities grew, including COVID-specific initiatives, such as governments' call-outs for volunteer support in the health care sector, along with increased virtual volunteering opportunities offered by different organizations.

Having a better understanding of the pre-pandemic generational differences in volunteering activities

Did you know?

This is the first cycle of the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating where information can be reported on:

1. The distinction between hours of informal and formal volunteering.
2. Informal volunteering distinguished by direct help and community improvement; that is helping people directly and involvement to improve the community, on one's own, and through activities not on behalf of a group or an organization.
3. The question on mandatory volunteering in the context of formal volunteering was extended to all volunteer hours. In 2013, the question on mandatory hours was only asked of organizations where the respondent volunteered the most hours; in 2018, it was asked in reference to all volunteer hours.
4. Number of volunteering hours supported by employers.
5. International definition of volunteering, which excludes activities that are mandatory/required or supported by an employer and direct help given to relatives living outside the household. Furthermore, the International definition only includes volunteer activities of at least one hour.

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will not only provide a baseline for measuring the impact of pandemic changes, but it may shape how the volunteer sector responds to ongoing restrictions and the re-opening of the economy, notably approaches to age-specific recruitment, retention and re-entry campaigns.

The article concludes with an overview of provincial variations in formal and informal volunteering. This is complemented by an analysis of international volunteering, aligning with the International Labour Organization approach to measuring volunteering, made available in the most recent survey cycle.

In 2018, the overall rate of volunteering was 79% among Canadians aged 15 and older

In 2018, over 24 million people volunteered (i.e., formal, informal, or both informal and formal) – accounting for 79% of Canadians aged 15 and older (Table 1). They devoted roughly 5 billion hours to their volunteer activities, a volume of work equivalent to over 2.5 million full-time year-round jobs.

While these numbers do not represent employment, work done for pay or profit, they do account for work done by Canadians for use by others, outside a person's

household.⁴ The International Labour Organization⁵ provides a continuum of work in the *Forms of Work Framework*, whereby volunteer work can be seen in the middlemost portion of the continuum (Figure 1).

Formal Volunteering

iGens had the highest rate of formal volunteering across all generations, at 52%

Prior to GVP 2018, the measurement of volunteering mainly focused on its formal aspect, namely volunteer work done through organizations or groups. For the first time, detailed information on informal volunteering

Table 1
Overall volunteer rate and hours, among the population aged 15 and older, 2018

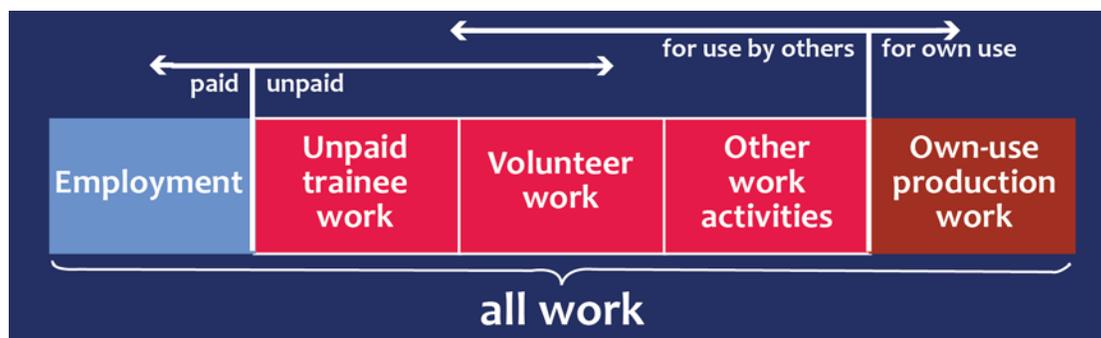
Overall participation in volunteering activities	Total
Total population (thousands)	30,843
Number of volunteers (thousands)	24,496
Volunteer rate (percent)	79
Hours volunteered	
Total hours volunteered (millions)	5,035
Full-time year-round job equivalents ¹ (jobs)	2,622,296
Average hours volunteered per year (hours)	206

1. Assuming 40 hours of work per week for 48 weeks.

Note: This includes informal and formal volunteers and hours.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, 2018.

Figure 1
Forms of work framework



Source: International Labor Organization, 2019.

Generations

Generations are groups of people who experience the same significant societal events, or similar cultural experiences, within a time period. There is no agreed upon name and designated age range for this, but, for the purpose of this article, the following specifications are used with corresponding generational proportions in 2018 provided:

- **iGen** (also referred as Generation Z): Born between 1996 and 2012 (15 to 22 years of age at the time of the survey) – 11%. Canadians younger than 15 are not included in the survey.
- **Millennials**: Born between 1981 and 1995 (23 to 37 years of age) – 25%
- **Gen X**: Born between 1966 and 1980 (38 to 52 years of age) – 23%
- **Baby Boomers**: Born between 1946 and 1965 (53 to 72 years of age) – 30%
- **Matures**: Born between 1918 and 1945 (73 to 100 years of age) – 10%

Analysis comparing generations should be interpreted with caution. This is because it is not known how a generation would have behaved, or will behave, when it reaches the same age group as the generation it is compared to. For example, it is not known how Millennials will behave when they reach the Baby Boomers' age cohort, nor how the Baby Boomers behaved when they were the age of Millennials.

is now available. However, it should be noted that, in practice, volunteer activities can be carried out through a combination of these two dimensions. The following section reports on formal volunteering regardless of whether informal volunteering activities were also undertaken during the reference period.

