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Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey

Volunteering in Canada, 2004 to 2013



by Maire Sinha

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.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0^s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
^{p}	preliminary
^{r}	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
^{E}	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published
*	significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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Highlights

- In 2013, 44% of Canadians aged 15 years and older volunteered for a charitable or non-profit organization. This represented a slight drop from 2010 (47%).

- The hours contributed by volunteers in 2013 stood at 1.96 billion hours, equivalent to about 1 million full-time, year-round jobs.

- The rate of volunteering was highest among teens aged 15 to 19, at 66%. This was followed by Canadians aged 35 to 44 (48%). Rates subsequently decline with age, with the lowest rates recorded among Canadians aged 75 years and older (27%).

- While older Canadians were less likely to volunteer, they devoted more hours to their volunteer work. For example, volunteers aged 65 to 74 dedicated 231 hours annually, compared to 110 hours for teens and 122 hours for middle-aged volunteers.

- Women were slightly more likely to volunteer than men (45% versus 42%), though this was primarily driven by significant gender differences among those aged 35 to 44.

- The top four sectors benefiting from volunteer work were: social services (25%), sports and recreation (24%), education and research (20%) and religious organizations (19%). Holding steady over the last decade was volunteering in the social services and sports and recreation sectors, while drops were recorded for the education and research sector, as well as religious organizations.

- Similar to previous years, volunteers were most often engaged in organizing events (46%) and raising money on behalf of an organization or group (45%).

- Similar proportions of volunteers made the decision to volunteer on their own (48%) or because someone asked (47%). A small share (8%) said that they were required to volunteer by their school, employer, a charitable organization or group, or someone else.

- When asked about the reasons for volunteering, the vast majority (93%) said they wanted to contribute to the well-being of their community. Other common reasons included the desire to use their skills and experience (77%), because they were personally affected by the cause (60%), and to improve their own sense of well-being (52%).

- A lack of time was the leading barrier to volunteering, reported by two-thirds of Canadians who did not volunteer in the previous 12 months. An inability to make a long-term commitment was also reported by 62% of non-volunteers.

- Most volunteers stated that volunteering gave them a chance to acquire or improve their skills. Ranking the highest was interpersonal skills (63%), followed by communication skills (43%) and organizational and managerial skills (40%).

- In addition to formal volunteering, 82% of Canadians aged 15 and older reported helping people directly, without the involvement of an organization or group. Most often, people helped with housework (59%), followed by health-related support or personal care (49%) and shopping and transportation (45%).

Volunteering in Canada, 2004 to 2013

By Maire Sinha

Volunteering can take many forms, involving a variety of activities and benefiting a diverse range of organizations and groups. It can be episodic, meaning participation in one or two events over the course of a year, or more regular and ongoing involvement, such as a weekly commitment to a specific cause. Regardless of the type and frequency, volunteers play an important role in maintaining and enhancing the wellbeing of communities. Their time commitments not only provide an important source of support for such causes as health care, education and the arts, but also contribute to Canadian society on an economic level (Salamon et. al 2012).

For non-profit organizations, knowing the patterns and trends in volunteering can be essential to attracting new volunteers and retaining those already contributing their time and energy to volunteering. Data can help tailor recruitment campaigns for particular population groups, by focusing on motivations underlying the decision to volunteer. It can also provide insight into the development of recognition programs for volunteers, helping to ensure that they remain engaged, committed and happy.

This report provides a profile of volunteerism in Canada, examining trends in volunteer rates and hours volunteered, the characteristics of volunteers, the sectors benefiting from volunteering, volunteer activities, and motivations for and barriers to volunteering. Also discussed are patterns in informal volunteering, defined here as acts helping people directly, whether it is family, friends or neighbours.

Six in ten Canadians volunteered at some point in their lives

According to the 2013 General Social Survey (GSS), at some point in their lives, about six in ten Canadians (59%) aged 15 years and older or 17 million Canadians had volunteered their time for a charitable or non-profit organization or group. For many, volunteering had been a part of their lives in the preceding year. In particular, 44%, or an estimated 12.7 million Canadians aged 15 years and older, reported volunteering in the last 12 months (Table 1).[1] These people coached and mentored children and youth; visited seniors in nursing homes; advocated for social, environmental, and wildlife causes; raised funds; prepared and delivered food; and provided other sources of support on behalf of an organization or group.

While the 12-month volunteer rate of 44% represented a slight drop from 2010 (47%), it was on par with the rate recorded ten years earlier in 2004 (45%).[2] In fact, the estimated number of volunteers increased 7% since 2004, from 11.8 million Canadians to 12.7 million. This was somewhat lower than the overall population increase (11%) among Canadians aged 15 and older during this same time period.

Volunteer activities equivalent to one million full-time jobs

Along with the rate of volunteering, the amount of time contributed by volunteers provides a more complete picture of the actual contributions of volunteers to the organizations and groups that they support. Altogether, the hours contributed by volunteers in 2013 stood at 1.96 billion hours, equivalent to about 1 million full-time, year-round jobs.[3]

At the individual level, volunteers contributed an average of 154 hours to their volunteer activities in the previous year, similar to 2010 but down from a high of 168 hours recorded in 2004.

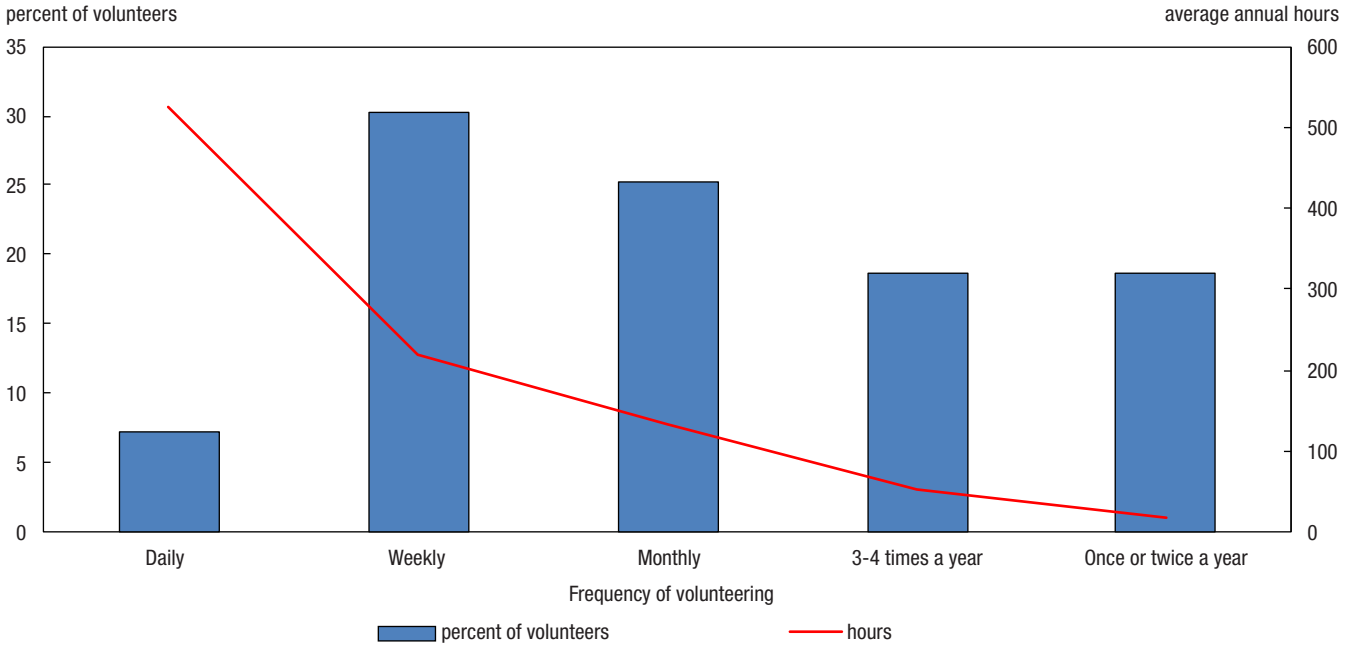
1. For the purpose of this report, the remainder of the analysis will focus on volunteering in the 12 months preceding the survey.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all differences are statistically significant.
3. Full-time defined as 40 hours per week for 48 weeks.

Most volunteers had a recurrent schedule of volunteering

The level of involvement varies widely among volunteers, ranging from a one-time activity to a daily undertaking. Most often, volunteers had a recurrent schedule of volunteering, with a weekly commitment being the most common. In 2013, 30% of volunteers gave their time on a weekly basis, another 25% contributed their time monthly, and a much smaller proportion (7%) had a daily schedule of volunteering. The remaining 37% of volunteering activities could be characterized as episodic, with volunteer activities occurring between one and four times a year.

Not surprisingly, regular volunteers put in more hours than episodic volunteers. Daily volunteers, on average, contributed 526 volunteer hours per year, while weekly volunteers contributed 220 annual hours (Chart 1). This compares to an average of 36 hours for episodic volunteers: 53 hours for those volunteering 3 to 4 times per year, and 19 hours for those volunteering once or twice a year.

