

# Experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland

Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2019/20

Annual publication

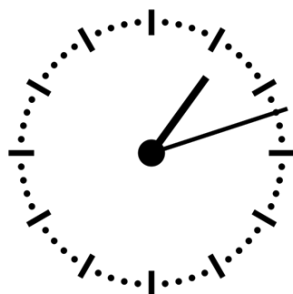
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## Main Stories

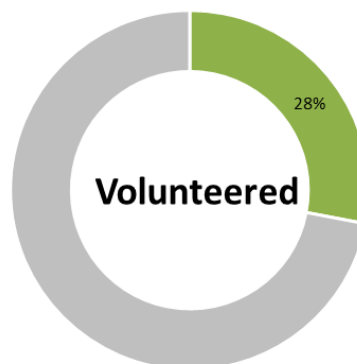
- The proportion of the adult population volunteering remained consistent at 28% in 2019/20 compared to 2018/19.
- The most commonly cited benefits as a result of volunteering were 'makes me feel better about myself' (67%), 'helps me make a positive contribution to society' (65%) and 'I had fun' (63%). Just 1% of adults said that they had experienced no benefit as a result of volunteering.
- The most common methods of identifying volunteering opportunities were from someone already involved in the organisation (45%), from a church or religious organisation (34%) and by word of mouth (33%).

### Time spent volunteering



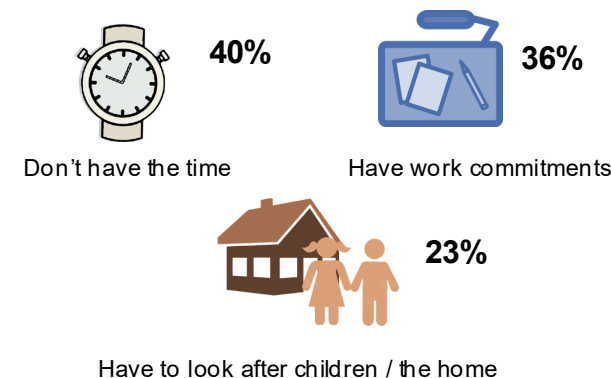
In 2019/20, the most common length of time spent volunteering in the previous four week period was 'less than 8 hours' (40%).

### Volunteered



In 2019/20, over a quarter (28%) of adults had volunteered within the past year.

### Reasons for not volunteering



The top three reasons for not volunteering were 'I don't have the time' (40%) 'I have work commitments' (36%), and 'I have to look after children / the home' (23%).

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## Introduction

This report presents the findings from the 2019/20 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) in relation to experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland.

The Department for Communities (DfC) is the lead department for volunteering. DfC is responsible for the development of voluntary and community sector strategies and policies and both funds and works in partnership with the sector.

From 2012 to 2016 questions on volunteering were included in the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. In 2017/18, however, they were moved to the CHS to improve the sample size and thus the precision of the estimates. Given this change, figures for 2017/18 onwards are not directly comparable with previous years' figures from the Omnibus survey.

Within this report volunteering is defined as follows:

*'the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.'*

Survey respondents were advised that their replies should only refer to unpaid work or activities.