In 2018, 12.7 million people volunteered on behalf of a group by contributing time to organizations, including charities and non-profit organizations, such as schools, religious organizations, sports or community associations (Table 2). That is, 41% of Canadians dedicated more than 1.6 billion hours to their formal volunteer activities, a volume of work equivalent to about 863,000 full-time year-round job equivalents.

Generational differences emerged for formal volunteering. The likelihood of volunteering generally decreased with age, though the hours volunteered were highest among the oldest generations. In particular, while iGens had the highest volunteer rate, the average

hours volunteered were the lowest among all generations, at 82 hours in 2018. Conversely, Matures logged the most average hours at 222 and had the lowest volunteer rate at 32%. The size of the Baby Boomer

volunteer population, combined with their high number of volunteer hours meant that Baby Boomers contributed the most total volunteer hours, equivalent to nearly 300,000 full-time year-round jobs.

iGen formal volunteers were more likely than their Gen X, Baby Boomer and Mature counterparts to be motivated by the potential to improve job opportunities



The underlying motivation for volunteering differs across generations. Improving job opportunities was cited as a top reason for volunteering among iGens, at 38%. Not surprisingly, career-oriented volunteering was less common among generations with generally more experience in the labour force - 16% among Gen Xs, 9% among Baby Boomers, and 1%⁶ for Matures. Reflecting their early stage skill development, a lower proportion of iGens (15%) reported skill use as an important reason for volunteering, compared to Millennials (25%), Gen X (23%), and Baby Boomers (29%).

Contributing to the well-being of the community was named as a leading motivation among about a quarter of volunteers, with the notable exception of iGen volunteers, where 13% mentioned this as a reason for volunteering. iGen volunteers were also less likely than other generations to say that a desire to support a political, environmental or social cause led them to volunteer, with 13% of iGens reporting it as a motivating factor. This compares to 29% of Millennials, 21% of Gen X, and 28% of Baby Boomers.

Spiritual or religious-based motivations were most often cited by Baby Boomers. About one in three Baby Boomers cited religious or spiritual obligations as a motivating factor in volunteering.

Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018

Table 2

Formal volunteer rates and hours, among the population aged 15 and older, by generation, 2018

Participation in formal volunteering activities	iGen (ref.)	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Matures	Total
	Born 1996 and up	Born 1981 to 1995	Born 1966 to 1980	Born 1946 to 1965	Born 1918 to 1945	
Total population (thousands)	3,424	7,764	7,159	9,348	3,148	30,843
Number of volunteers (thousands)	1,773	3,139	3,162	3,608	996	12,678
Volunteer rate (percent)	52	40*	44*	39*	32*	41
Hours volunteered						
Total hours volunteered (millions)	146	360*	378*	552*	221*	1,657
Full-time year-round job equivalents ¹ (jobs)	76,115	187,535	197,025	287,451	115,114	863,240
Average hours volunteered per year (hours)	82	115*	120*	153*	222*	131

* significantly different from reference group (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

1. Assuming 40 hours of work per week for 48 weeks.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, 2018.

Millennial and Baby Boomer women had higher rates of volunteering than men within the same generations

Overall, women were more likely than men to participate in formal volunteering (44% versus 38%). This gender difference was mainly

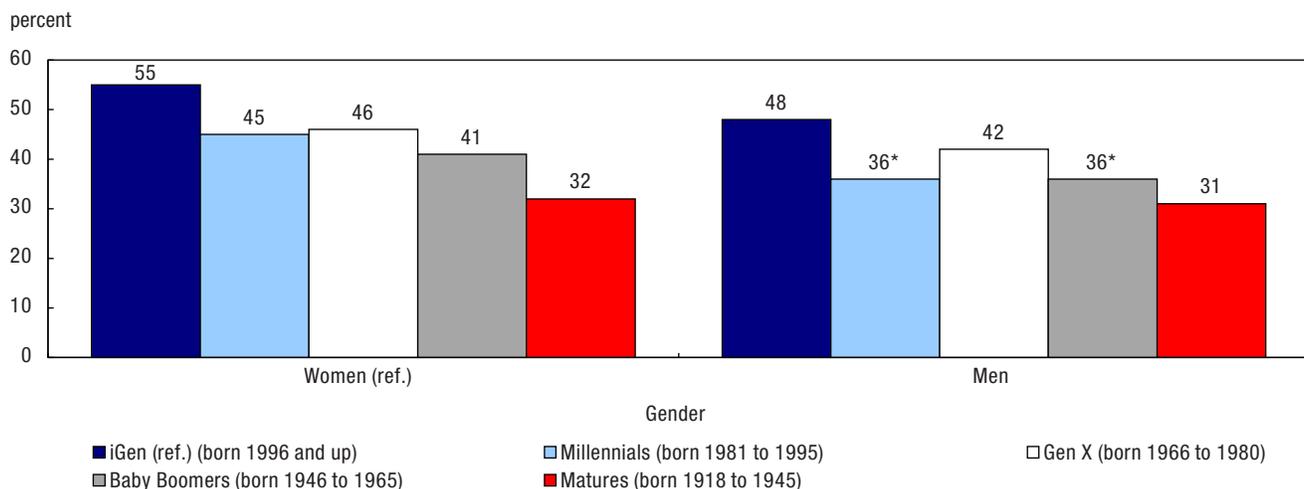
driven by Millennials and Baby Boomers. No significant differences were found for the other generations (Chart 1).

Understanding variations in formal volunteering rates by other population groups, such as among the Indigenous population and immigrant

population, is not possible, due to small sample size and corresponding issues with data quality. Other indicators of ethnocultural diversity, such as visible minority status, were not collected by this survey.

