

Key Statistics about Volunteering in Australia: The General Social Survey 2020 and the Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey

This factsheet presents official data on volunteering in 2020, collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The data in the General Social Survey (GSS) 2020 was collected between 15th June and 5th September 2020. The GSS 2020 is the most recent publication, and can be found [here](#).

The Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey was a series of monthly surveys conducted between August 2020 and June 2021, which collected data on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the lifestyle and wellbeing of Australians. The timeseries release includes data on formal volunteering collected between December 2020 and June 2021, and a detailed module on unpaid voluntary work was included in the March 2021 survey. The final release can be found [here](#).

Unless otherwise stated, the data presented below is taken from the GSS 2020.

Rates of volunteering

- 24.8 per cent of people aged 15 and over, equating to 5,025,300 people, volunteered through an organisation or group in Australia in 2020.
 - By comparison, 29.5 per cent (5,897,000 people) volunteered through an organisation or group in 2019.¹
- 32.1 per cent, or 6,511,400, volunteered informally.²
 - This compares to 33.4 per cent, or 6,676,100, in 2019.³

The demographics of volunteers

- People aged 40-54 years volunteered at the highest rate of any age group (30.5 per cent), followed closely by people aged 70 years and over (28.0 per cent).
- Volunteering rates were similar for males (23 per cent) and females (26 per cent).
- People with higher non-school qualifications, whose main language spoken at home is English, who have children, and who earn higher incomes also volunteer at higher rates.

Characteristics of volunteering

- The most common types of organisations for which people volunteer *formally* are sport and physical recreation (30.7 per cent), religious (23.1 per cent), education and training (18.8 per cent), and community/ethnic groups (15.7 per cent).
 - The proportion of people volunteering for community/ethnic groups increased from 11.6 per cent in 2019 to 22.7 per cent in March 2021.⁴

¹ According to the General Social Survey 2019, Table 3

² Informal volunteering is defined by the ABS as the provision of unpaid work/support to non-household members, excluding that provided only to family members living outside the household. A summary of the limitations of the informal volunteering data collected in the GSS can be found on the ABS website here: <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia-methodology/2020#history-of-changes>

³ General Social Survey 2019, Table 3

⁴ According to the Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey – March 2021, Table 5.1

- The most common types of *informal volunteering* are providing emotional support (50.5 per cent), providing transport and running errands (42.4 per cent), and domestic work, home maintenance or gardening (41.9 per cent).
 - The most common recipients were friends (51.6 per cent), neighbours (13.0 per cent), and work colleagues (12.3 per cent).
- The most common motivation to volunteer was to help others/community (74.2 per cent), while the most common reason for not volunteering was a lack of time (52.2 per cent).

Trends

- The decline of formal volunteering.
 - The rate of formal volunteering has decreased steadily over the past decade, from 36.2 per cent in 2006 to 24.8 per cent in 2020.⁵
 - However, the proportion of Australians who provided unpaid work/support to persons living outside their household has remained stable at 49.1 per cent in 2010 and 49.2 per cent in 2020.⁶
- Changes in volunteering activity during COVID-19.
 - Volunteering rates decreased (from 29.5 per cent to 24.8 per cent), but informal volunteering was less strongly affected (from 33.4 per cent to 32.1 per cent).
 - The Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey found a further decrease in formal volunteering, from 25.9 per cent before March 2020 to 20.6 per cent in March 2021.
 - The number of people who volunteered online increased from 8.5 per cent in 2019 to 17.3 per cent in 2020. Further, of those who indicated that online volunteering was available in their organisation or group, 75.6 per cent participated in online volunteering.⁷
 - Between December 2020 and April 2021, the proportion of people who volunteered formally one or more times a week within a four-week period increased steadily, from 7.6 per cent to 8.4 per cent. This rate fell to 7.3 per cent in June 2021, following the reintroduction of restrictions in many jurisdictions.⁸
- Reasons for not volunteering during COVID-19.⁹
 - The most common reasons for not participating in formal volunteering were ‘cannot fit around paid work’ (30.6 per cent), ‘cannot fit around family or care commitments’ (22.4 per cent), and ‘my previous volunteering group stopped or reduced their operations’ (15.5 per cent).
 - The most common reasons for not volunteering informally were ‘do not think there is a need’ (39.7 per cent), ‘cannot fit around paid work’ (26.5 per cent), and ‘cannot fit around caring responsibilities for my household’ (20.9 per cent).

⁵ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/volunteers>

⁶ *Note:* These numbers include both informal volunteering, and unpaid help offered to family members in another household

⁷ Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey – March 2021, Table 5.1

⁸ Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey – June 2021, Table 26.1

⁹ All data referenced below is taken from the Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey – March 2021, Table 5.1