Chart 1
Regular volunteers log more hours than those volunteering less frequently

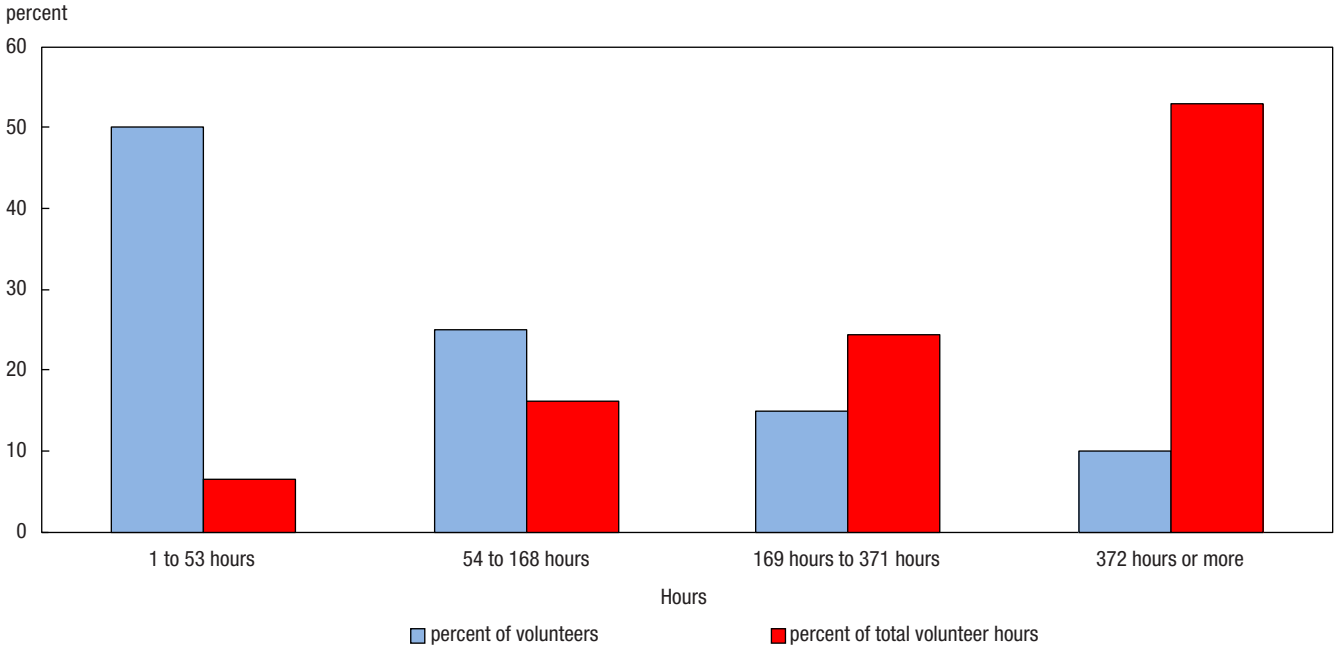


Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Over half of total volunteer hours performed by the top 10%

As has been the case historically, the bulk of volunteer work is done by a small minority of volunteers. In 2013, over half (53%) of all volunteer hours were performed by 10% of volunteers (Chart 2). These volunteers dedicated 372 hours or more to volunteering, corresponding to at least nine full-time weeks of paid work. Another 15% of volunteers dedicated between 169 and 371 hours per year. Combined, these top 25% of volunteers accounted for over three-quarters (77%) of all volunteer hours over the previous year.

Chart 2
Top 10% of volunteers contributed over half of all volunteer hours



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Among the top 10% of volunteers, either a weekly or daily commitment to volunteering was most often reported. In 2013, 45% of these top volunteers said they devoted their time at least once a week, with another 34% reporting that their volunteer activities were a daily occurrence.

Teens have the highest volunteer rate; seniors the lowest

While volunteers are a heterogeneous group, with a diverse set of personal and economic characteristics, certain segments of the population are more likely to volunteer their time than others. Age has been a consistent predictor of involvement in volunteer activities. The 2013 rate of volunteering was highest among teens, with two-thirds (66%) of Canadians aged 15 to 19 volunteering their time (Table 2). The rate of volunteering subsequently drops in young adulthood, though it rebounds, albeit to a lesser degree, among those in their mid 30s to early 40s (48%). This is followed by a fairly steady decrease in volunteerism with age, with the lowest rates recorded among Canadians aged 75 years and older (27%).

This age pattern in volunteering tends to follow life transitions. For teens, the high rate of volunteering can be partly explained by 'mandatory' volunteering: one in five volunteers aged 15 to 19 reported that they volunteered because they were required to do so, either by their school or some other way (20%). This was nearly three times higher than the proportion (8%) recorded for volunteers overall. Entering the job market was also a driver among young volunteers. Almost half (47%) of volunteers under 35 were motivated by possible job prospects, compared to 13% of 35 to 54, and 5% of volunteers aged 55 and older. This type of volunteering has been previously described as 'self and career-oriented' volunteering and is most commonly associated with young volunteers (Wilson 2000).

For middle-aged volunteers, who had the second highest volunteer rate, volunteering may be tied to their parental role.[4] Schools and after-school programs, such as arts, recreational and sports programs, often depend on volunteers to deliver services and activities for children, and may not exist without parental involvement. According to the 2013 GSS, a child in school increased the likelihood of volunteering. About 6 in 10 Canadians with a school-aged child (6 to 17 years) in the household volunteered their time and 52% who had both preschool and school-aged children did the same. In comparison, the volunteer rate for those without children was 38%.

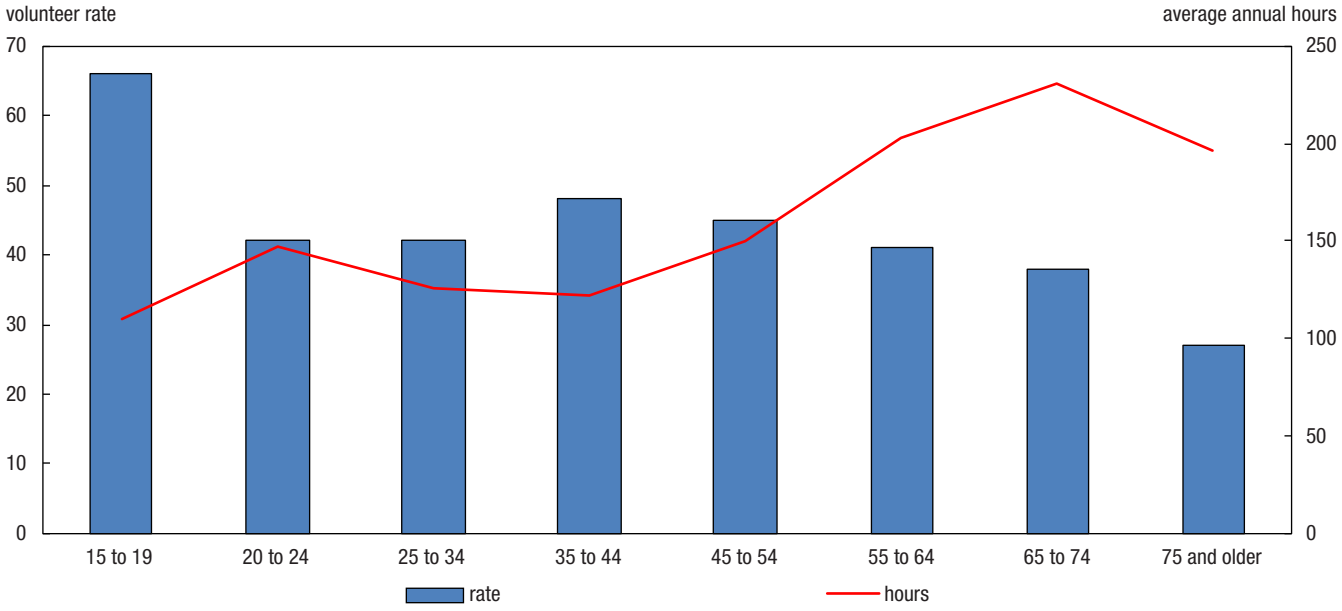
4. In 2013, the majority (71%) of Canadians aged 35 to 44 reported the presence of children (under the age of 18) in their household. This compares to 41% of 25 to 34 year-olds and 39% of 45 to 54 year-olds.

Older Canadians, who were the least likely to volunteer, may be limited by health problems, despite the fact that approaching and entering retirement can mean greater time to devote to activities outside of paid work. In 2013, 43% of non-volunteers in their mid 50s and beyond identified health conditions as a barrier to volunteering, double the proportion for those aged 35 and 54 (18%) and four times higher than non-volunteers under 35 (10%). The physical inability to participate in volunteer activities was even higher among the oldest seniors: 64% among those aged 75 years and older.

Older volunteers dedicate the greatest number of hours

While the likelihood of volunteering generally decreases with age, the hours volunteered display the opposite pattern (Chart 3). The average annual hours volunteered were highest among older volunteers and lowest among adolescent and middle-aged volunteers. On average, volunteers aged 65 to 74 devoted the most hours, at 231 hours annually. This was followed by those aged 55 to 64 (at 203 hours) and those 75 years and older (at 196 hours). Nearly half as many volunteer hours were logged by teen and middle-aged volunteers: 110 hours and 122 hours, respectively.

Chart 3
Older Canadians less likely to volunteer but contribute more hours



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Just as the volunteer rate reflects changes across the life course, this same explanation may help account for the age difference in the average volunteer hours. Older volunteers often have transitioned out of the paid workforce and have greater time availability and flexibility. For younger age groups, competing time demands - whether school, paid work, family and caregiving responsibilities - may restrict the ability to contribute more volunteer hours.

Middle-aged adults less likely to volunteer than in previous years

When examining age-related trends in the volunteer rate and hours volunteered, one group continually stands out: middle-aged adults. Canadians aged 35 to 44 were the only group to experience a decrease in the overall volunteer rate since 2010, from a rate of 54% in 2010 to 48% in 2013. This decrease contributed to the overall drop in the volunteer rate over this three-year period. Volunteer hours for this age group have also decreased, dropping from 152 hours in 2004 to 122 hours in 2013.

Women more likely to volunteer

Both women and men dedicate their time and energy to volunteering, though the rate of volunteering was somewhat higher among women. In 2013, 45% of women volunteered for a charitable or non-profit organization or group, compared to 42% of men. This small but significant gender difference in volunteering was primarily driven by those aged 35 to 44. In this age group, over half (52%) of the women volunteered, compared to 44% of men. For all other age groups, rates of volunteering were equal between women and men. The average volunteer hours were also similar for women and men.