Chart 1

Formal volunteer rate, by generation within gender, among the population aged 15 and over, 2018



* significantly different from reference group (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Note: The category of gender diverse was included in the calculation but not displayed in the chart due to low data quality.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating 2018.

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Did you know?

In 2018, roughly 34% of employed Canadians had an employer-based program or policy to encourage formal volunteering. Among those with access to a program or policy, just over half (53%) participated in employer supported volunteering in the 12 months preceding the survey. Employer supported hours represented 1%⁷ of total formal volunteer hours reported in 2018.

Among formal volunteers, more average hours were dedicated to religious- and hospital-based causes

The charitable and non-profit organizations benefiting from the dedication of volunteers are varied. However, the average number of volunteer hours were highest among hospitals (111 hours), religious organizations (110 hours), sports and recreation (105 hours), and arts and culture (104 hours). In comparison, formal volunteers gave

about half as many hours to the four sectors receiving the fewest number of volunteer hours: education and research (51 hours); grant-making, fundraising and volunteer promotion (52 hours); and health-related services, such as crisis intervention services, outpatient clinics, and rehabilitation services (58 hours) (Chart 2).

Organizing or supervising events and fundraising were the most commonly reported formal volunteer activities

Volunteering can involve a wide array of activities, varying in level of commitment and necessary skills and experience. Canadians aged 15 years and older were most often engaged in organizing events and raising money on behalf of an organization. In 2018, 18% of Canadians reported organizing, supervising, or coordinating events, and 16% helped with fundraising. The next most common formal volunteer activities

included sitting on a committee or board (13%), teaching, educating or mentoring (12%), collecting, serving or delivering food (11%), or providing counselling or advice (10%) (Chart 3).

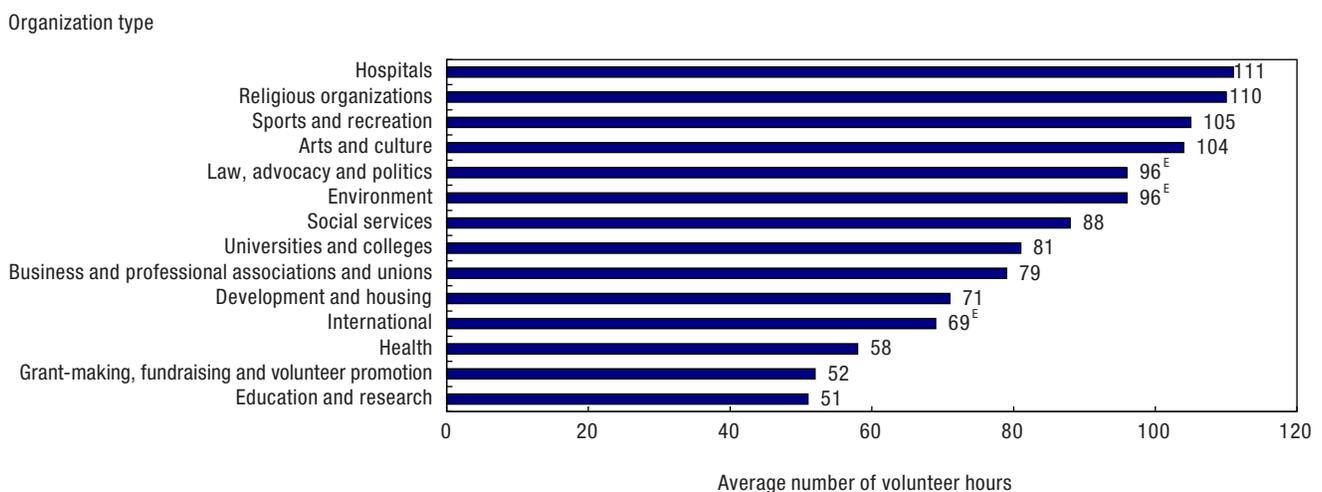
The types of volunteer activities vary somewhat by generation. Compared to all other generations, iGens were more likely to organize, supervise or coordinate activities or

Did you know?

In certain circumstances, volunteering may be required, such as for obtaining a diploma, in a co-op program or by an employer. In 2018, iGens volunteered 14 million hours⁸ in this capacity. Expressed as a percentage of the total formal volunteer hours, this represents the largest contribution of mandatory unpaid work observed among generations. Nevertheless, mandatory unpaid work is a fairly small portion of the total formal hours contributed by iGens (10%)⁹ in volunteering activities.

Chart 2

Average annual volunteer hours, by organization type, among formal volunteers aged 15 and over, 2018



^E use with caution

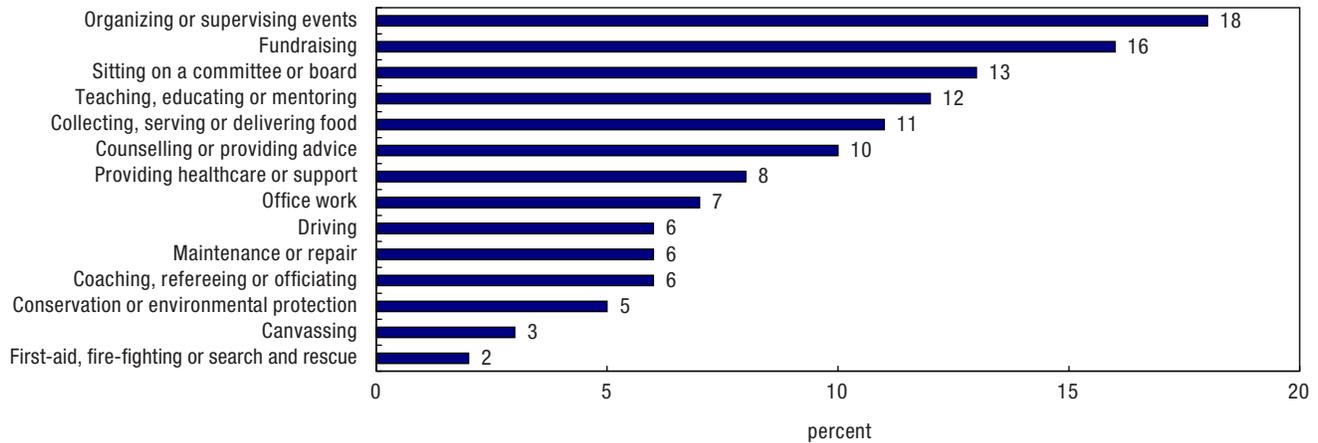
Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, 2018.