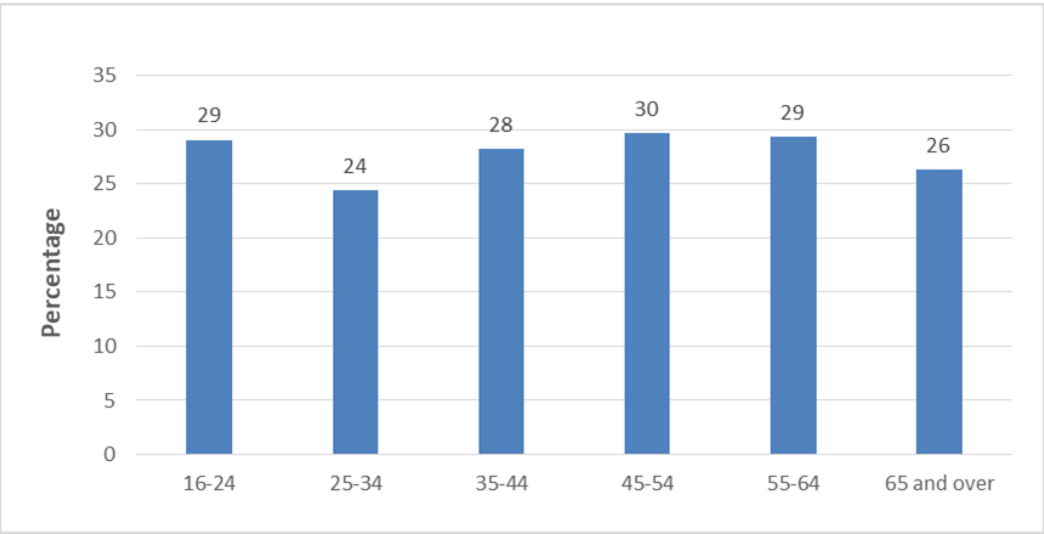
## Continuous Household Survey

More information relating to the CHS, methodology, definitions and the interpretation of figures can be found in the definitions and technical notes section. The questions that were asked in the CHS 2019/20 relating to culture, arts and sport are available [here](#). Data tables are available in [Excel](#) and [ODS format](#).

# Participation in volunteering

The proportion of the adult population who volunteered in 2019/20 was 28%, a similar figure to both 2018/19 and 2017/18. A lower proportion of adults who were separated or divorced volunteered in 2019/20 (18%) compared to 2018/19 (25%) whilst the proportions of those volunteering by other demographic groups were similar.

## Volunteering by age group



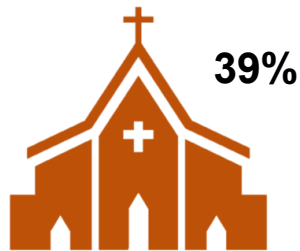
In 2019/20 a lower proportion of those aged 25-34 years (24%) volunteered compared with those aged 45-54 (30%) years.

Adults from the Protestant community were more likely to volunteer (32%) than both those from the Catholic community (24%) and those of ‘Other/No’ religion (25%). Higher proportions of those who lived in the least deprived (35%) or rural areas (32%) volunteered compared with those who lived in the most deprived or urban areas (21% and 25% respectively) whilst adults who were economically active (30%) were more likely to volunteer than those economically inactive (25%).

Adults who were married were more likely to volunteer (30%) than those who were widowed (21%) or who were separated/divorced (18%). Those who were single (27%) were also more likely to volunteer than those who were separated/divorced (18%).

## Types of organisations volunteered with

The most common type of organisation that adults identified as volunteering with was a 'church/faith based' organisation (39%). Twenty nine per cent of respondents said they had volunteered with a 'sports' organisation whilst 17% had volunteered with 'local community, neighbourhood or citizen's groups'. Two per cent of respondents said 'I volunteer, but not with an organisation'.



**39%**

Church or faith based  
organisation



**29%**

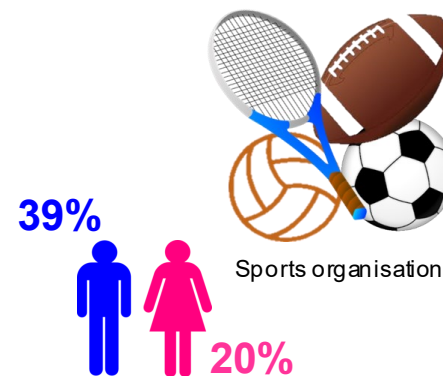
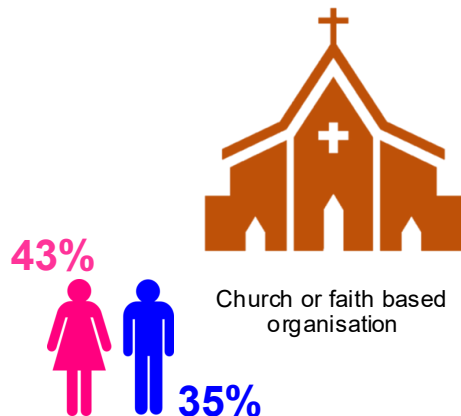
Sports organisation



**17%**

Local community, neighbourhood  
or citizen's groups

Analysis by gender indicated that a higher proportion of females volunteered with a 'church/faith based' organisation (43%), organisations that involved 'children's education/schools' (20%), 'youth/children's activities (outside school)' (19%) and 'people with a disability' (11%) than males (35%, 9%, 11% and 6% respectively). In contrast, a higher proportion of males indicated that they had volunteered at sports organisations (39%) and organisations that involved 'conservation, the environment and heritage' (7%) than females (20% and 3% respectively).



