Why Measure Volunteering?

- To document the amount, character, and value of volunteering
- To give credence and added respect to the millions of hours of volunteering that people throughout the world contribute
- To improve the management of volunteering since what cannot be measured cannot be managed
- To assess the effectiveness of various volunteer promotion efforts
- To bring into view a sizable part of the actual labour force that is now invisible in existing labour statistics
- To clarify the economic impact of nonprofit institutions, which draw particularly heavily on volunteer labour
- To promote an enabling legal environment for the conduct of volunteer activities
- To fulfill the mandates set by recent United Nations General Assembly Resolutions underlining the need for improved data on volunteer activities

How does the Manual define volunteering?

The Manual defines volunteering as “Unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household.” Key features of this definition include:

- **Produces goods and/or services** which bring something of potential value to its recipients.
- **Unpaid**. However, some forms of monetary or in-kind compensation may still be possible without violating this feature of the definition (such as reimbursement of expenses).
- **Non-compulsory or non-obligatory**. Persons engage in these activities willingly, without being legally obligated or otherwise coerced to do so. Social obligation, such as peer pressure, parental pressure, or expectations of social groups, however, does not make the activity compulsory.
- **Embraces both “direct” volunteering**, i.e., volunteer activities directly for other households; and **“organization-based” volunteering**, i.e., volunteering done for or through nonprofit institutions or other types of organizations.
- **Does not embrace work done without pay for members of the volunteer’s own household.**

See Chapter 3 of the ILO Manual for more details.

How does the Manual measure volunteering?

The ILO Manual recommends countries add a few questions about volunteering to their existing labour force or other household surveys (see Chapter 4 of the Manual). These survey questions measure:

- **Number of persons who volunteer**: Makes it possible to calculate the volunteer rate.
- **Type of volunteer work performed**: The occupation or the job that the volunteer did.
- **Number of hours volunteered**: Allows countries calculate the economic value of volunteering.
- **Institutional setting of work performed**: Type of organization through which the volunteering was performed (nonprofit organizations, business, or government) and help provided directly for other individuals.
- **Field of work**: e.g. health, education, social services, environmental causes, legal services.

**Why use the ILO Manual?**

**Comparable**. A common approach to data collection, definitions, key concepts, classification, and variables.

**Feasible**. Workable in the widest possible range of countries, minimal burden to implement, and sensitive to cultural traditions and differences in languages.

**Cost-effective**. Utilizes existing household surveys, reducing costs and taking advantage of existing classification systems and structures.

**Efficient**. Maximizes the information gathered with the minimum number of questions.

**Reliable**. Based on extensive input from an international Technical Experts Group, and careful field testing of key terms and design decisions.

**How much does it cost?**

The ILO Manual was designed to minimize the cost of measuring volunteering as much as possible. First, adding questions to an existing survey is much more cost effective than implementing a stand-alone survey. Second, the ILO Manual has focused on streamlining the approach with current national classification and data-gathering systems, and thus takes advantage of the existing highly professional staff equipped to measure volunteer “work” and its characteristics.

**How can I help?**

Governments are encouraged to implement the ILO Manual, but are not required to do so. Additional steps are needed to encourage statistics offices to adopt it, such as disseminating the ILO Manual to national statistical agencies, encouraging them to adopt it, ensuring effective implementation, and creating a mechanism to assemble and report the results. Click here to learn more about what you can do.