Chart 3

Participation in formal volunteering, by volunteer activity type, among the population aged 15 and over, 2018

Activity type



Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2018.

events, as well as to teach or mentor. Joining the iGens were Millennials and GenXs in coaching, refereeing or officiating. About 1 in 10 individuals in these generations engaged in these activities. This compares to 3% of Baby Boomers and 1%¹⁰ of Matures.

Baby Boomers were more likely than the youngest generation to sit on a committee or board, as well as to provide driving services, such as driving adults with disabilities to and from medical appointments.

No generational differences were found for volunteering activities such as collecting, serving or delivering food; counseling or providing advice; maintenance or repair; conservation or environmental protection.

Informal Volunteering

iGens more likely than Baby Boomers and Matures to volunteer informally

In 2018, more Canadians engaged in informal volunteering- which includes the provision of i) direct help to people outside the household and ii) community improvement -than in formal volunteering. The following section reports on informal volunteering, regardless of whether formal volunteering activities have also been carried out during the reference period.

In 2018, close to 23 million people aged 15 years and older volunteered on their own, and devoted more than



3.4 billion hours to their informal volunteer activities (Table 3). This represents 74% of Canadians 15 years of age and older, meaning that the rate of informal volunteering is almost double the rate of formal volunteering at 41%.

The informal volunteer rate tended to be relatively the same across generations, with the exception of iGens (78%) where the rate was significantly higher than the rates for Baby Boomers (73%) and Matures (58%). While less likely to volunteer, the oldest generations - Matures and Baby Boomers - dedicated more hours to their informal volunteer work. For example, Baby Boomers



Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018

Table 3
Informal volunteer rates and hours by generation, among the population aged 15 and older, 2018

	iGen (ref.) Born 1996 and up	Millennials Born 1981 to 1995	Gen X Born 1966 to 1980	Baby Boomers Born 1946 to 1965	Matures Born 1918 to 1945	Total
Participation in informal volunteering activities						
Total population (thousands)	3,424	7,764	7,159	9,348	3,148	30,843
Number of volunteers (thousands)	2,667	5,950	5,427	6,810	1,839	22,692
Volunteer rate (percent)	78	77	76	73*	58*	74
Total hours volunteered (millions)	265	718*	729*	1,342*	323	3,377
Full-time year-round job equivalents ¹ (jobs)	138,176	373,866	379,725	699,174	168,116	1,759,056
Average hours volunteered per year (hours)	99	121	134	197*	176*	149
Helping others directly						
Number of volunteers (thousands)	2,574	5,736	5,169	6,566	1,727	21,771
Volunteer rate (percent)	75	74	72	70*	55*	71
Total hours volunteered (millions)	242 ^E	586*	648*	1,219*	294	2,990
Full-time year-round job equivalents ¹ (jobs)	126,097 ^E	305,461	337,443	635,023	153,279	1,557,304
Average hours volunteered per year (hours)	94 ^E	102	125	186*	170*	137
Improving the community directly						
Number of volunteers (thousands)	1,032	2,408	2,044	2,462	696	8,642
Volunteer rate (percent)	30	31	29	26	22*	28
Total hours volunteered (millions)	23 ^E	131*	81*	123*	28	387
Full-time year-round job equivalents ¹ (jobs)	12,079 ^E	68,405	42,281	64,150	14,837	201,752
Average hours volunteered per year (hours)	22 ^E	55*	40*	50*	41*	45

^E use with caution

* significantly different from reference group (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

1. Assuming 40 hours of work per week for 48 weeks.

Note: "Helping others directly" and "Improving the community directly" are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, 2018.

volunteered an average of 197 hours annually or the equivalent to almost 700,000 full-time jobs. This compares to 99 hours for iGen or about 138,000 job equivalents.

Among Canadians 15 years of age and older, 71% volunteered informally to help others directly and 28% did so to improve the

community directly. For both types of informal volunteering, Matures and Baby Boomers contributed more annual hours on average than iGens. Unlike formal volunteers, no gender differences were found among informal volunteers across all generations.

iGens more likely than all other generations to help others directly by teaching, coaching or tutoring

Help with housework, such as cooking and cleaning, as well as home maintenance and outdoor work were the most frequently reported types of informal volunteering. About half (49%) of individuals

Did you know?

Many formal volunteers provide a small number of hours, but an exceptional group of volunteers are involved in long-term, consistent activities with an intensive time commitment. Top volunteers are defined as the 25% of volunteers who provide the most hours – spending 132 hours or more on volunteer activities in 2018.

