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Women & Volunteering in Canada

Statistics Canada, Table 45-10-0040-01 ·
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Canada

At first glance...

Men volunteer at a slightly higher rate

73.0%

Men (2023)

72.4%

Women (2023)

However...

Women give more hours per volunteer

156 hrs

Men avg/yr

188 hrs

Women avg/yr

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

Understanding Rate vs. Hours

A higher volunteer rate does not mean more contribution.

When men's volunteer rate is higher, it can appear they are the more engaged group.

But rate only counts who participates. It says nothing about how much.

RATE

Volunteer Rate

The % of the population who volunteered at least once. A person giving 1 hour counts the same as someone giving 500.

Men: 73.0%
Women: 72.4%
0.6 pp difference

HOURS

Avg. Annual Hours

The mean hours contributed per volunteer. This reveals depth of engagement, not just whether someone showed up.

Women: 188 hrs
Men: 156 hrs
Women give 32 more hrs/yr

TOTAL

Total Hours

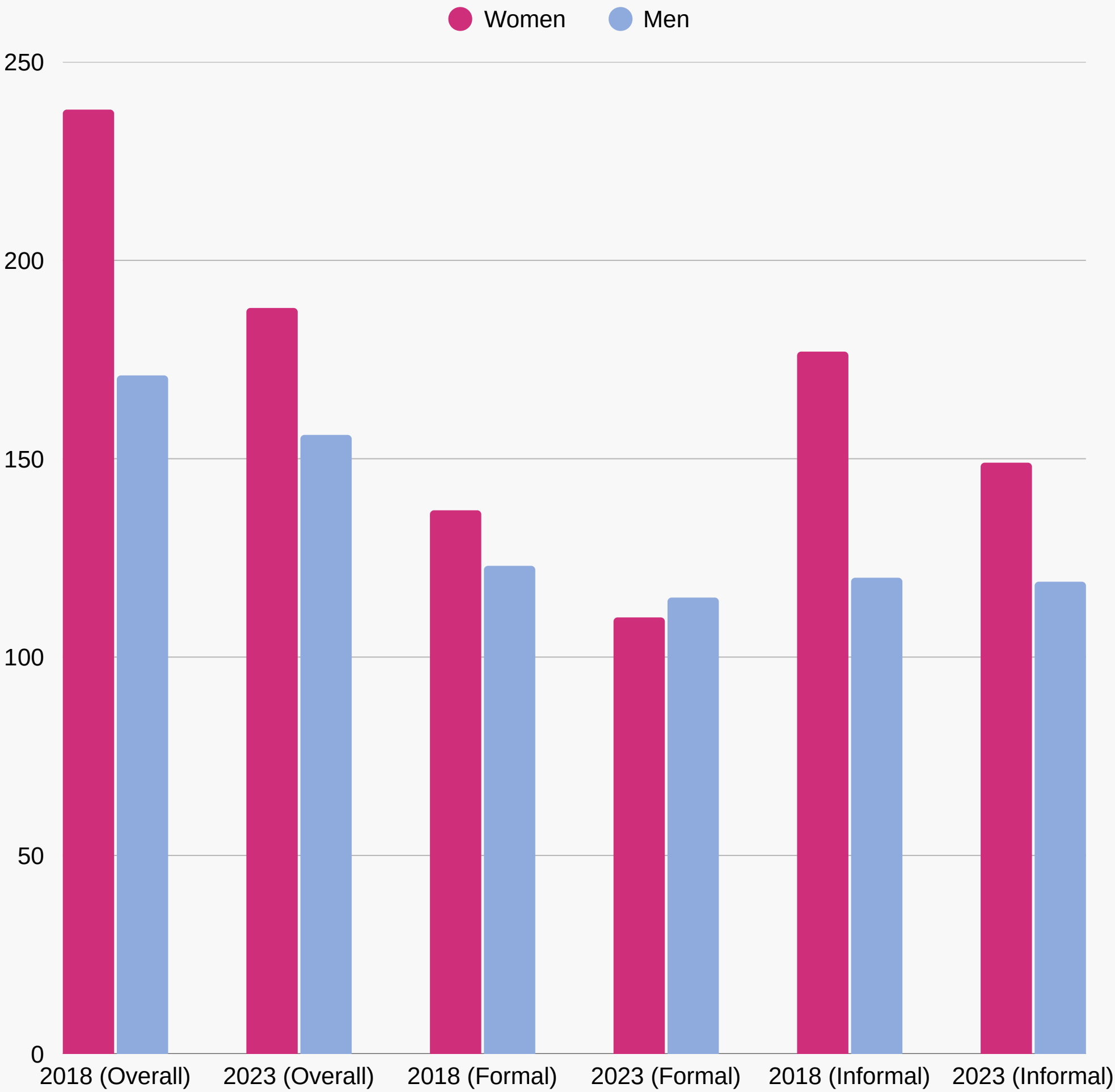
Rate x Hours x Population = true contribution. This captures the full weight of who sustains volunteer sectors.