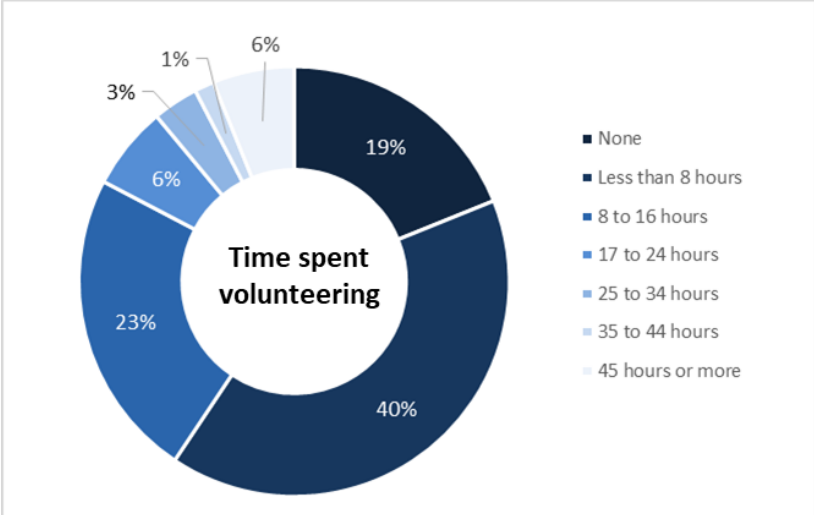
Analysis by religion revealed that 59% of Protestants had volunteered in the past year at a ‘church/faith based’ organisation compared with 21% of Catholics. A higher proportion of Protestants had also volunteered in an organisation involving ‘animal care’ (6%) than Catholics (0%). In contrast, a greater proportion of Catholics indicated that they had volunteered with sports organisations (40%) and organisations involving ‘local community, neighbourhood or citizens groups’ (23%) than Protestants (23% and 12% respectively).

A higher proportion of adults not in paid work had volunteered with a ‘church/faith based’ organisation (49%) and organisations involving ‘older people’ (14%), ‘people with a disability’ (13%) and ‘culture, arts and crafts’ (8%) than adults in paid work (32%, 5%, 6% and 4% respectively). In comparison a higher proportion of adults in paid work had volunteered with a sports organisation (34%) and an organisation involving ‘childrens education / schools’ (17%) than adults not in paid work (22% and 11% respectively).

Analysis by area showed that a higher proportion of those living in the least deprived areas had volunteered with a ‘church/faith based’ organisation (45%) than those living in the most deprived areas (19%). Conversely, a higher proportion of those living in the most deprived areas volunteered with an organisation involving ‘local community, neighbourhood or citizens groups’ (20%) and had ‘volunteered, but not with an organisation’ (5%) compared with those living in the least deprived areas (11% and 1% respectively).

