

VOLUNTEERING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

The coping strategies available to people and households when confronted with social distress are a function not only of government policies but also of the initiatives of civil society and of various informal forms of support. Two of the most important items in this perspective are volunteering and social support.

Definition

A tool for valuing volunteering is provided by the new *Handbook on Non-profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*, developed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civic Society Studies in co-operation with the United Nations Statistics Division. The *Handbook* recommends that countries regularly produce “satellite accounts” of the non-profit sector, providing a comprehensive picture of its size and operation. So far, eight OECD countries have implemented this handbook, with data referring to a year between 1999 and 2004, and four additional countries are committed to do so in the future.

Beyond the comprehensive information available through these handbooks, information on the size of volunteering and social support is available for a larger number of countries through household surveys. The data presented here are drawn from the Gallup World Poll. Data on volunteering are based on the two following questions: “Have you donated money to an organisation in the last

month?” and “Have you volunteered your time to an organisation in the last month?”. Data on social support from the same survey are based on the questions: “If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them?” and “Have you helped a stranger or someone you didn’t know who needed help in the last month?”. Population shares are calculated as a percentage of all respondents excluding those who refused or didn’t know how to answer the various questions.

Comparability

Data from the satellite accounts for non-profit institutions are based on comparable definitions and classifications across countries; the quality of the estimates depends, however, on the nature of the information used to compile these accounts, which may differ across countries.

The Gallup World Poll is conducted in around 140 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire, translated into the predominant languages of each country. With few exceptions, all samples are probability based and nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 and over in the entire country (including rural areas). While this assures a high degree of comparability across countries, results may be affected by sampling and non-sampling errors. Sample sizes are limited to around 1 000 persons in each country.

Overview

Across the eight OECD countries that have implemented the UN Handbook, the non-profit sector (including volunteering) accounts for around 5% of GDP, with this share ranging from a little over 1% in the Czech Republic to over 7% in Canada and the United States. These shares are much larger than those conventionally attributed to “non-profit institutions serving households” in economic accounts. Most of the activity of non-profit institutions is concentrated in health, education and social services, which together account for over 60% of their value added. Culture and recreation, and other activities account for the remaining 40%, although with large differences across countries.

On average, 47% of respondents in OECD countries donated money in the last month to an organisation and 24% volunteered time. The extent of volunteering is large in the Netherlands and in all English-speaking countries, while it is much lower in Mexico, Turkey and in several southern and eastern European countries.

Social support is very high in all OECD countries, with 91% of respondents reporting that they had someone they could count on in case of need but much lower shares in Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Korea and Japan. OECD countries that top the league in terms of the share of respondents reporting to have helped a stranger are also those with high scores in terms of volunteering. Having someone to count on is a robust correlate of subjective well-being in both OECD and non-OECD countries (Helliwell, 2008).

Source

- Gallup World Survey.
- *Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering*, Initial Findings from Implementation of the UN Handbook on Non-profit Institutions, Johns Hopkins Center for Civic Society Studies.

Further information

Analytical publication

- John F. Helliwell (2008), *Life Satisfaction and Quality of Development*, Working Paper No. 14507, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, United States.

Websites

- The UN Non-profit Handbook Project, www.jhu.edu/ccss/unhandbook/handbookdraft.html.
- The Comparative Non-profit Sector Project, www.jhu.edu/cnp/.



People reporting volunteering or social support

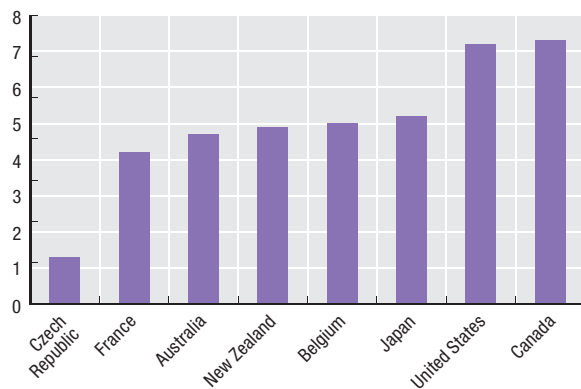
As a percentage of respondents, 2008 or latest available year

	Volunteering		Social support	
	Donated money	Volunteered your time	Someone you can count on	Helped a stranger
Australia	69.9	37.9	94.7	64.6
Austria	69.7	30.3	93.5	58.8
Belgium	40.5	24.0	92.3	46.0
Canada	65.6	38.1	93.9	66.0
Czech Republic	31.0	18.2	90.0	38.3
Denmark	67.7	19.7	95.4	45.6
Finland	42.7	27.9	95.1	42.1
France	51.5	28.5	94.4	38.2
Germany	56.3	22.7	92.6	47.9
Greece	19.0	7.4	80.8	34.2
Hungary	19.2	6.3	93.1	38.8
Ireland	73.0	38.0	98.3	58.7
Italy	50.7	21.1	91.2	33.8
Japan	25.6	24.7	85.7	22.7
Korea	30.9	21.3	82.7	41.6
Mexico	20.2	10.3	87.6	41.3
Netherlands	74.9	37.1	94.4	49.4
New Zealand	67.7	41.5	94.4	64.1
Norway	52.4	38.9	95.9	48.9
Poland	29.3	10.4	91.3	36.5
Portugal	18.9	11.9	90.5	38.4
Slovak Republic	29.3	12.9	95.4	31.4
Spain	23.4	14.8	94.8	46.0
Sweden	52.4	12.4	92.3	47.6
Switzerland	70.7	34.1	95.1	61.5
Turkey	14.6	7.5	64.5	35.7
United Kingdom	72.2	28.7	95.4	58.5
United States	66.3	41.9	95.3	65.5
OECD average	46.6	23.8	91.4	46.5
Brazil	29.1	16.9	88.6	52.9
China	8.2	3.9	81.1	40.5
India	14.3	12.8	68.4	31.6
Indonesia	43.1	23.1	67.5	25.6
Russian Federation	4.6	20.3	88.2	35.2
South Africa	14.3	12.8	78.8	51.3

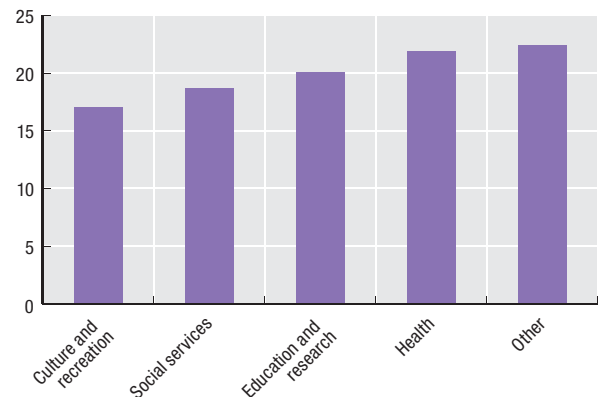
StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/544563886858>

Output of the non-for profit sector for selected countries

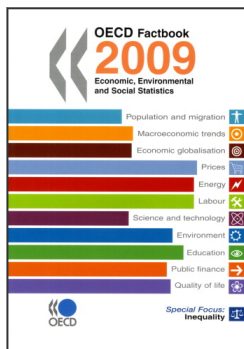
As a percentage of GDP, 2007



As a percentage of output in the non-profit sector, average of selected countries, 2007



StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/538638471325>



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