Baby Boomers (31%) and Matures (40%) were more likely than iGens (18%) to be top volunteers. Those holding a postsecondary diploma (26%) or a university degree (27%) were more likely than those with less than a high school diploma (20%) to be a top volunteer, while those not in the labour force, such as retirees and stay-at-home parents (33%) were more likely than the employed (21%) to be top volunteers.¹¹

In contrast with general findings on formal volunteering, those without children (28%), who may have more discretionary time, were more likely to be top volunteers than those with pre-school aged children only (14%)¹², school aged children only (22%), and both (19%)¹³. In accordance with studies on volunteering, those attending weekly religious events/activities were more likely to be top volunteers than those with less than weekly attendance (37% versus 22%).

Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018

Did you know?

Nearly two-thirds of all hours given to help others directly (62%) went to tasks for relatives living outside the household. This could include any combination of the following: cooking, cleaning, maintenance-related tasks, driving, shopping, paperwork, providing health-related or personal care support, and/or teaching or coaching. Notably, Baby Boomers contributed a larger percentage of hours to helping family members, at 71%.

said they assisted someone directly or their community with these tasks. Next most common was shopping for someone or driving or accompanying someone to the store or an appointment (39%), along with providing someone with health-related or personal care, such as visiting the elderly or performing unpaid babysitting (39%). Other types of informal help cited were helping someone with paperwork

tasks (i.e., writing letters, doing taxes, filling out forms, banking, paying bills or finding information) (22%) and helping someone with unpaid teaching, coaching, tutoring or assisting with reading (11%).

Reflecting the overall lower rate of informal volunteering, Matures were less likely than other generations to help others directly with almost all tasks, such as housework, health-related or personal care, shopping, and teaching/coaching (Chart 4). While helping others with paperwork was also less prevalent among Matures (12%), this activity was also relatively uncommon among

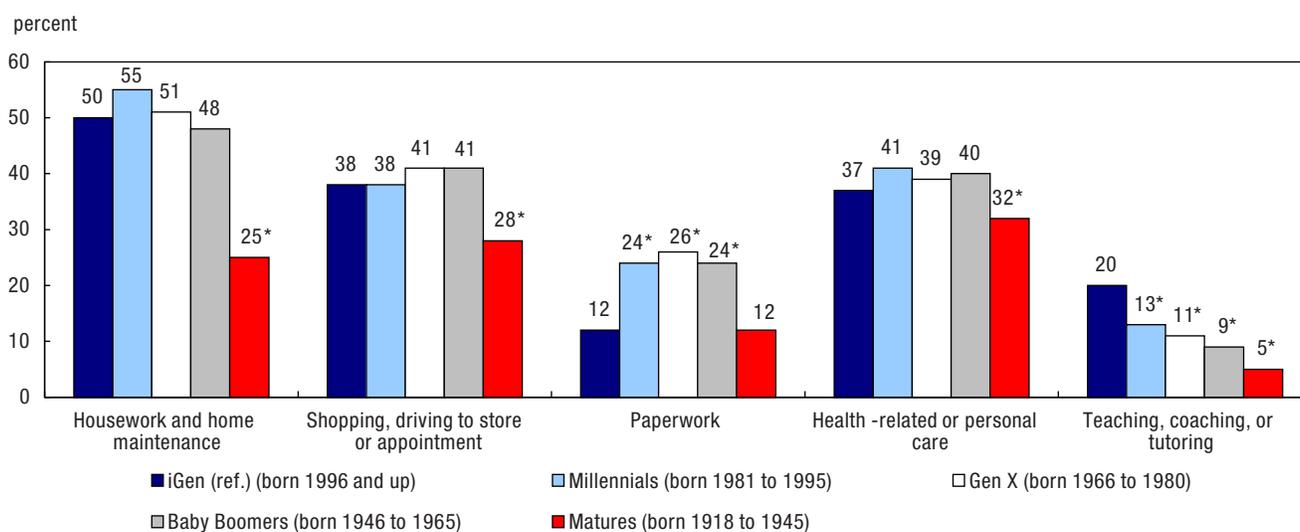


iGens (12%). The only informal volunteering activity where iGens had higher rates of participation was related to teaching, coaching, tutoring or assisting in reading. These tasks were reported by 20% of iGens, compared to 13% of Millennials, 11% of Gen Xs, 9% of Baby Boomers and 5% of Matures.

Older generations gave the most hours of support, on average, to health-related or personal care activities

As with formal volunteering, older volunteers dedicated more time to providing direct help. For example, Baby Boomers and Matures provided, on average, more hours to shopping, driving someone to the store or an appointment (44 hours and 47 hours, respectively), compared to iGens (27 hours¹⁴). This pattern of higher average annual hours volunteered among older generations held true even for activities that were more common

Chart 4
Participation rate of helping others directly by generation, among the population aged 15 and over, 2018



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating 2018.

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among iGens. In particular, Matures dedicated the most average hours to teaching, coaching or tutoring at 74 hours¹⁵, nearly four times higher than the average annual hours reported by iGens (20 hours¹⁶).

The youngest generation more likely than the oldest to disseminate information

Canadians 15 years of age and older contributed on their own, outside of formal organizations, by participating in a variety of activities to help improve their communities. The most frequently reported informal volunteer activities included: disseminating information (online or elsewhere) to make others aware of an issue (14%); actively participating in public meetings where there was a discussion of community

affairs (10%); coordinating a group or event (such as a community gathering or neighbourhood watch) (8%); maintaining a park or public space, planting trees or repairing public facilities (5%); and/or helping to develop an economic or social project for their community (3%).