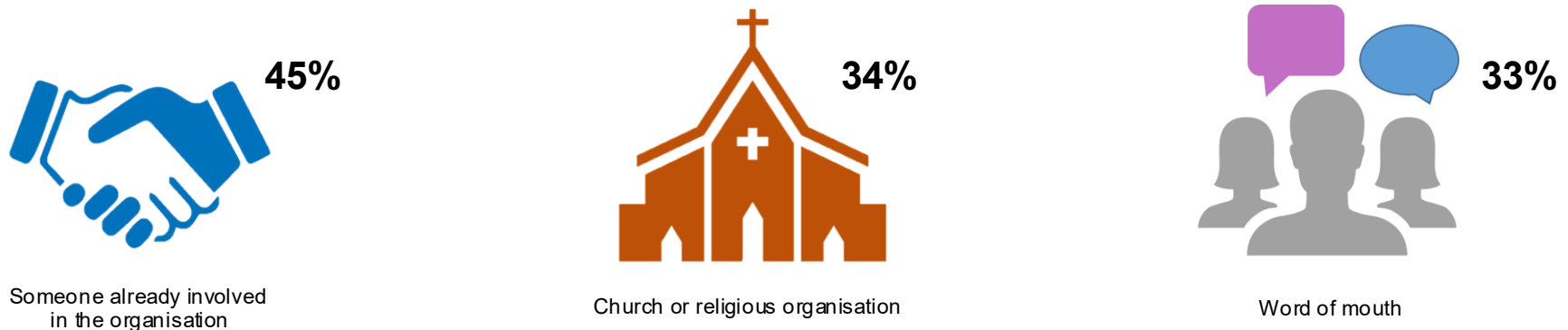
## Time spent volunteering

Seventeen per cent of those who had volunteered had spent 17 hours or more volunteering in the previous four week period, while a further 23% had volunteered for 8 to 16 hours. The most common length of time spent volunteering in the previous four week period was ‘less than 8 hours’ (40%). Just under a fifth (19%) of adults who had volunteered in the last 12 months had not volunteered at all within the previous four weeks.



## Identifying volunteering roles

The most common methods of identifying volunteering opportunities were from someone already involved in the organisation (45%), from a church or religious organisation (34%) and by word of mouth (33%).



Analysis by religion showed that a greater proportion of adults from the Protestant community (52%) indicated that they found out about volunteering through a church or religious organisation when compared with Catholics (15%). In contrast, a higher proportion of Catholics said that they found out about volunteering through someone already involved in the organisation (50%), by word of mouth (44%), through a school, college or university (14%), through a community centre (6%) or through a volunteer centre (3%) than Protestants (42%, 29%, 7%, 2% and 0% respectively).

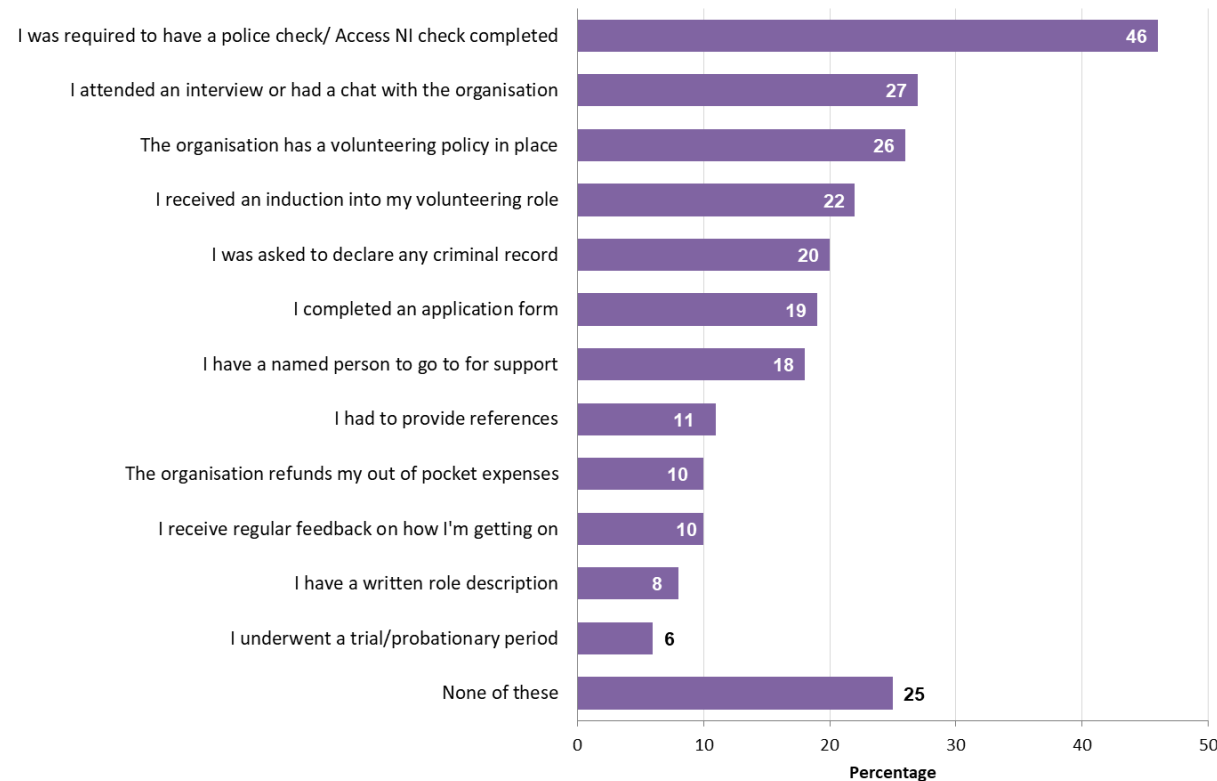
A higher proportion of adults living in rural areas found out about their volunteering role by word of mouth (39%) and through a community centre (5%) when compared with those living in urban areas (29% and 2% respectively). Conversely, a higher proportion of those living in urban areas said they found out about volunteering by contacting the organisation directly (10%) and through the internet (6%) in comparison to those living in rural areas (4% and 3% respectively).