Volunteering more common among those with high levels of education and income

Often referred to as socioeconomic status,[5] three inter-related socio-economic factors play an important role in the likelihood that a person will become a volunteer: household income, education level, and labour force participation. In general, Canadians with a higher household income, greater educational attainment and current participation in the labour force are more likely to volunteer. However, they may not necessarily be the ones who contribute the most volunteer hours.

With a volunteer rate of 55%, university graduates were most likely to report volunteering in the previous 12 months, as compared to Canadians with lower levels of educational attainment. Next highest were those with some post-secondary education (42%) and those with high school or less (37% and 39%). The average number of hours was also higher among volunteers with a university degree. They dedicated 170 hours per year, 16% more than those who had not graduated from university. Overall, university graduates contributed 36% of all volunteer hours, though representing 26% of the population aged 15 years and older.

Over the last decade, a growing proportion of volunteers are university graduates. In 2004, 27% of all volunteers had a university degree, increasing to 32% in 2013. This increase largely reflects the changing educational profile of Canadian society and corresponding pool of university graduates available to volunteer. That being said, the tendency to volunteer has decreased among university graduates, from 59% in 2004 to 55% in 2013.

Household income, a characteristic closely associated with education levels, plays a similar role in volunteering as education (Table 3). Rates of volunteering increase with income, from a low of 33% among Canadians with a household income below $20,000 to a high of 52% among Canadians with a household income of $120,000 or more. However, contrasting variations in volunteer hours by education, the highest income volunteers dedicated the fewest number of hours. Over the course of a year, they contributed an average of 130 hours, far below those reported by the lowest income volunteers at 182 hours.

Volunteering highest among employed and those looking for work

Participation in the labour force meant a greater likelihood of volunteering. Nevertheless, unlike in previous years where employed Canadians were most likely to volunteer, unemployed Canadians were just as likely as employed Canadians to perform volunteer work in 2013 (45% and 46%). The parallel rates between the unemployed and employed are largely a reflection of the decrease in the volunteer rate among employed Canadians, from 50% in 2004 to 46% in 2013. There was no significant change in volunteer rates for the unemployed.

Canadians not in the labour force, such as retirees and stay-at-home parents, remained the least likely to volunteer (38%), though they contributed more hours on average. In particular, those not in the labour force spent an average 191 hours per year on volunteer activities, employed spent 133 average hours, and unemployed contributed 182[E] hours.

5. See Adler 1994.

Religious attendance plays a role in volunteering, though influence has decreased

Previous research has consistently found that high levels of religious involvement, as defined by weekly religious attendance, have been linked to the likelihood of volunteering (See Vézina and Crompton 2012). This has been explained by the encouragement of philanthropy in all major religions and the reliance of religious organizations on volunteers to run programs. The 2013 GSS confirms these earlier findings. In 2013, about six in ten Canadians who attended weekly religious service also participated in volunteer activities (Table 2). This compares to a figure of four in ten among those not attending religious services on a weekly basis.

Mirroring the decrease in the overall volunteer rate since 2010, Canadians who attended religious services weekly were also less likely in 2013 to dedicate their time to volunteering. In particular, the volunteer rate among weekly attendees dropped six percentage points since 2010, from 65% to 59% in 2013. A somewhat smaller drop in volunteer involvement was recorded for those who did not attend religious services on a weekly basis, from 44% to 40%.

Nevertheless, in 2013, weekly religious attendees continued to contribute more volunteer hours than other volunteers. On average, they spent 215 hours per year volunteering, compared to 133 hours for those not attending religious services on a weekly basis.

Volunteer rate remains steady for immigrants

It is now well known that a growing proportion of Canadians are immigrants: in 2011, 21% of the Canadian population were immigrants, up three percentage points from a decade earlier.[6] This proportion is expected to rise between 25% and 28% by 2031.[7] Consequently, the pool of Canadians available to volunteer is changing.

Historically, people born outside Canada have been less likely to volunteer than their Canadian-born counterparts. This also held true in 2013, where 38% of immigrants volunteered their time for an organization or group, significantly less than the proportion (45%) reported for those born in Canada (Table 2). However, while the overall volunteer rate decreased since 2010, this has not been the case for immigrants. They were as equally as likely to volunteer in 2013, as they were in 2010. Furthermore, when immigrants do volunteer, they average the same number of hours as Canadian-born volunteers.

One-quarter of volunteers dedicated their time to social services or sports and recreation

The charitable and non-profit organizations benefiting from the dedication of volunteers are varied, though four sectors continued to attract the greatest number of volunteers: social services; sports and recreation; education and research; and religious organizations. In particular, 25% of volunteers aged 15 years and older dedicated their time to organizations providing social services. This was similar to the proportion (24%) providing support to organizations associated with sports and recreation (Chart 4). Volunteer participation in these two sectors has held steady over the last decade.

Volunteers have become less likely to dedicate their time to education and research, as well as to religious organizations. This is despite the fact that these sectors remain among the most common areas where people volunteer. Between 2004 and 2013, a drop of five percentage points was recorded for volunteer participation in education and research (from 25% to 20%), and a decline of three percentage points for religious organizations (from 22% to 19%).

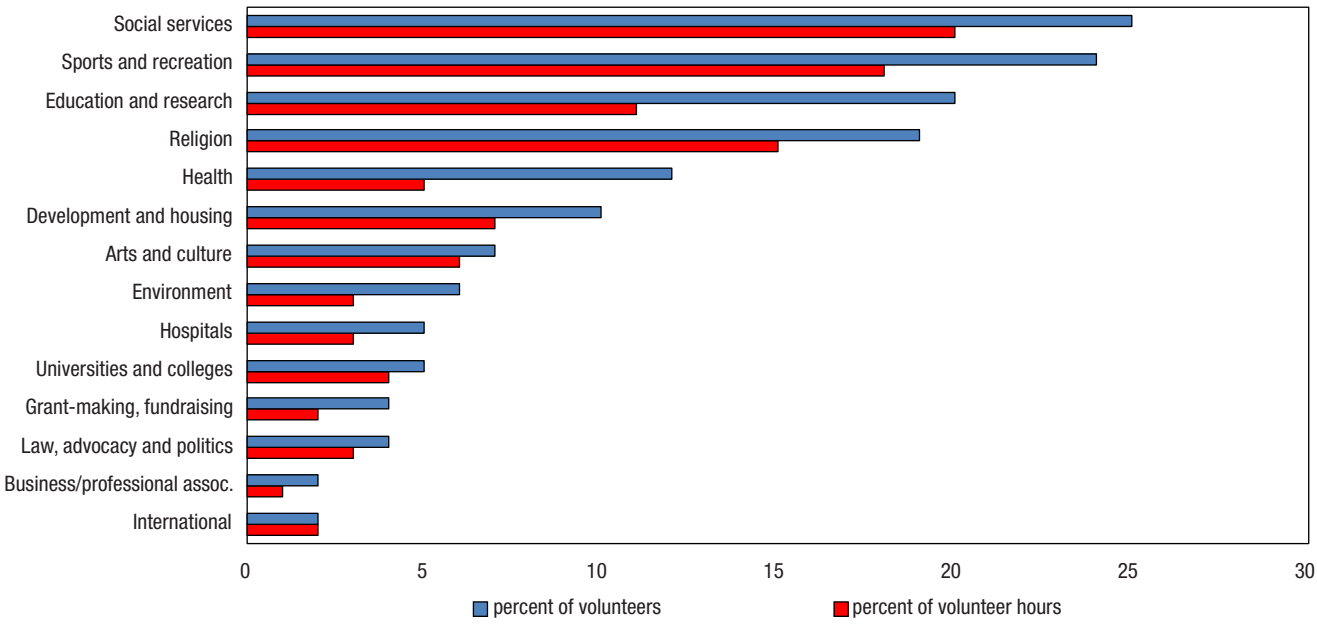
6. Statistics Canada, Censuses of the population, 1911 to 2006; Statistics Canada, National Household Survey.
7. Statistics Canada. 2010. Projections of the Diversity of the Canadian Population, 2006 to 2031. Catalogue no. 91-551-X. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-551-x/91-551-x2010001-eng.htm

The decrease in the education and research sector can be partly explained by trends in the volunteer rate among Canadians aged 35 to 44. This age group have been more likely than any other group to provide help to schools, reflecting their greater propensity to be parents of school-aged children.[8] With the decrease in volunteering among middle-aged adults, there are fewer of these volunteers available to support the education and research sector.

In a similar vein, the drop in the religious sector mirrors the sharper decrease in volunteering among weekly religious attendees, as compared to those not attending religious services weekly. Weekly religious attendees have been consistently much more likely to commit their time to the religious sector. In 2013, 37% of volunteer hours contributed by weekly religious attendees benefited religious organizations. The comparable figure for volunteers not attending religious services weekly was 2%.

Despite the overall drop in two of the four most common sectors, about two-thirds (64%) of all volunteer hours were devoted to the four leading sectors, including 20% for social services, 18% for sports and recreation, 15% for religious organizations and 11% for education and research.

Chart 4
Volunteers most likely to volunteer for the social service and sports and recreation sectors



Note: Volunteers were able to identify volunteer activities in multiple sectors. Therefore, percentage of volunteers by sector will not total 100%.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Involvement in most other sectors has held steady over time, with the exception of a significant increase in volunteering at universities and colleges. While a relatively small proportion of volunteers committed their time to this sector, the proportion has grown from 2% in 2004 to 5% in 2013.

8. In 2013, one-third (33%) of volunteers aged 35 to 44 volunteered for the education and research sector, compared to 19% of those aged 25 to 34, and 22% of those aged 44 to 54.