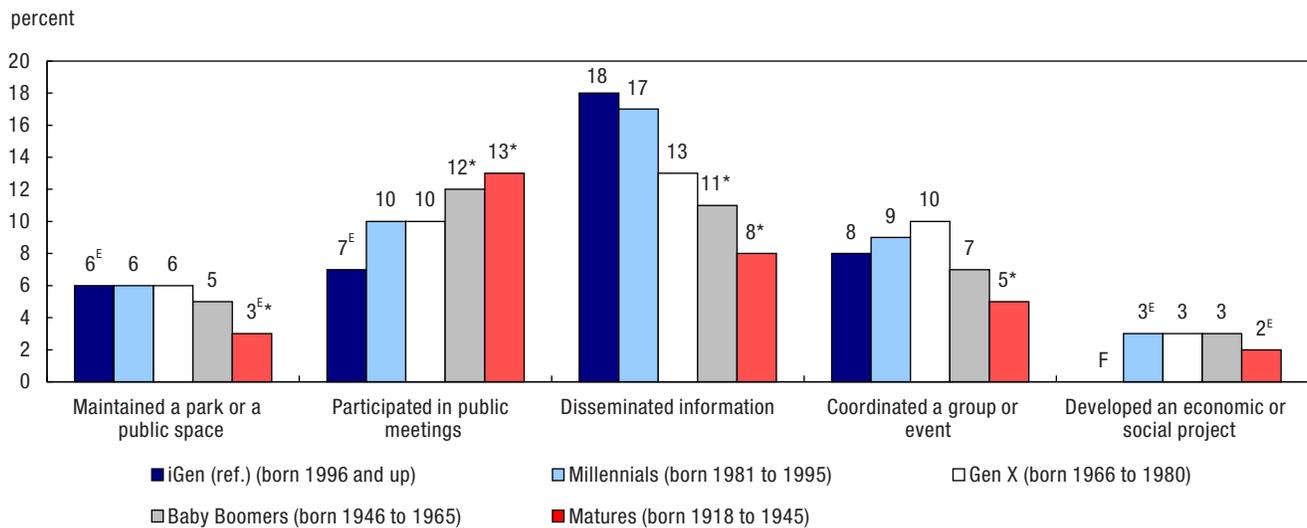
Generations differed in the types of informal volunteering. Younger generations, namely iGens (18%) and Millennials (17%) were more likely than Baby Boomers (11%) and Matures (8%) to disseminate information (online or elsewhere) to raise awareness of an issue (Chart 5). Conversely, Matures (13%) and Baby Boomers (12%) were more likely than iGens (7%) to participate in public meetings in which there was discussion of community

Matures tended to be less likely than their youngest counterparts – iGens – to coordinate groups or events (5% versus 8%). Matures were also less likely than any other generation to maintain a park or another public space, plant trees or repair public facilities. Across all informal volunteering activities, there were no generational differences in the average annual number of volunteer hours.



Chart 5

Participation rate of those who improved the community directly by generation, among the population aged 15 and over, 2018



* significantly different from reference group (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

^E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2018.

Did you know?

Available for the first time on this cycle of the General Social Survey: Giving, Volunteering and Participating is a measure of volunteering in accordance with the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), which seeks to develop a standard definition and method of measuring volunteer work. The objective is to gather and share comparative cross-national data on a form of work which, despite its growing importance and economic value, often remains uncaptured in statistics (International Labour Organization, 2011). The 19th ICLS defines volunteer work as "work performed by persons of working age who, during a short reference period, performed any unpaid, non-compulsory activity to produce goods or provide services for others, where:

1. 'any activity' refers to work for at least one hour;
2. 'unpaid' is interpreted as the absence of remuneration in cash or in-kind for work done or hours worked; nevertheless, volunteer workers may receive some small form of support or stipend in cash, when below one third of local market wages (e.g. for out-of-pocket expenses or to cover living expenses incurred for the activity), or in-kind (e.g. meals, transportation, symbolic gifts);
3. 'non-compulsory' is interpreted as work carried out without civil, legal, or administrative requirements which are different from the fulfilment of social responsibilities of a communal, cultural, or religious nature;
4. production 'for others' refers to work performed: (i) through, or for, organizations comprising market and non-market units (i.e. organization-based volunteer work) including through or for self-help, mutual aid, or community-based groups of which the volunteer is a member; or (ii) directly for households other than the household of the volunteer worker or of related family members (i.e. direct volunteer work)".

The formal and informal volunteering definition stipulated by ICLS differs from the Canadian definition in that it excludes activities that are mandatory/required or supported by an employer and direct help given to relatives living outside the household. Furthermore, the ICLS definition only includes volunteer activities of at least one hour.

Several countries have completed implementation of the International Labour Organization approach to measuring volunteering, while others are not yet ready to report on this measure. Canada can now provide a volunteer rate and average number of hours volunteered defined by the 19th ICLS. The volunteer rate in Canada using the international definition of volunteering was 66% in 2018.