Analysis by age showed a higher proportion of those aged 16-34 years (15%) had found out about their volunteering role through social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) in comparison to corresponding demographic groups whilst a higher proportion of those aged 65 and over (49%) had found out from a church or a religious organisation.

# Organisation Procedures

Those respondents who indicated that they volunteered with an organisation were asked to read a number of statements relating to the processes involved in their main volunteering role and main organisation and state whether any of them were applicable.

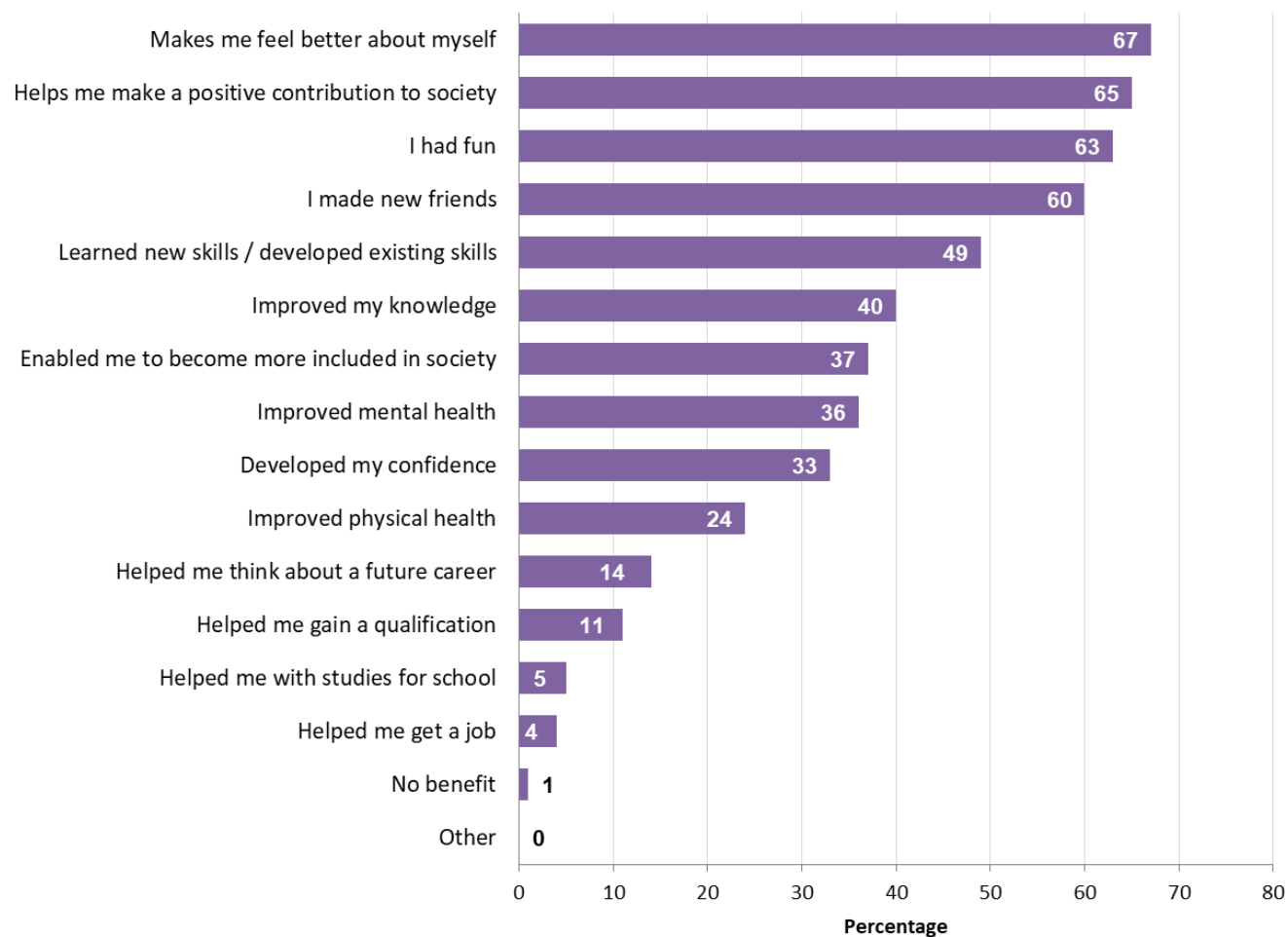
Forty six percent of those who volunteered with an organisation indicated that they were required to have a police or Access NI check completed and over a quarter attended an interview or had a chat with the organisation prior to taking up their volunteering role (27%). Over a quarter of those who volunteered also reported that the organisation had a volunteering policy in place (26%). One in four of those who volunteered with an organisation (25%) stated that none of the statements regarding the organisation that they volunteered with applied to them.