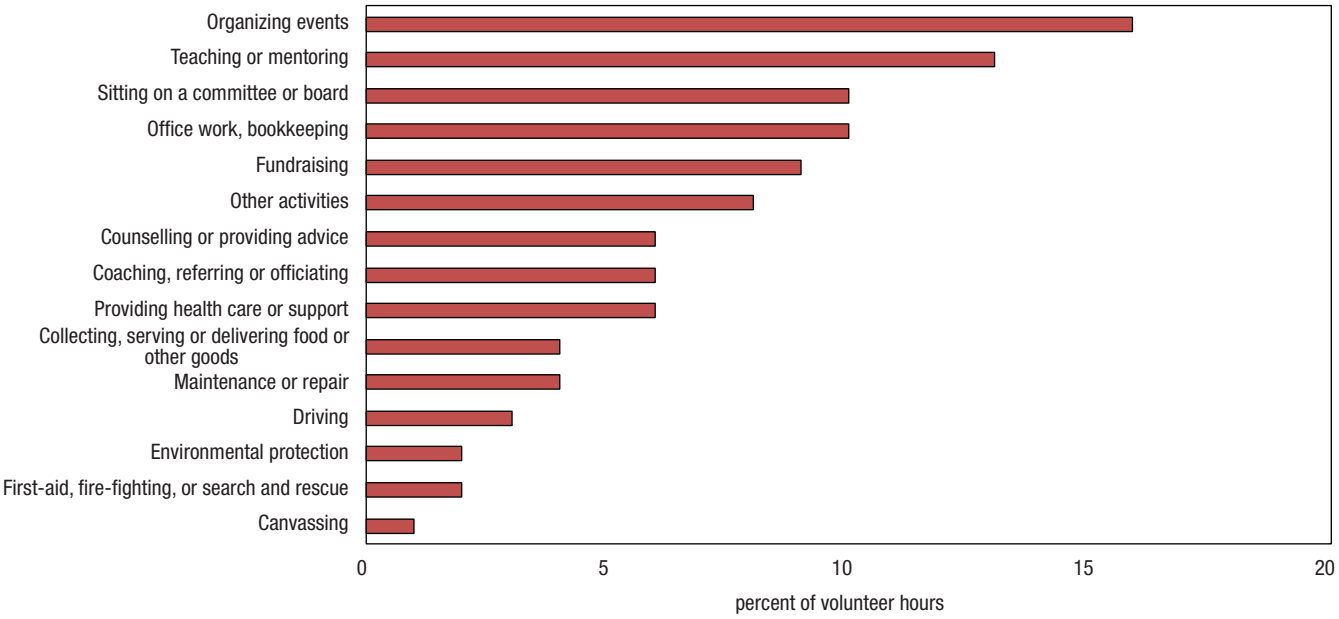
Organizing events and fundraising: Top volunteer activities

Volunteering can involve a wide array of activities, varying in levels of commitment and necessary skills and experience. Similar to previous years, volunteers were most often engaged in organizing events and raising money on behalf of an organization or group. In 2013, nearly half (46%) of volunteers organized, supervised or coordinated events, and about the same share (45%) helped with fundraising (Table 4). These proportions are essentially unchanged from the last decade.

Decreasing in popularity was sitting on a committee or board, which dropped from 36% in 2004 to 33% in 2013. It remained, however, the third most common activity among volunteers. Similar drops were seen in driving services, providing health care or support, and maintenance or repair. The greatest decrease was recorded in canvassing-related activities, falling from 15% in 2004 to 10% in 2013. This decline may be a reflection of the move away from traditional canvassing methods, such as door-to-door soliciting, and the adoption of new methods for raising funds and soliciting support for campaigns.

With the exception of organizing events, the most common types of activities were not always the ones with the greatest number of volunteer hours. For instance, fundraising activities, one of the most common activities, accounted for 9% of all volunteer hours, fewer than the proportion (13%) for teaching or mentoring, a less common volunteer activity (Chart 5). The occasional nature of fundraising activities compared to the more regular schedule for teaching and mentoring help to understand this difference. Fundraising was most commonly performed by those volunteering between one and four times over the year, whereas teaching and mentoring was most often performed by weekly volunteers.

Chart 5
Organizing events account for highest percentage of contributed volunteer hours



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Women more likely to raise money; Men more often coach

The types of volunteer activities and sectors benefiting from these activities vary by gender. According to the 2013 GSS, women were more involved in fundraising, organizing events and providing health care, while men were twice as likely to coach and provide services related to maintenance or repair (Table 5).

'Word of mouth': Most common way volunteers learned about opportunity

Becoming a volunteer can happen in a number of ways. For almost half of volunteers (48%), involvement in a charitable organization or group started through their own initiative. That is, they actively sought out a volunteer opportunity. Another 47% said their decision to volunteer began when someone asked them to volunteer. Only a minority (8%) said that they were required to volunteer by their school, employer, the charitable organization or group, or someone else.

Among those who were self-motivated, 'word of mouth' was the most common way they learned about the volunteer opportunity, reported by 43%. This was followed closely by attending a meeting or activity (34%). Less commonly reported was responding to an advertisement on a poster or in a newspaper (8%), through the Internet (6%) or some other way (7%).

Over half of employed volunteers had formal support from their employer

While a very small minority of volunteers (less than 1%[E]) were required to volunteer by their employer, a significant portion of volunteers indicated that their employer supported their volunteer activities. In 2013, 55% of volunteers who had paid employment in the last 12 months[9] received some form of formal support from their employer (Table 6). Often known as "employer-supported volunteering", this proportion has remained largely unchanged from 2010.

Flexible work arrangements were the leading type of employer support. About one-third (34%) of employed volunteers indicated that their employer approved either a change in work hours or a reduction in work activities. Also, the ability to take time off, whether paid or unpaid, to volunteer was reported by 20% of volunteers.

Infrastructure support was another key source of support. In 2013, 27% of volunteers said that their employer allowed the use of facilities or equipment, making it the second most common form of employer support. Decreasing in prevalence was formal recognition or letter of thanks, which dropped from 24% in 2010 to 19% in 2013. This represented the only type of formal support to decrease over this three-year period.

Less common types of employer support were donations of prizes (1%[E]), t-shirts or company goods (1%[E]), and financial contributions to the organization (1%[E]).

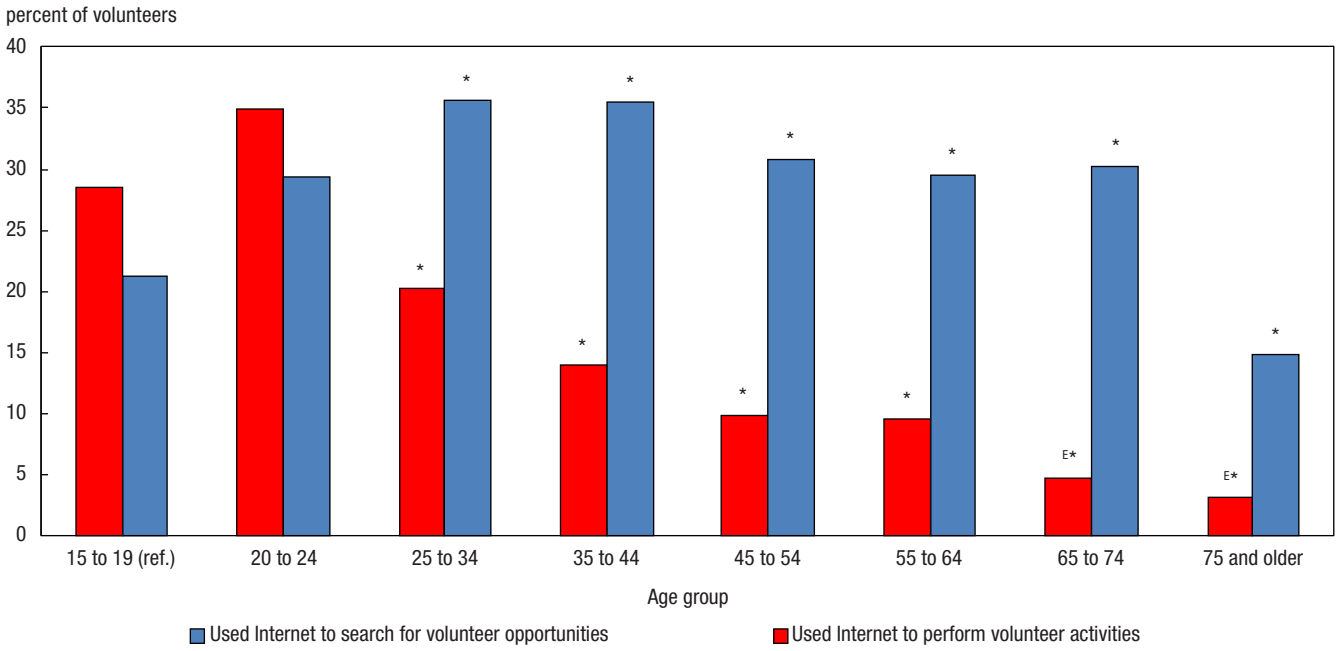
One in six volunteers searched the Internet to find volunteer opportunities

The Internet has become a tool for recruiting volunteers, as well as performing volunteer work. One in six volunteers said that they had searched the Internet to find volunteer opportunities. This was much more common among younger volunteers. In 2013, 26% of volunteers under 35 looked for volunteer positions over the Internet. This compares to 12% of those aged 35 to 54, and 7% of those over 55 years.

9. Includes volunteers, aged 15 to 64, who worked at a paid job (excluding self-employed) in the previous 12 months.

This same age pattern, however, did not exist for performing volunteer tasks. Oftentimes, older volunteers were just as likely to use the Internet for this purpose, and in some cases, more likely than younger volunteers. For example, 30% of volunteers aged 65 to 74 used the Internet to carry out their volunteer activities, compared to 21% of volunteers aged 15 to 19 year olds (Chart 6). Age differences in Internet-based volunteering were even more pronounced, when limited to Internet users. Volunteers aged 65 to 74, who used the Internet in the past 12 months, were one of the groups most likely to use the Internet to perform volunteer activities.