Women: 2.25B hrs
Men: 1.85B hrs
Women: 54% of ALL hours

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

The Hours Gap: 2018 to 2023

Women volunteer more total and informal hours per year, and more overall hours across both time points



Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

Formal vs. Informal Volunteering: What Each Tells Us

The type of volunteering matters. It reveals very different gender dynamics.

Formal Volunteering (through organizations)

	Women	Men
Volunteer Rate (2023)	**34.2%**	30.4%
Avg Hours/yr (2023)	110 h	**115 h**
Total Hours (2023)	**622M**	567M
Rate Chg (18–23)	**-9.7 pp**	-7.7 pp

- *Women lead volunteer rate by 3.8 pp*
- *Men average slightly more hours per year*
- *Women contribute 55M more total hours*
- *Both declined; women's rate fell faster*

Informal Volunteering (direct community help)

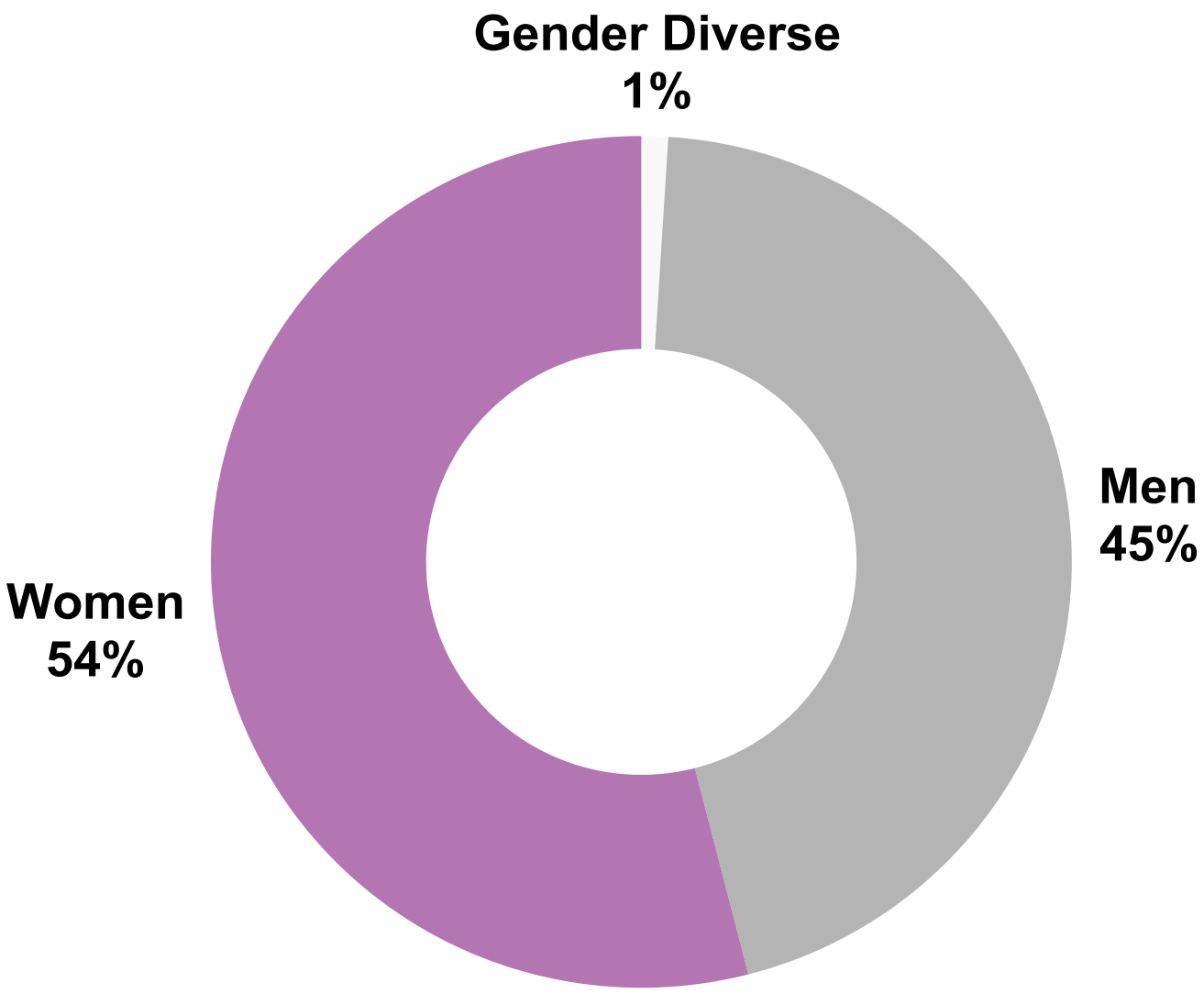
	Women	Men
Volunteer Rate (2023)	65.9%	**66.4%**
Avg Hours/yr (2023)	**149 h**	119 h
Total Hours (2023)	**1,628M**	1,286M
Rate Chg (18–23)	**-8.1 pp**	-6.8 pp

