



AN UNDERVALUED RESOURCE

Volunteer work is a sizeable part of the labour force in most countries and makes a significant economic contribution. For example, Statistics Canada recently reported that the contribution to GDP of volunteers in that country exceeded the GDP contribution of agriculture. Yet most countries lack reliable systems to gauge the extent and character of volunteer work, and what data do exist are not comparable. As a

result, volunteer work remains under-valued and its potentials under-realized, leaving volunteers, volunteer managers, policy-makers, government officials, and business leaders without the crucial information they need to effectively manage and support this crucial renewable resource for societal problem solving.

THE ILO MANUAL ON THE MEASUREMENT OF VOLUNTEER WORK

A unique opportunity now exists to establish a permanent system for the collection of data on volunteer work. This opportunity arises from the convergence of the 10th Anniversary of the UN 2001 Year of the Volunteer (IYV + 10) with the release by the International Labour Organization of the first official ILO *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*, which provides guidance to national statistical agencies on measuring the amount and economic value of volunteering through regular labour force or other household surveys.

APPROACH AND VARIABLES

The ILO *Manual* advises countries to add a short survey module to their existing labour force or other household surveys to collect data that will allow us to answer questions such as these:

- ✓ **How many people volunteer?** What are the **demographic characteristics** of the volunteers?
- ✓ What **type of work** do volunteers perform?
- ✓ **How much time** do volunteers contribute?
- ✓ What is the **institutional setting of volunteer work** (e.g., nonprofit organizations, business, government, or household)?
- ✓ **In what fields** is volunteer effort focused (e.g., health, education, social services, environmental causes, legal services)?
- ✓ **How does volunteering in our country compare** to that in other countries along all these dimensions?

NEXT STEPS

Several countries have already agreed to adopt this *Manual* and others are considering doing so. We hope your country will agree to take this step. The **Global Volunteer Measurement Project** has been formed to promote such implementation in as many countries around the world as possible, and to work with statistical agencies during implementation, and to compile comparative reports that will put the data to use. Please contact volunteers@jhu.edu to learn how you can help bring this project to your country.

THE ILO MANUAL DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEER WORK

“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.”

BENEFITS OF 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.

Comprehensive

It will bring into view a sizeable part of the **actual labour force** that is currently invisible, clarifying the **economic impact** of these unpaid workers and **helping policy-makers understand their great potential**.

FAQs

THE ILO MANUAL ON THE MEASUREMENT OF VOLUNTEER WORK

frequently asked questions for statistics agencies



and its scale made known. It is crucial to make our labour statistics complete.

Isn't volunteering done during leisure time? Doesn't this mean it does not really have economic value?

The ILO and its 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians have officially recognized that **volunteering is a form of “work,” that it has economic value, and that this value should be systematically counted.** In response, many other countries are already counting it.

How can we possibly figure out the value of volunteer work since by definition volunteers are not paid a wage?

It is easy to figure out the value of volunteer work once we know the jobs volunteers perform and the hours that they work. Using standard classification systems, it is possible to find an average wage for these types of work. This “replacement cost” approach is widely accepted by economists and statisticians and is what the *Manual* recommends.

Volunteering in our country is unique. How can it be measured the same way it is measured elsewhere?

The *Manual* was developed in cooperation with an international Technical Experts Group and specifically designed to be workable in the widest possible range of countries. Countries as diverse as Brazil, Norway, South Africa, and Poland have already agreed to adopt it.

We can't afford to add more surveys to the workload of our statistical agency at the present time.

The *ILO Manual* does not require a new survey. It utilizes your existing labour force or other household surveys, and takes advantage of existing national classification systems and structures. The volunteering module is only two pages long. This should not add substantially to costs and can be handled with existing, trained staff.

Our labour force survey is already over-burdened. Even if we wanted to measure volunteering, we couldn't include all of the questions the *Manual* recommends.

The *ILO Manual* is very efficient. It maximizes the information gathered with the minimum number of questions. Field tests suggest that most respondents will cite only one or two volunteer activities, reducing the time required.

Volunteering is very inspiring and is important for community development, but is it really relevant to statistical data-gathering efforts?

Current labour force statistics are overlooking an enormous amount of work being done in our country. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has determined that this work should be counted

THE *ILO MANUAL* on the Measurement of Volunteer Work calls on countries to integrate a short survey module on “volunteer work” into their regular labour force surveys. This *Manual* was:

Prepared by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies in cooperation with a Technical Experts Group representing volunteer and statistics experts from 13 countries.

Approved by the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

Field tested in five countries.

Endorsed by the ILO Department of Statistics, the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, and the International Association of Volunteer Effort (IAVE).

The **Global Volunteer Measurement Project** is a coalition of volunteer promotion organizations, the authors of the *Manual*, and statistical agencies formed to disseminate this *Manual* and promote its implementation.

THIS MANUAL:

- Utilizes a **broad definition** of volunteering.
- Covers both **organization-based and direct volunteering.**
- Collects information on the **work that volunteers do and the number of hours they spend volunteering.**
- Will provide a **regular, updated profile** of who volunteers, how much, for whom, and doing what work.
- Will document the **economic contribution** of volunteer work.
- Will make possible **comparisons to other countries** using a standard definition and approach.
- Will **encourage volunteering** by boosting its visibility and credibility.
- Will **fill an important gap** in current labour force statistics.