Chart 6
Internet searching for volunteer opportunities more common among young volunteers



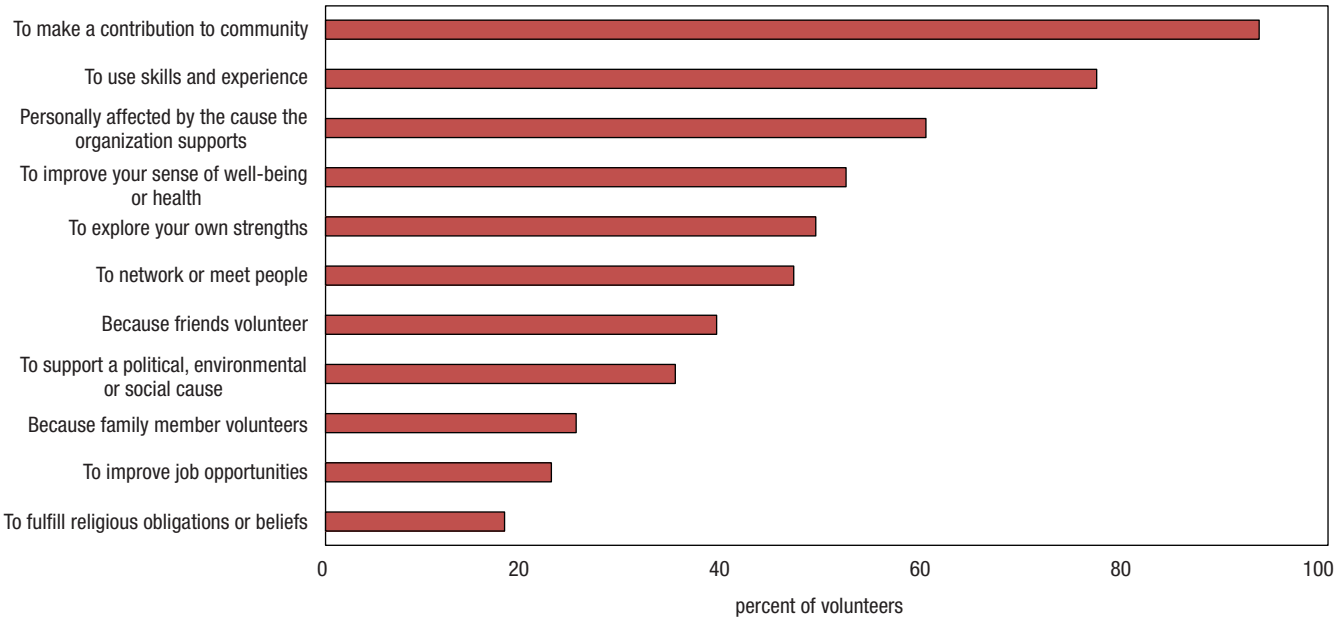
[E] use with caution
* significantly different from reference category
Note: Includes all volunteers, whether or not they used the Internet in the past 12 months.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

At first glance, the higher likelihood of Internet-based volunteering among older age groups seems counterintuitive. However, this likely speaks to the differences in the types of volunteer activities performed by younger and older volunteers. For instance, younger volunteers are more likely to coach or mediate - an activity less conducive to performing over the Internet. Conversely, older volunteers, those over 55 years, were more likely to perform office work and sit on committees or boards. Some of this work could be done using the Internet.

Most volunteers wanted to contribute to their communities

When asked about the reasons for volunteering, the vast majority (93%) said they wanted to contribute to the well-being of their community (Chart 7). Other common reasons included the desire to use their skills and experience (77%), because they were personally affected by the cause (60%), and to improve their own sense of well-being (52%).

Chart 7
Making a contribution to the community: Leading reason for volunteering



Note: Reasons for volunteering with the organization to which the volunteer gave the most hours (main organization). Volunteers were able to give multiple reasons for volunteering; therefore, responses will not total 100%.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Reasons for volunteering have remained largely the same over time, with the exception of volunteering because of the involvement of friends or because of religious obligations. More specifically, 39% of volunteers in 2013 said that the involvement of friends motivated them to volunteer, down from 43% in 2004.

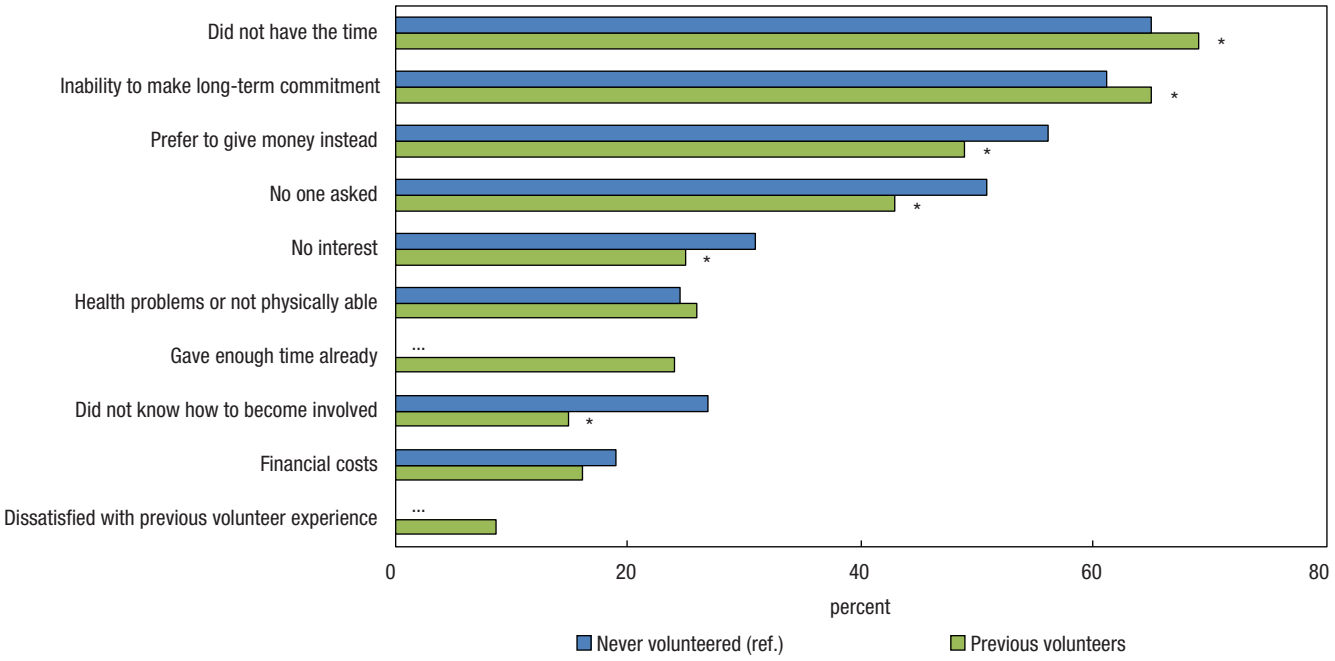
Religious-based motivations fell four percentage points over the last decade, from 22% in 2004 to 18%. This may help to explain the previously noted decrease in volunteers' participation in the religious sector over this same time period. Older volunteers, those aged 55 years and older, continued to cite religious obligations more often than their younger counterparts under 55 (26% versus 15%).

Time constraints prevented two-thirds from volunteering

According to the 2013 GSS, finding the time to volunteer was the leading barrier to providing unpaid help for a charitable or non-profit organization or group. Two-thirds (66%) of non-volunteers said they did not have time to volunteer and 62% said they were not in a position to make a long-term commitment. Rather than volunteer, some preferred to make a monetary donation. Over half (54%) of non-volunteers opted to give money to the charity or group, rather than performing volunteer activities.

Non-volunteers include those who have never before volunteered and those who volunteered but not in the previous 12 months. While the lack of time was the most important barrier for both groups, some key differences existed. Those who had never volunteered were twice as likely to say that they were unsure about how to become involved (27% versus 15%) (Chart 8). They were also more likely than previous volunteers to say that they did not become involved because no one asked (51% versus 43%).

Chart 8
Lack of time: Leading barrier to volunteering



... not applicable
* significantly different from reference category
Note: Includes people who had not volunteered in the 12 months preceding the survey.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

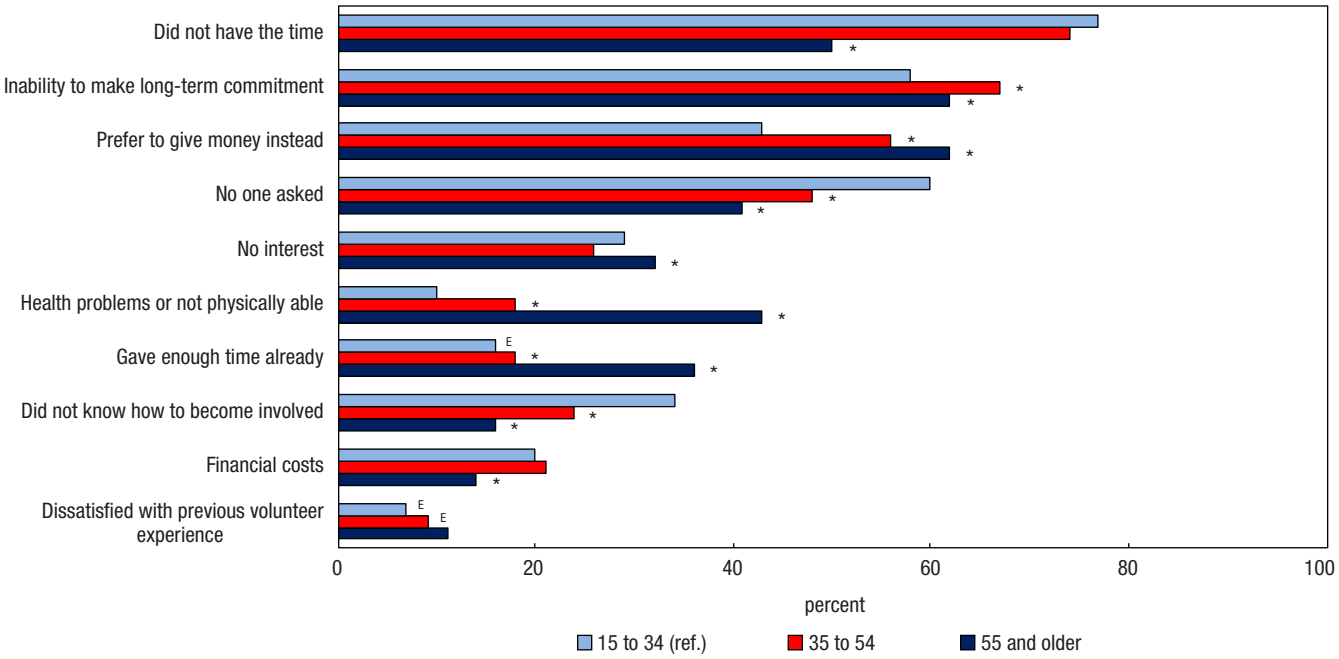
On the other hand, one-quarter (24%) of previous volunteers said they already gave enough time and 9% said they were dissatisfied with their previous volunteer experience. They also were slightly more likely than those who never before volunteered to say that they did not have the ability to make a long-term commitment or because of lack of time.