- *Rates nearly equal (men +0.5 pp)*
- *Women give 25% more hours per year*
- *Women: 56% of all informal hours*
- *Both declined; women's rate fell faster*

Men have a marginally higher informal volunteer RATE (66.4% vs 65.9%), but women give 25% MORE HOURS: 149 vs 119 hrs/yr.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

Who is carrying the volunteer sector?



54%
of all volunteer hours in 2023 were contributed by women

2.25B
hours volunteered by women in Canada in 2023

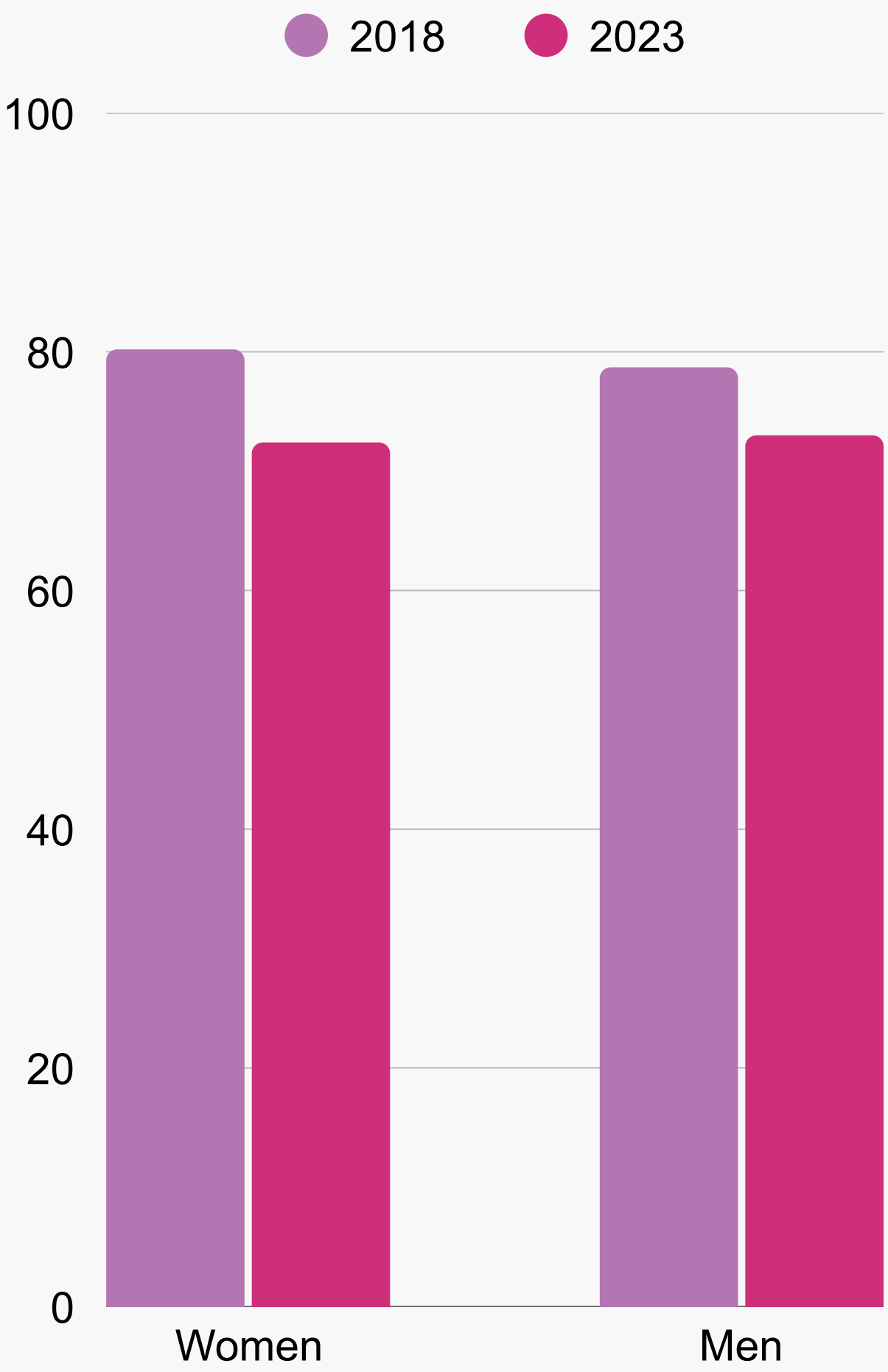
1.85B
hours volunteered by men in Canada in 2023

