

# **Volunteering & Gender Key Statistics**

## **March 2021**

### *Disclaimer*

These statistics have been compiled primarily from external sources. While every effort has been made to provide accurate and up to date data, Volunteering Australia does not accept any liability for the accuracy, reliability or completeness of data in this summary. Users are encouraged to visit the source report to assist in the understanding of the data and context of information provided.

## Introduction

This document provides key statistics about volunteering in Australia by gender.

The main source of data is the General Social Survey (GSS) which includes a series of questions about volunteering. The most recent data available is the 2019 GSS<sup>i</sup>. This data, therefore, predates the onset of COVID-19. Volunteering was profoundly affected by COVID-19 and is struggling to recover. For further information on the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering, see the following:

- [Volunteering and the early impact of COVID-19 \(May 2020\)](#)
- [Re-engaging Volunteers and COVID-19 \(February 2021\)](#)

The 2020 GSS survey data is due for release at the end of June 2021. Volunteering Australia acknowledges that the GSS data is not inclusive of the diversity of gender identities in our community. This document uses the terms ‘men/male’ and ‘women/female’ to denote those who have selected this gender option during their response to the GSS. Volunteering Australia recognises that only those who identify as male or female are represented in these statistics.

The next Census of Population and Housing is due to be held in August 2021 and asks about volunteering. The ABS is introducing some new questions and amending existing questions in the 2021 Census, including providing a non-binary option for the gender question. This data will be available in 2022.

This factsheet presents national data. Increasingly, States and Territories are producing their own ‘State of Volunteering’ surveys and reports which are a rich source of information within each jurisdiction. These can be found via the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies<sup>ii</sup>.

Australia’s definition of volunteering is “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.”<sup>iii</sup> This document deploys this definition and hence includes information on formal and informal volunteering. The ABS defines ‘formal volunteering’ as unpaid voluntary work through an organisation and ‘informal volunteering’ as the provision of unpaid work/support to non-family members outside of the household.

**Note:** Throughout this document, estimates marked with a ‘#’ have a high margin of error and should be used with caution.

## Key statistics

- Nearly 3 million (2.897m) women volunteered for an organisation or group in Australia in 2019, according to the 2019 General Social Survey.
- Nearly 3.5 million (3.446m) women volunteered informally in the community in the 4 weeks prior to the 2019 survey.
- Based on the GSS 2019 data, men and women now volunteer for an organisation or group at similar rates, 30.7% and 28.5 % respectively (aged 15 years and over). However, there are important differences.

- Women are more likely to volunteer than men in ‘parenting, children and youth’ (16.4% and 9.3% respectively) and ‘health and welfare’ organisations (15.6% and 7.1% respectively). Men are more likely than women to volunteer for sport and physical recreation – 47.5% and 30.5 % respectively.
- Women are more likely than men to have volunteered for more than 10 years (43.0% of female volunteers compared to 32.9% of males).
- The rate of formal volunteering is declining for both men and women. However, the decline is most evident for women, whose rate decreased from 38.1% in 2010 to 28.1% in 2019.
- Female volunteers were more likely to have stopped volunteering during the early stages of COVID-19 compared to male volunteers (68.2 % of women stopped volunteering, compared to 62.9% of men).

## Nature of organisations and activities

In 2019, overall people were most likely to volunteer for a sport and physical recreation organisation (39.1%), followed by religious organisations (23.3%) and education and training (21.8%). However, women are more likely to volunteer than men in ‘parenting, children and youth’ (16.4% and 9.3% respectively) and ‘health and welfare’ organisations (15.6% and 7.1% respectively). Men are more likely than women to volunteer for sport and physical recreation – 47.5% and 30.5 % respectively.

*Formal volunteering rate by type of organisation (ABS, 2019)*

Type of organisation	Persons	Females	Males
Arts/Heritage	5.1	6.4	4.7
Business/Professional/Union	2.5	2.1#	3.3#
Community/Ethnic groups	11.6	13.1	9.2
Education and Training	21.8	21.2	21.7
Parenting, children and youth	12.3	16.4	9.3
Emergency services	4.7	3.6	7.2
Environmental/Animal welfare	6.0	4.8	5.8
International Aid/Development	1.8	2.3#	1.1#
Health/Welfare	11.6	15.6	7.1
Law/Justice/Political	1.0	1.2	1.3
Religious	23.3	21.8	24.3
Sport and physical recreation	39.1	30.5	47.5
Other	8.1	7.9	7.4

Source: General Social Survey, ABS, 2019 Table 8

(Totals add up to more than 100% as people volunteer for more than one type of organisation.)