Men more often lacked interest and awareness in volunteer activities

The leading barriers to volunteering – time constraints - tended to be similar across socio-demographic characteristics. However, certain barriers to volunteering were more prevalent depending on the sex and age of the non-volunteer. A lack of awareness and interest were more commonly reported by men. More precisely, 26% of men said they were unaware of volunteer opportunities, higher than the figure for women (21%). Further, an estimated 33% of men said they were not interested in volunteer work, compared to 25% of women. Men were also more likely than women to report that no one asked (55% versus 43%).

Throughout the life course, barriers to volunteering somewhat shift. For those under 55, a lack of time was, by far, the biggest challenge to devoting any time to volunteering, reported by three-quarters of non-volunteers under the age of 55. After 55, time constraints became a less common factor (50%), while issues related to health (43%), as well as the preference to give money rather than time grew as reasons for not volunteering (62%) (Chart 9).

Chart 9
Time constraints less common barrier to volunteering among Canadians aged 55 and older



[E] use with caution
* significantly different from reference category
Note: Includes people who had not volunteered in the previous 12 months, but who may have previously volunteered.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

The barriers to volunteering have remained relatively constant over time, though some have grown in prevalence. For instance, the percentage of non-volunteers citing a lack of interest in volunteering has increased from 23% in 2004 to 29% in 2013 (Table 7). In addition, a growing share said that no one had asked them to volunteer (from 40% in 2004 to 49% in 2013).

Lack of time leading barrier towards not committing more time to volunteering

Canadians who volunteered in 2013 were asked about reasons for not volunteering more. The most frequently mentioned reasons paralleled those among non-volunteers: a lack of time (73%) and inability to make a long-term commitment (51%). A significant proportion (42%) felt that the time dedicated to volunteering was already enough.

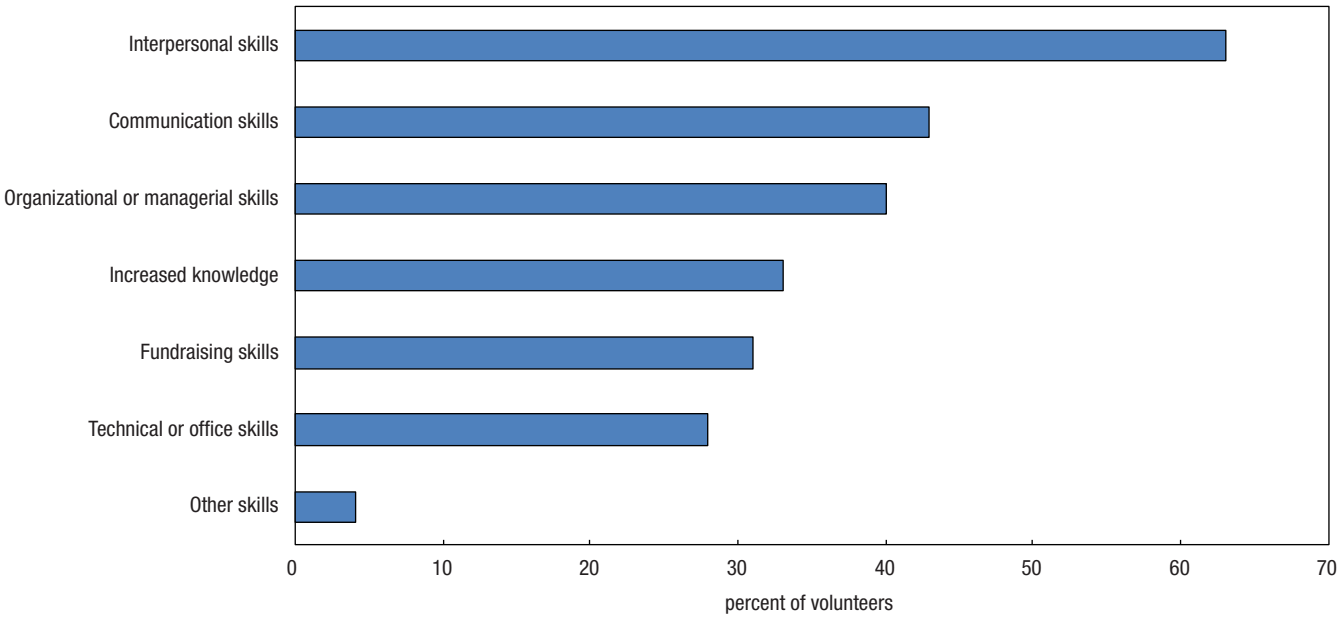
Many volunteers improved interpersonal skills

Besides benefiting communities, the act of volunteering can have a positive impact on volunteers' overall well-being and health[10], as well as improving their skills and knowledge, and expanding work experience. Most volunteers stated that volunteering gave them a chance to acquire or improve their skills. Ranking the highest was interpersonal skills (63%), followed by communication skills (43%) and organizational and managerial skills (40%) (Chart 10). Gaining knowledge in such areas as health, environmental causes, and women's issues, were also rewards of volunteering, with one-third (33%) of volunteers reporting this benefit.

Overall, younger volunteers, those under 35 years, were more likely to state that they had acquired skills through volunteering. This may not be surprising since their work experience, both unpaid and paid, would be more limited than older volunteers. In addition, older volunteers may choose to volunteer in an area where they can apply their previous work experience and skills.

10. See Jenkinson, et al. 2013.

Chart 10
Six in ten volunteers said they improved their interpersonal skills



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Eight in ten Canadians helped people directly

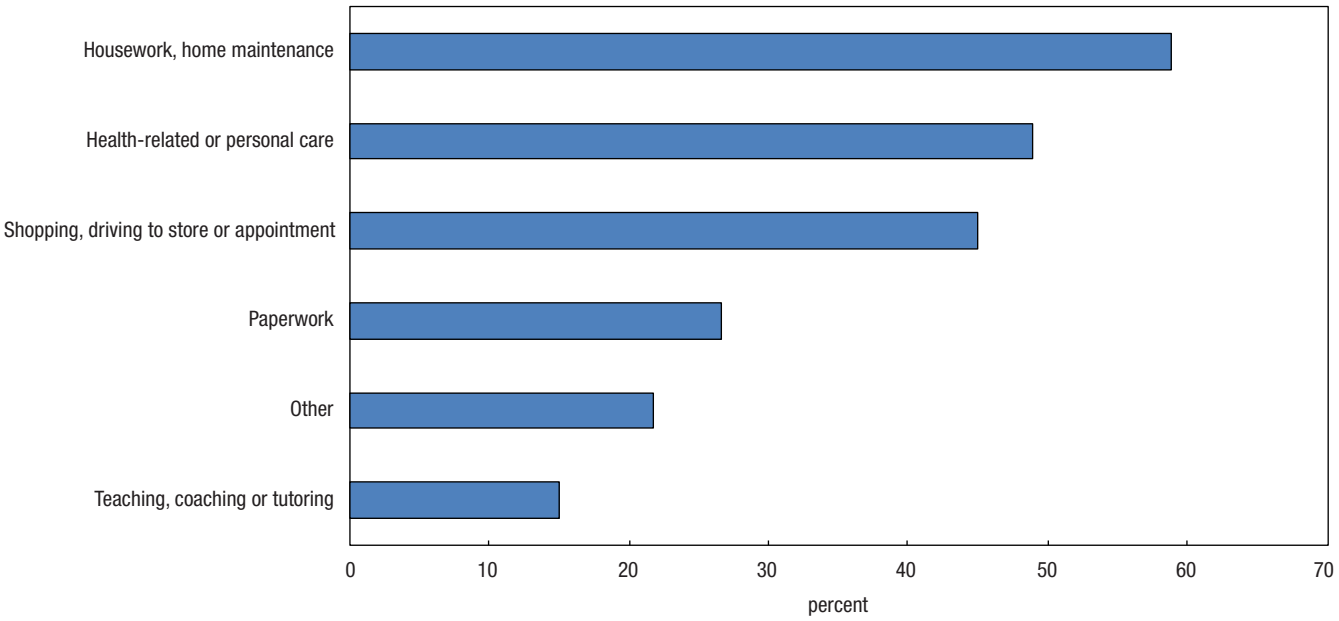
In addition to formal volunteering, direct helping activities, such as shovelling a senior neighbour's driveway or preparing meals for a sick colleague, are often considered equally important as organization-based volunteering. This may be particularly true in those regions with fewer charitable or non-profit organizations or groups (International Labour Office 2011). According to the 2013 GSS, 82% of Canadians aged 15 and older reported helping people directly, without the involvement of an organization or group. This included helping behaviours directed at people living outside the household, such as extended family members, neighbours, colleagues, and even strangers. The rate of informal volunteering was almost double the rate for more formalized volunteering (82% versus 44%).