+398M
more volunteering hours by women every year

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

A Warning Signal: Women Are Stepping Back

Overall volunteer participation rate · Canada · 2018 vs 2023



WOMEN

80.2% to 72.4%

-7.8 pp

A steeper decline over 5 years, pointing to structural exhaustion and competing demands on women's unpaid time.

MEN

78.7% to 73.0%

-5.7 pp

Women's decline was 37% steeper than men's. This reflects who bears unpaid care burdens.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

Gender Gap in Volunteer Hours Lost

Women Accounted for 82% of All Hours Lost

-730M hrs
Female-gender
(-24.5%)

-190M hrs
Male-gender
(-9.3%)

82%
Share of total national decline

Female-gender volunteers lost 730M hours between 2018 and 2023 (2,981M to 2,251M, **-24.5%**). Male-gender lost 190M (**-9.3%**). Women generated 82% of the total national decline despite being roughly half the volunteer population. This scale of loss, concentrated in one group, is not just a statistical pattern: it is a signal worth interrogating.

Research consistently shows that women carry a disproportionate share of unpaid caregiving labour - for children, aging parents, and other dependents. Between 2018 and 2023, many of those pressures intensified: the pandemic disrupted care systems, childcare access remained constrained, and informal support networks frayed.

Volunteering, particularly formal volunteering through organizations, often requires predictable blocks of time, advance scheduling, and physical presence: conditions that are hardest to meet for people managing caregiving responsibilities.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

What to understand before using this data...

01

Understand Participation vs. Contribution

A higher volunteer RATE for men does not mean men contribute more. Rate is a binary measure. Hours x Rate x Population = actual labour. By that measure, women contribute more.

02

Informal Work Is the Invisible Layer

Men slightly outnumber women in informal volunteer RATE (66.4% vs 65.9%), but women give 25% more informal hours. This is the care economy in action: women's help is deeper, longer, and less counted.

03

Declining Rates May Signal Burnout

Women's steeper exit from volunteering (-7.8 pp vs -5.7 pp) is not a loss of civic spirit. It likely reflects an overloaded group making hard choices about where their unpaid time goes post-pandemic.

04

The Double Shift Problem

Women who volunteer may also carry primary responsibility for domestic and care work. Volunteer data captures only one part of this double shift. Yet even so, they still outcontribute men in hours.

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 (Table 45-10-0040-01) · Canada overall

Gender Gap in Volunteer Hours Lost

The Sector Needs to Ask Why

The data does not tell us why individual women stepped back. But the size and consistency of the decline - across provinces, across formal and informal categories, across age groups - suggests that **structural barriers deserve serious attention**.

Questions Organizations Should Be Asking:

Recruitment

Are outreach strategies reaching people with caregiving responsibilities?

Scheduling

Do volunteer roles offer flexibility, or do they assume predictable availability?

Role Design

Can roles be done remotely, asynchronously, or in shorter time blocks?

Retention

Are practices genuinely accessible, or implicitly designed around those without caregiving duties?

Source: Statistics Canada, SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018 · Analysis by gender

What This Means for Volunteer Organizations

See her work. Value her time.

1. MEASURE HOURS, not just participation rates, in all volunteer reporting and recognition programs.

2. ACKNOWLEDGE the double shift: design flexible, care-aware volunteer roles for people with caregiving responsibilities.

3. INVESTIGATE the decline: audit whether your structures inadvertently place more burden on women volunteers.

4. CREDIT informal contribution: recognize direct community help that does not flow through formal channels.

Data: Statistics Canada SGVP 2023 & GSS-GVP 2018

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