Formal and Informal Volunteering

Informal volunteers made up the largest percentage of the population

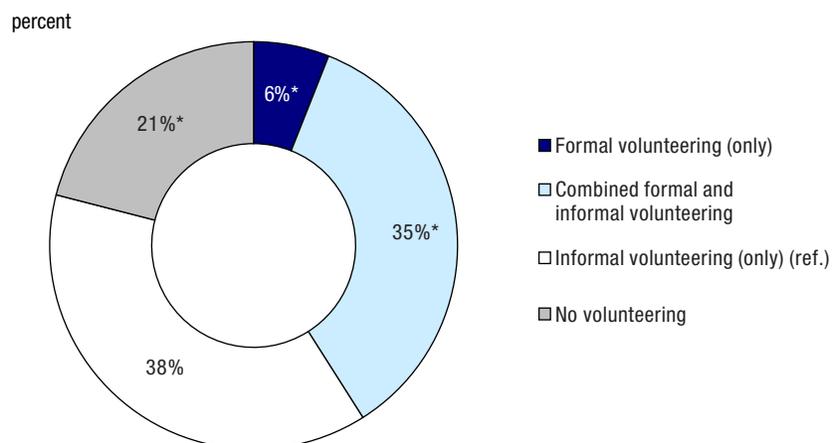
Canadians can participate in a variety of volunteering types – be it exclusively formal volunteering, exclusively informal volunteering, or a blend of both formal and informal volunteering. For the first time, the GVP 2018 is able to classify volunteers into these mutually exclusive categories. Previously, it was not possible to understand and quantify the possible overlap in the volunteer types.

In 2018, most Canadians engaged in informal *only* volunteering (38%), when compared with all other volunteering types (Chart 6). The

next most common was a mix of formal and informal volunteering, reported by 35% of Canadians. Very

few Canadians (6%) exclusively gave their time to formal volunteering activities.

Chart 6
Distribution of volunteer type, among the population aged 15 and over, 2018

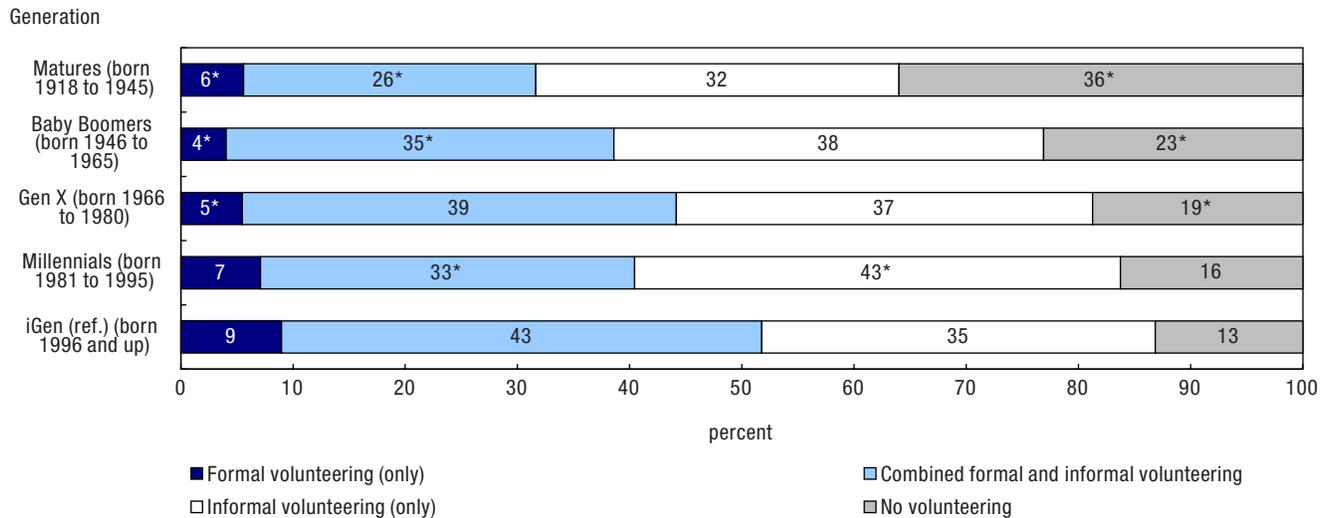


* significantly different from reference group (ref.) (p < 0.05)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2018.

Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018

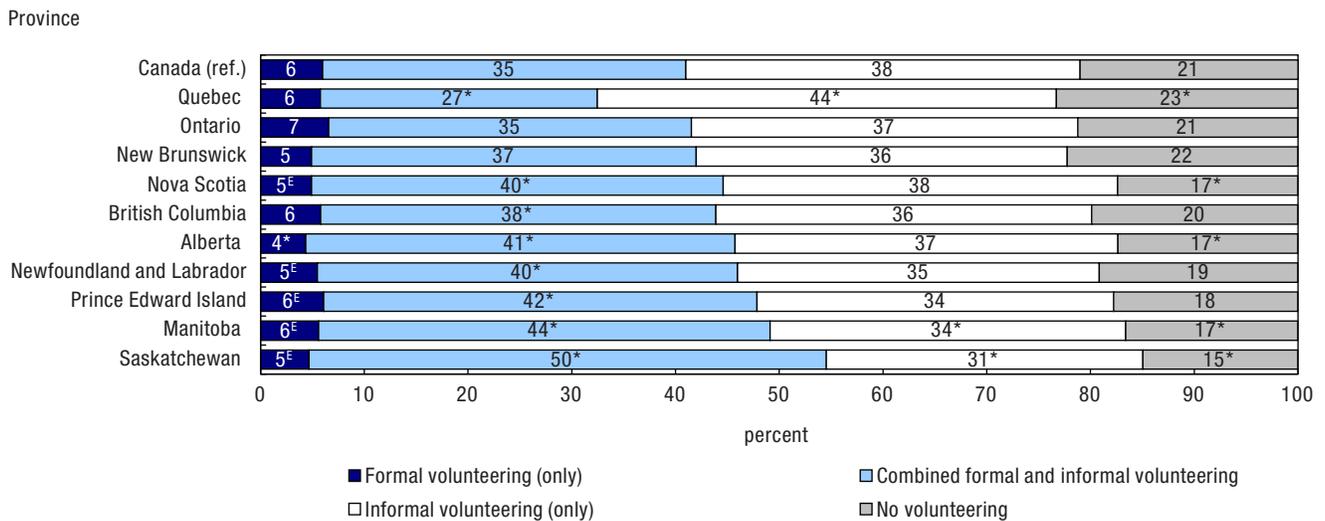
Chart 7
Distribution of volunteer type within each generation, among the population aged 15 and over, 2018



* significantly different from reference group (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2018.