Unlike formal volunteering, Canadians were just as likely to provide direct help as they were in 2010. However, the rate of informal volunteering was slightly lower than a decade ago (82% in 2013 versus 83% in 2004).

Housework, home maintenance and yard work remain most common types of informal help

The most prevalent forms of informal help provided in the previous 12 months remain unchanged. Help with housework, such as preparing meals, cleaning and laundry, as well as home maintenance and outdoor work were cited most often. Over half (59%) of people said they assisted someone with these tasks (Chart 11). In addition, 49% reported that they provided health-related support or personal care, while 45% helped someone with shopping and transportation, whether it was driving to a store or an appointment.

Chart 11
Over half of Canadians help with housework and home maintenance



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Notwithstanding the absence of change in the overall rate of informal volunteering since 2010, almost all types of helping behaviours have dropped, with the exception of help with shopping and transportation (Table 8). For instance, health-related and personal care dropped four percentage points since 2010, from 53% to 49% in 2013. The proportion returned to levels recorded in 2004.

Also, the most common types of help were not always the ones most likely to be performed on a regular basis (i.e., at least once a week). For instance, despite the fact that teaching, coaching or tutoring were the least common forms of help, when they were performed, these tasks were more likely to be done more regularly. In 2013, 41% of Canadians tutoring or coaching did so at least once a week. In comparison, 31% of Canadians helping with housework or home maintenance reported doing these tasks on a weekly basis.

Informal volunteering more often done by the young

Just as formal volunteering varies by socio-demographic characteristics, so does direct helping. In fact, patterns in informal volunteering mirror those for formal volunteering - direct helpers tend to be relatively young, university educated, have a high household income and currently participate in the labour force.

Teens, aged 15 to 19, were most likely to volunteer informally, with 91% indicating that they provided help to someone outside their home in the last 12 months (Table 9). These rates decreased fairly steadily with increasing age. By the time Canadians reach 75, just over half (55%) were providing some type of direct help.

Along with changes in time demands and physical capacity, one possible reason for the age differences in informal volunteering may be related to the size of social networks and corresponding exchange of services within these groups. Previous research has found that Canadians under 25 have a significantly larger network of friends and acquaintances, compared to older aged Canadians (Turcotte 2015; Sinha 2014). While the larger circle of friends may mean a greater flow and access to resources, it may also mean the likelihood of reciprocating help is higher.

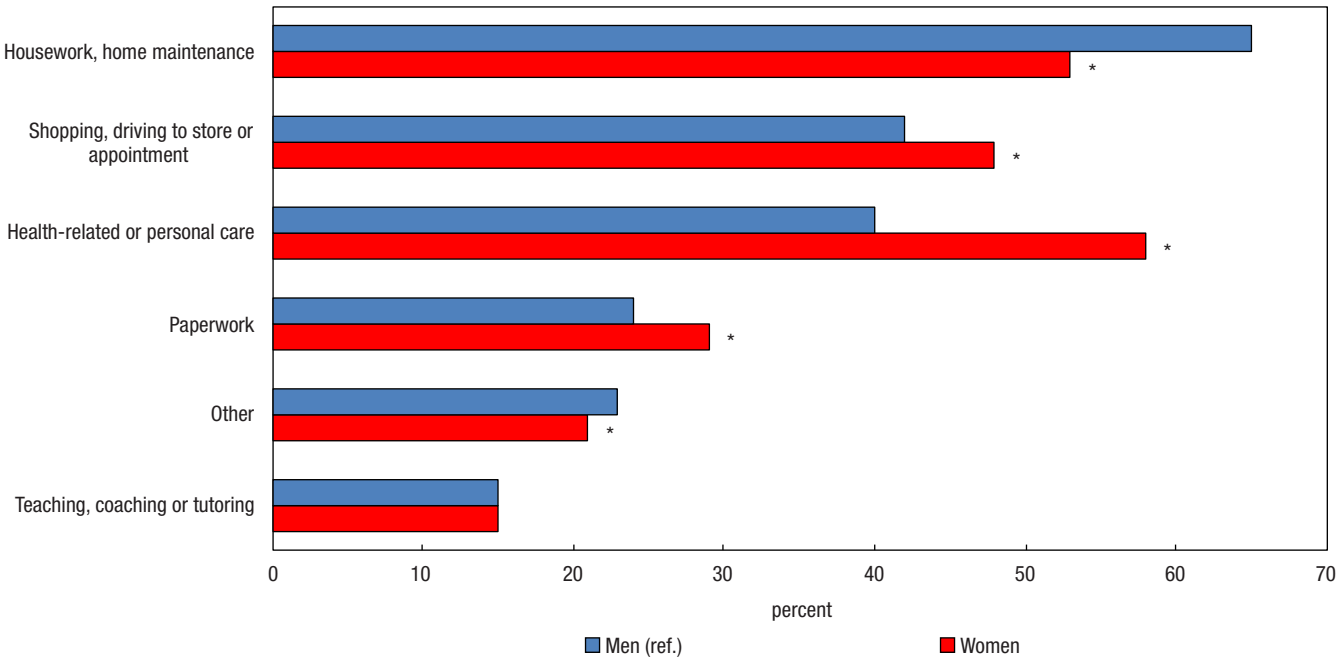
In addition to the elevated tendency of helping other directly, young people are likely to report providing help on a weekly basis. This is unlike formal volunteering where the intensity of volunteering increased with age.

Women and men equally as likely to help others directly

Similar proportions of women and men helped others directly, though women were more likely to report doing tasks for others on a regular basis. Exactly half (50%) of women who provided help directly performed some activities at least once a week, with 16% performing them daily. In comparison, 42% of men provided regular help, including 11% who provided daily help.

The higher likelihood of women regularly providing direct help may be partly related to the type of tasks commonly performed by them. Women tend to provide help with activities that more often must be completed on a regular or set schedule. For instance, they were more likely than their male counterparts to provide health-based or personal care (58% versus 40%) (Chart 12). On the other hand, men were more likely than women to report helping with housework, outdoor work and home maintenance (65% versus 53%).[11]

Chart 12
Men more likely to assist with housework and home maintenance; women more likely to help with health-related or personal care



* significantly different from reference category
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Higher socio-economic status related to greater levels of informal volunteering, but lower intensity of help

Canadians currently in the labour force, whether employed or looking for work, were more likely than those not in the labour force to provide direct help. However, the time demands associated with paid work seemed to translate into lower intensity of direct help. In 2013, 42% of direct helpers who were employed reported providing daily or weekly help. This proportion was lower than the proportions for the unemployed (56%) and those not in the labour force (53%).

11. In 2013, 38% of direct helpers of health-care or personal care did so at least once a week. This compares to 31% for housework and home maintenance.

Similar patterns were seen for household income and education. Both higher levels of household income and educational attainment were related to greater helping behaviours. For instance, 85% of Canadians with a household income of $120,000 or more helped someone directly, compared to 78% of Canadians with a household income of less than $20,000. However, volunteers with the lowest household incomes, as well as those with less than a high school diploma more often performed these tasks on a daily or weekly basis.

Having children at home increased likelihood of helping people directly

Regardless of the age of the child, the presence of a child in the household increased the likelihood of providing help directly to someone outside the household. Having children at home, however, had no bearing on the level of helping. That is, there was no significant difference in the frequency of helping activities between those with no children and those with preschool or school-aged children.

Summary

At a rate of 44%, volunteering over the last 12 months has decreased slightly since 2010, but is on par with levels reported in 2004. The overall hours contributed to volunteering has remained relatively stable.

As in previous years, the likelihood of volunteering differed across socio-demographic groups. Young people were most likely to volunteer, though older volunteers dedicated more time to their volunteer activities. Higher levels of education and income were associated with a higher likelihood of volunteering, as was participating in the paid labour force and having school-aged children in the home.

Volunteers aged 15 years and older continued to be most likely to volunteer their time for social services or for the sports and recreation sector. Also among the most common, but decreasing in prevalence, was volunteering in the education and research sector, as well as on behalf of religious organizations. The decline in volunteering within the education sector may be partly due to the decrease in volunteering among middle-aged adults. For the religious sector, the drop may be rooted in the falling volunteer rate among weekly religious attendees, who historically, have had higher rates of volunteering, particularly within the religious sector.

The types of activities done on behalf of an organization or group have remained largely the same. Volunteers were most likely to organize events or help with fundraising, with proportions (46% and 45%) similar to a decade earlier. Volunteer activities decreasing in prevalence were: sitting on a committee or board, driving, providing health care or support, providing maintenance or repair, and canvassing.

A desire to contribute to their communities was the top reason for volunteering, while a lack of time was the leading barrier to volunteering altogether or volunteering more time.

In addition to formal volunteering, the majority of Canadians (82%) helped people directly, without the involvement of an organization or group. Help with housework, home maintenance and outdoor work were the most common forms of informal volunteering.

Data source

This report is based on data from the 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, and the 2004, 2007 and 2010 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. For this report, the target population consisted of persons aged 15 and older living in Canada's 10 provinces, excluding people living full-time in institutions.

For more information on the data sources, please consult the following documents:

2004
http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=27698&InstaId=26500&SDDS=4430

2007
http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=27698&InstaId=31436&SDDS=4430

2010
http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SurvId=27698&InstaId=87858&SDDS=4430

2013
http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=4430

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Table 1
Volunteer rate and volunteer hours, population aged 15 and over

	2013	2010	2007	2004
Volunteer rate				
Total population (thousands)	29,188	28,206†	27,000†	26,021†
Number of volunteers (thousands)	12,716	13,249†	12,444	11,773†
Volunteer rate (percentage)	44	47†	46†	45†
Volunteer hours				
Total annual volunteer hours (millions)	1,957	2,063	2,062	1,978
Average annual volunteer hours (hours)	154	156	166	168†

† significantly different from 2013
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013, and the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004, 2007 and 2010.