# Benefits experienced as a result of volunteering

Respondents who said they had volunteered in the last 12 months were asked what benefits, if any, they had experienced as a result of volunteering.

The most frequently cited benefits were 'makes me feel better about myself' (67%), 'helps me make a positive contribution to society' (65%) and 'I had fun' (63%). Just 1% of adults said that they had experienced no benefit as a result of volunteering.





Higher proportions of females cited a number of benefits including 'helps me make a positive contribution to society' (70%), 'I made new friends' (65%), 'enabled me to become more included in society' (42%), 'helped me think about a future career' (17%), 'helped me with studies for school' (8%) and 'helped me get a job' (5%) compared to males (60%, 56%, 33%, 12%, 2% and 2% respectively). Conversely males cited benefits relating to 'improved mental health' (40%) and 'improved physical health' (29%) in comparison to females (32% and 19% respectively).

Analysis by marital status showed higher proportions of single adults cited benefits including 'I had fun', 'learned new skills / developed existing skills', 'developed my confidence', 'helped me think about a future career', 'helped me gain a qualification' and 'helped me with studies for school' in comparison to those who were either married/ cohabiting or who were widowed/ separated/ divorced'

A higher proportion of adults who have a disability stated that volunteering 'makes me feel better about myself' (73%), 'I made new friends' (67%) and 'helped me get a job' (6%) in comparison to those who do not have a disability (65%, 58% and 3% respectively).

Higher proportions of those living in the most deprived areas cited a number of benefits including 'makes me feel better about myself' (77%), 'improved mental health' (44%), 'developed my confidence' (43%) and 'improved physical health' (33%) in comparison to those living in the least deprived areas (59%, 31%, 29% and 22% respectively).

# Reasons for not volunteering

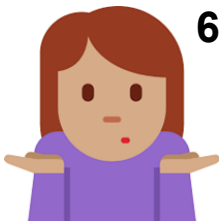
Respondents who reported that they had not undertaken any volunteering in the last year were asked if there were any reasons for this. The top three reasons for not volunteering were ‘I don’t have the time’ (40%), ‘I have work commitments’ (36%), and ‘I have to look after children/ the home’ (23%).

Of those who responded to the question, 9% stated that they ‘don’t want to do voluntary work’, whilst 6% said either they wouldn’t know how to get involved or hadn’t heard about any opportunities to do voluntary work.



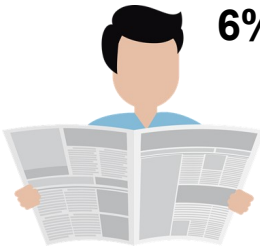
9%

Don't want to do voluntary work



6%

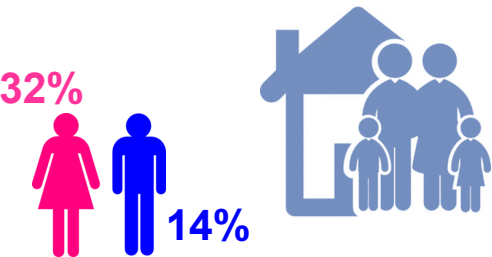
Wouldn't know how to get involved



6%

Hadn't heard about any opportunities to do voluntary work

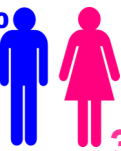
Analysis by gender indicated that 32% of females said ‘I have to look after children/ the home’ compared with 14% of males. Higher proportions of males said that they had work commitments (40%) or didn’t want to do voluntary work (11%) compared to females (33% and 8% respectively).