Chart 8
Distribution of volunteer type within each province, among the population aged 15 and over, 2018



* significantly different from reference group (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

^E use with caution

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2018.

Overall volunteering tends to decrease from younger to older generations

Among the generations, iGens (43%) had the highest proportion of those who engaged in both formal and informal types of volunteering activities (Chart 7). iGens constituted a smaller proportion of non-volunteers (13%) compared to older generations, demonstrating greater engagement across volunteering types. Conversely, Matures comprised a larger proportion of non-volunteers (36%), with the lowest proportion of overall volunteering at 64%.

Saskatchewan had the highest proportion of people participating in formal or informal volunteering

The distribution of volunteer types within each province revealed differences. In 2018, the participation rate in formal volunteering activities was highest in Saskatchewan (55%) and lowest in Quebec (33%). Saskatchewan also had the highest participation rate in informal volunteering activities (80%, compared with 71% in Quebec).

In Quebec, 44% of the adult population engaged in informal volunteering activities only, the highest proportion of all provinces (Chart 8). Owing to a relatively large participation in informal activities, differences in overall volunteer participation rates were relatively small between Quebec and other provinces. For example, the difference was 2 percentage points between Ontario (79%) and Quebec (77%), and 1 percentage point between New Brunswick (78%) and Quebec (77%). This suggests that when both formal and informal volunteering activities are taken into account, a more complete picture of overall volunteering emerges.

Conclusion

This article presents findings from the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating while taking a generational focus. This is the first time informal volunteering hours are reported, providing a picture of engagement across a spectrum of volunteering types.

While these data predate the COVID-19 pandemic, they provide a reference point that can potentially help the volunteer sector understand the impact of the pandemic moving forward. Indeed, knowing the pre-pandemic generational characteristics of volunteering can help tailor volunteer recruitment, now and during the economic restart.

And, while the pandemic has created challenges for volunteers and organizations alike, both individuals and organizations have discovered innovative ways to continue to support Canadians and their communities. New opportunities arising from the increased virtual volunteering opportunities has meant the removal of previous geographic and physical barriers, perhaps allowing for a more diverse and inclusive volunteer community and the potential for greater societal benefits.

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Data sources, Methods and Definitions

Data source

This study is based on data from the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GVP), which was conducted on a sample of persons aged 15 and over, totalling 16,149 respondents in 2018. Estimates in the report are for Canada unless a regional breakdown is provided.

Comparability with previous iterations

The 2018 GSS GVP offered for the first time an Internet option to survey respondents. This new approach to data collection was in recognition of the need to adapt to the changing use of technology and the ever present demands on Canadians' time. It is impossible to determine with certainty whether, and to what extent, differences in a variable are attributable to an actual change in the population or to changes in the survey methodology. However, there are reasons to believe that the use of an electronic questionnaire had an impact on the estimations. Because of these changes it is **not** appropriate to compare results from GSS GVP 2018 with previous iterations. Analysis and associate documentation is ongoing and will be available on Statistics Canada web site.

Definitions

Formal volunteers: Persons aged 15 and older who did any activities without pay on behalf of a group or organization, at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey. This includes any unpaid help provided to schools, religious organizations, sports or community associations to name a few.

Mandatory unpaid activity: Those who volunteer in this capacity were required to do unpaid activity by a school, employer, court or other organization.

Top volunteers: Top volunteers are defined as 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.

Informal volunteers:

- **Direct help:** This refers to help given by those aged 15 and older on one's own; that is, not through a group or organization, in the 12 months preceding the survey. It includes help given to friends, neighbours and relatives, but excludes help given to a person living in one's household. This may include health-related or personal care support, teaching or coaching, help with paperwork, shopping, driving, cooking, cleaning or maintenance-related tasks.
- **Improving the community:** Informal volunteering also includes help given, in the past 12 months, by those aged 15 and older to improve the community directly through activities that are not on behalf of a group or organization such as maintaining a public space, participating in public meetings, producing or disseminating information to make others aware of an issue, organizing or coordinating a group or an event, helping to develop an economic or social project for their community, or in some other capacity.

Average annual volunteer hours: This is the average number of hours volunteers gave of their time on behalf of a group or organization or on their own, directly to others or their community, in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Volunteer type: This pertains to the spectrum of total volunteer participation across formal and/or informal volunteer types.

Notes

1. See Isakson (2013).
2. See Bennett (2012).
3. See Vancouver Foundation (2019).
4. The International Labor Organization classifies unpaid help provided to “family members living in other households” as part of “own-use production work”. Using the Canadian definition, this same activity is classified as informal “volunteer work”.
5. See International Labor Organization (2013) cited in International Labor Organization (2019).
6. Use this number with caution.
7. Use this number with caution.
8. Use this number with caution.
9. Use this number with caution.
10. Use this number with caution.
11. There were no significant differences between those that were unemployed (looking for work) and those in the labour force, or between the unemployed and employed.
12. Use this number with caution.
13. Use this number with caution.
14. Use this number with caution.
15. Use this number with caution.
16. Use this number with caution.

References

- Bennett, L. 2012. “The personalization of politics: Political identity, social media, and changing patterns of participation.” *ANNALS, AAPSS*, 644, 20-39.
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