Table 2
Volunteer rate and average number of volunteer hours, by personal and economic characteristics, population aged 15 years and older

	Volunteer rate				Average number of hours (annually)			
	2013	2010	2007	2004	2013	2010	2007	2004
	percent				mean number of hours			
Total	**44**	**47†**	**46†**	**45**	**154**	**156**	**166**	**168†**
Sex								
Men (ref.)	42	46†	45†	44	164	153	168	168
Women	45*	48†	47	47*	145	158	164	168†
Age group								
15 to 19	66*	66*	65*	65*	110	115	116*	127*
20 to 24	42	48	47	43*	147	159E	182	161
25 to 34	42*	46*	40*	42*	126	109	133	137
35 to 44 (ref.)	48	54†	52†	51	122	136	158†	152†
45 to 54	45	45*	48	47*	150*	168	169	176*
55 to 64	41*	41*	40*	42*	203*	201*	206*	202*
65 to 74	38*	40*	40*	39*	231*	236*	216*	250*
75 years and older	27*	31*	29*	23*	196*	198*	222*	234*
Marital status								
Married or common-law (ref.)	44	47†	47†	46	156	160	168	172
Single, never married	47	51*	48	48	139	134†	153	148†
Separated or divorced	37*	42*	39*	43†*	167	183	197	199
Widowed	27*	32*	31*	28*	228	204	179	201†
Level of education								
Less than high school	39*	37*	39*	37*	159	148	136*	140*
High school diploma	37*	47†*	44†*	45†*	142*	171	152*	163
Post-secondary diploma or certificate	42*	45*	47†*	46†*	142*	140	168*†	172†
University degree (ref.)	55	58	57	59†	170	160	187	180
Labour force participation								
Employed (ref.)	46	50†	50†	50†	133	139	150	152†
Unemployed	45	34*	38*	42*	182E	132	205	236*
Not in the labour force	38*	44†*	44†*	43†*	191*	189*	190*	199*
Presence of children in the household[1]								
No child (ref.)	38	41†	39	40	169	175	184	191†
Pre-school aged children only	37	45†	41	43†	122E*	87*	110*	126*
Both pre-school and school-aged children	52*	56*	54*	53*	121*	122*	147*	141*
School-aged children only	59*	59*	62*	59*	139*	146*	153*	142*
Religious attendance								
Weekly (ref.)	59	65†	66†	62	215	202	232	230
Other	40*	44*†	43*†	43*†	133*	141*	142*	147*
Birthplace								
Canada (ref.)	45	49†	47†	46	150	155	165	167†
Outside Canada	38*	40*	40*	40*	162	158	168	172

E use with caution
† significantly different from 2013
* significantly different from reference category
1. 'Pre-school aged' is defined as ages 0 to 5, while 'school-aged' is defined as ages 6 to 17. 'Both pre-school and school-aged children' indicates the presence in the household of at least one child from each age range (i.e., at least one child aged 0 to 5 and at least one child aged 6 to 17).
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013, and the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004, 2007 and 2010.

Table 3
Volunteer rate and average number of volunteer hours, by household income, 2013

Household income	percentage	mean number of hours (annually)
Less than $20,000	33*	182*
$20,000 to $39,999	34*	172*
$40,000 to $59,999	37*	165*
$60,000 to $79,999	41*	179*
$80,000 to $99,999	44*	148*
$100,000 to $119,999	50*	171*
$120,000 and over (ref.)	52	130

* significantly different from reference category
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Table 4
Participation rate by type of volunteer activities, volunteers aged 15 years and older

Types of activities	2013 (ref.)	2010	2007	2004
	percentage of volunteers			
Organizing events	46	44	45	47
Fundraising	45	45	44	46
Sitting on a committee or board	33	33	33	36†
Teaching or mentoring	28	30	30	30
Counselling or providing advice	26	28	28†	26
Collecting, serving or delivering food or other goods	25	28†	27	25
Office work, bookkeeping	22	23	24	25†
Other activities	20	15†	18†	10†
Coaching, referring or officiating	17	18	20†	19
Driving	17	17	20†	20†
Providing health care or support	17	19†	20†	19†
Environmental protection	16	18	19†	16
Maintenance or repair	16	16	18	18†
Canvassing	10	14†	13†	15†
First-aid, fire-fighting, or search and rescue	6	6	6	7

† significantly different from 2013
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013, and the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004, 2007 and 2010.

Table 5
Types of activities performed by volunteers aged 15 years and older, by sex, 2013

Types of activities	Men (ref.)	Women
Organizing events	43	48*
Fundraising	40	49*
Sitting on a committee or board	34	33
Teaching or mentoring	29	28
Counselling or providing advice	30	22*
Collecting, serving or delivering food or other goods	22	28*
Office work, bookkeeping	20	25*
Other activities	19	21
Coaching, referring or officiating	24	11*
Driving	19	15*
Providing health care or support	15	19*
Environmental protection	17	15
Maintenance or repair	23	10*
Canvassing	10	10
First-aid, fire-fighting, or search and rescue	7	4*

* significantly different from reference category
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.

Table 6
Types of formal employer support for volunteering, volunteers aged 15 to 64 with employment, 2010 and 2013

Type of formal employer support	2013	2010
	percentage	
Any type of support	**55**	**57**
Use of facilities or equipment (ref.)	27	30
Paid time off or time to spend volunteering	20*	20*
Approval to change work hours or reduce work activities	34*	35*
Recognition or letter of thanks	19*	24*†
Other	3*	4*
Donated prizes, gift certificates	1E*	2E*
Donated financially to the organization	1E*	1E*
Donated T-shirts or company goods	1E*	1E*
Sponsored an event, paid entry fee or membership fee	1E*	1E*
Provided transportation	0E*	F

E use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
† significantly different from 2013
* significantly different from reference category
Note: Only respondents who answered all the questions on formal employer support are included.
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013, and Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2010.

Table 7
Barriers to volunteering among non-volunteers

	2013 (ref.)	2010	2007	2004
Dissatified with previous volunteer experience	9	7	8†	6†
Financial costs	18	17	18	15†
Did not know how to become involved	24	22	24	22†
Gave enough time already	24	17†	15†	15†
Health problems or not physically able	25	26	27	26
No interest	29	27†	26†	23†
No one asked	49	45†	44†	40†
Prefer to give money instead	54	52	53	49†
Inability to make long-term commitment	62	62	62	58†
Did not have the time	66	67	68	67

† significantly different from 2013
Note: Includes people who had not volunteered in the previous 12 months, but who may have previously volunteered.
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013, and Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004, 2007, 2010.

Table 8
Helping others directly by type of activity

	2013 (ref.)	2010	2007	2004
Housework, home maintenance	59	61†	60	60
Health-related or personal care	49	53†	53†	50
Shopping, driving to store or appointment	45	47	47	46
Paperwork	27	29†	29†	28
Teaching, coaching or tutoring	15	17†	16	16
Other	22	24†	25†	24†

† significantly different from 2013
Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013 and the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2004, 2007, and 2010.

Table 9
Rate and frequency of helping people directly, by personal and economic characteristics, population aged 15 years and older, 2013

		Frequency of helping others directly[1]			
	Rate of helping others directly	Daily or almost daily	At least once a week	At least once a month	A few times a year
Total	**82**	**13**	**33**	**30**	**25**
Sex					
Men (ref.)	82	11	31	31	27
Women	81	16*	34*	28*	22*
Age group					
15 to 19 (ref.)	91	21	39	20	19
20 to 24	88*	17	39	27	17[E]
25 to 34	89*	11*	30*	35*	25*
35 to 44	84	10*	28*	34*	28*
45 to 54	82*	13*	31*	29*	27*
55 to 64	79*	15	34	27*	24
65 to 74	76*	14*	34	28*	25*
75 years and older	55*	10*	37	28*	25*
Marital status					
Married or common-law (ref.)	81	11	30	32	27
Single, never married	86*	17*	37*	25*	21*
Separated or divorced	78*	17*	35*	26*	23*
Widowed	62*	16*	37*	24*	24
Level of education					
Less than high school	72*	18*	38*	23*	20*
High school diploma	81*	15*	35*	25*	24
Post-secondary diploma or certificate	84*	13*	31	31	24
University degree (ref.)	86	10	29	34	27
Labour force participation					
Employed (ref.)	86	12	30	31	26
Unemployed	87	18*	38*	29	15*
Not in the labour force	74*	16*	37*	25*	22*
Household income					
Less than $20,000	78*	16*	41*	21*	22
$20,000 to $39,999	75*	17*	37*	27*	20*
$40,000 to $59,999	76*	13	34	28*	25
$60,000 to $79,999	82	13	32	31	24
$80,000 to $99,999	83	12	32	30	26
$100,000 to $119,999 (ref.)	86	11	29	34	26
$120,000 and over	85	13*	31	30	26
Presence of children in the household[2]					
No child (ref.)	79	13	33	29	24
Pre-school aged children only	88*	11[E]	27*	34	28
Both pre-school and school-aged children	86*	13	32	30	25
School-aged children only	85*	15	32	28	25
Religious attendance					
Weekly (ref.)	82	16	35	29	20
Other	81	13*	32	29	25*
Birthplace					
Canada (ref.)	83	13	33	30	24
Outside Canada	80	14	31	28	27*

[E] use with caution
* significantly different from reference category
1. Includes those who reported helping people directly.
2. 'Pre-school aged' is defined as ages 0 to 5, while 'school-aged' is defined as ages 6 to 17. 'Both pre-school and school-aged children' indicates the presence in the household of at least one child from each age range (i.e., at least one child aged 0 to 5 and at least one child aged 6 to 17).
Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013.