Have to look after children/the home



40%



33%

Have work commitments



11%



8%

Don't want to do voluntary work

A higher proportion of adults with dependants stated that they had to 'look after children/the home' (51%), didn't have the time to volunteer (50%), had work commitments (44%) and were 'worried that it might affect my social security benefits' (1%) in comparison to those with no dependants (5%, 34%, 32% and 0% respectively). In contrast, a higher proportion of adults with no dependants cited reasons including 'I have an illness or disability that prevents me from volunteering' (15%), 'I don't want to do voluntary work' (11%) and 'I feel I'm too old to get involved' (11%) compared to those with dependants (7%, 7% and 3% respectively).

Analysis by economic activity showed that higher proportions of adults who were economically active referenced work commitments (60%), not having the time (54%), looking after children/the home (27%) and that they'd be 'worried about the risks and being liable if something goes wrong' (3%) as reasons for not volunteering in comparison to those who were economically inactive (5%, 21%, 17% and 2% respectively). Conversely adults who were economically inactive cited reasons including 'I have an illness or disability that prevents me from volunteering' (25%), 'I feel I'm too old to get involved' (16%), 'I don't want to do voluntary work' (13%) and 'I'd be worried that it might affect my social security benefits' (1%) in comparison to those whose were economically active (2%, 1%, 7% and 0% respectively).

# Definitions and technical notes

## Continuous Household Survey

The Continuous Household Survey (CHS) is a Northern Ireland wide household survey administered by Central Survey Unit, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The sample for this survey consists of a systematic random sample of 9,000 addresses selected from the Land and Property Service's list of private addresses. The findings reported for 2019/20 in these tables are based on 2,952 respondents, aged 16 and over, who answered the questions relating to volunteering that were first included as part of the culture, arts and sport module of the survey in 2017/18.

## Weighting the Continuous Household Survey

Analysis of the culture, arts and sport modules of the CHS have been weighted for non-response. A chi square goodness-of-fit test showed that the CHS sample was not representative of the population by age and sex when compared with the 2019 Mid year Population Estimates Northern Ireland (NISRA). As a result, three separate weights were produced for age, sex and age and sex combined.

Non-response weighting sometimes increases standard errors, although the impact tends to be fairly small, i.e. the adjustment may be less or greater than 1, but will generally be reasonably close to 1. In the case of the culture, arts and sport modules of CHS, the values of the adjustment for all three weighting systems are so close to one, it is not necessary to take account of this in the calculation of standard error and confidence intervals.

While weighting for non-response (also called post-stratification) should reduce bias, it must be acknowledged that it will not eliminate bias. The reasons individuals choose to take part in surveys are complex and depend on lots of factors specific to the individual. As a result, the non-response biases in surveys are likely to be complex. Post-stratification works on the assumption that, by aligning the survey to the population along a small number of dimensions such as age and gender, many of these complex biases will reduce. However, it would be misleading to suggest that they will be eliminated.

## **Volunteering**

Volunteering is defined as *'the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.'*

Have you carried out any voluntary work or activity in the 12 months prior to the CHS? Replies should only refer to unpaid work or activities.

## **Statistical significance in this report**

Any statements in this report regarding differences between groups are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% confident that the differences between groups are actual differences and have not just arisen by chance. The base numbers and sizes of percentages have an effect on statistical significance. Therefore on occasion, a difference between two groups may be statistically significant while the same difference in percentage points between two other groups may not be statistically significant. The reason for this is because the larger the base numbers or the closer the percentages are to 0 or 100, the smaller the standard errors. This leads to increased precision of the estimates which increases the likelihood that the difference between the proportions is actually significant and has not just arisen by chance.

## **Other notes**

The following should be noted when interpreting figures and tables:

- Detailed tabulations are not provided where the number of respondents is too small to allow meaningful analysis.
- The base number of responses to each question, which is shown in each table, is the unweighted count. The base may vary due to some respondents not answering certain questions.