## Reasons for volunteering

People report multiple motivations for volunteering with the most often cited being to help others, for personal satisfaction and to do something worthwhile.

Women are more likely than men to cite ‘helping others/community’ (77.2% and 69.2% respectively), whereas men are more likely to cite ‘feeling obliged’ than women (11.4% and 7.2% respectively.)

Reasons for being a volunteer (ABS, 2019)

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Personal satisfaction/To do something worthwhile	66.9	67.9	65.4
Help others/Community	73.0	77.2	69.4
Personal/Family Involvement	41.2	42.1	39.7
Social contact	35.7	38.9	32.0#
To be active	32.9	34.4	31.4
Use skills/Experience	38.4	38.4	38.1
To learn new skills/Gain work experience	20.8	21.2	18.7
Religious beliefs	17.3	16.7	16.4
Just happened	10.4	10.8	11.3
Felt obliged	9.2	7.2	11.4
Other	2.7	2.1	3.2#

Source: General Social Survey, ABS, 2019 Table 8

## Duration of volunteering

A large proportion of people (38.1%) have volunteered for more than ten years. Women are more likely (43.0%) than men (32.9%) to have volunteered for ten years or more.

How long ago a volunteer (proportions, ABS, 2019)

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
Less than one year	15.4	11.0	19.3
One to five years	35.7	35.9	34.8
Six to nine years	10.7	10.8	10.5
Ten years or more	38.1	43.0	32.9

Source: General Social Survey, ABS, 2019 Table 8

## Volunteering hours

Over one in four volunteers (28.3%) undertake voluntary work for an organisation for 100 hours or more each year. Women are slightly more likely to volunteer for longer hours than men: 29.1% of women volunteers for 100 hours or more; compared to 27% of men.

Annual hours by sex (proportions, ABS, 2019)

<b>Hours</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
1-20 hours	41.6	40.9	42.2
21-99 hours	30.0	30.8	29.0
100 hours or more	28.3	29.1	27.0

Source: General Social Survey, ABS, 2019 Table 9

## Trends in volunteering

The rate of volunteering through an organisation has declined over time. For people aged 18 years and over, the rate has declined from 36.2% in 2010 to 28.8% in 2019.

Both men and women are volunteering less. However, the decline is most evident for women, whose rate decreased from 38.1% in 2010 to 28.1% in 2019.

In the 2019 GSS, more females (43.1%) reported 'Always' or 'Often' feeling rushed for time than males (35.8%). Females aged 15-24 years are more likely than males aged 15-24 to report feeling rushed for time (55.7% compared to 37.1%). Similar data came from the 2014 GSS - 45% of women and 36% of men were 'Always' or 'Often' rushed or pressed for time, compared with 21% of women and 28% of men who were rarely or never rushed or pressed for time.

## The impact of COVID-19

In April 2020, Volunteering Australia commissioned the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods to undertake analysis of the experience of volunteers during COVID-19<sup>iv</sup>. Their analysis draws on the ANUpoll which involves a regular survey of around 3,000 Australians that produces nationally representative results.

The decline in volunteering during COVID-19 was substantial with nearly two thirds of volunteers (65.9%) estimated to have stopped volunteering between February and April 2020.

- This reduction in volunteering across Australia is equivalent to 12.2 million hours per week.
- Volunteers over the age of 65 were more likely to have stopped volunteering than other age groups.
- Female volunteers were also more likely to have stopped volunteering compared to male volunteers.

*ANU May 2020 The experience of volunteers during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic*

***Per cent of volunteers who reported they had stopped volunteering since the spread of COVID-19 (by gender)***

<i>Female</i>	68.3%
<i>Male</i>	62.9%
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>65.9%</b>

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- <sup>i</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#voluntary-work-and-unpaid-work-support>
  - <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/contact/>
  - <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering/>
  - <sup>iv</sup> [Research Briefing: The experience of volunteers during COVID-19 \(volunteeringaustralia.org\)](#)