



THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF ROTARY VOLUNTEERING

A special report prepared for Rotary International by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies

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“The lesson from this report is clear: volunteer service is not only a feel-good calling—it may provide one of the more powerful, and one of the more fulfilling, avenues through which to reach the ambitious United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.”

~ Lester M. Salamon

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OVERVIEW

Service has long been recognized as a fundamental feature of Rotary membership. But neither Rotary nor any of the other major service organizations has been able to gain a meaningful handle on the actual scale or economic value of the volunteer effort they mobilize. But now, thanks to a recent internationally recognized methodology for measuring volunteer work, it has become possible to close this gap. In this report we present **10 findings generated through the first systematic application of this methodology to the volunteer promotion activity of a major international service organization.** These findings powerfully demonstrate the significant renewable resource of volunteer effort that service organizations like Rotary are generating.

HOW THE ROTARY/HOPKINS SURVEY WAS CARRIED OUT

The Hopkins survey utilized an official definition of “volunteer work” sanctioned by the International Labour Organization and a widely recognized methodology for handling survey non-respondents. Survey forms were sent via email by Rotary’s President to a carefully selected sample of Rotary club leaders in every Rotary region around the world. Club leaders were asked to distribute the surveys, either in electronic or paper form, to all of their club members. The survey asked respondents to recall and report information about each time they volunteered in the previous 4 weeks. Responses were then tallied, weighted by region, and adjusted to account for potential non-response bias. For further detail on the survey methodology, see the **Appendix.**

ROTARY'S 1.2 MILLION MEMBERS



VOLUNTEERED 5.8 MILLION HOURS IN THE SURVEY MONTH



IN 1 YEAR, THAT WOULD TOTAL OVER 47 MILLION HOURS



(THAT WOULD EQUAL A FULL WORK WEEK PER YEAR FOR EVERY ROTARY MEMBER)

FINDING 1

Rotary's volunteer workforce: 47 MILLION HOURS A YEAR and counting

The new survey makes clear that Rotary members are not merely “talking the talk” of service volunteering: they are also “walking the walk.”

According to the world-wide Hopkins survey, Rotary's 1.2 million members **volunteered a total of nearly 5.8 million hours in a recent four-week reference period**. Even excluding the volunteering associated with Rotary's World Polio Day, which was included in the survey reference period, Rotary members accounted for close to 5.1 million hours of volunteer effort during this four-week period.

And this does not even include the more than 1 million friends and relatives that members frequently bring with them to Rotary-organized volunteering engagements or the volunteering contributed by the more than 700,000 members of Rotary's Rotaract, Interact, or Community Corp affiliates.

If the overall Rotary membership maintains this level of volunteering over even nine months in a typical year, this translates into a conservative estimate of nearly 47 million hours of volunteer effort generated by Rotary members in a typical year.

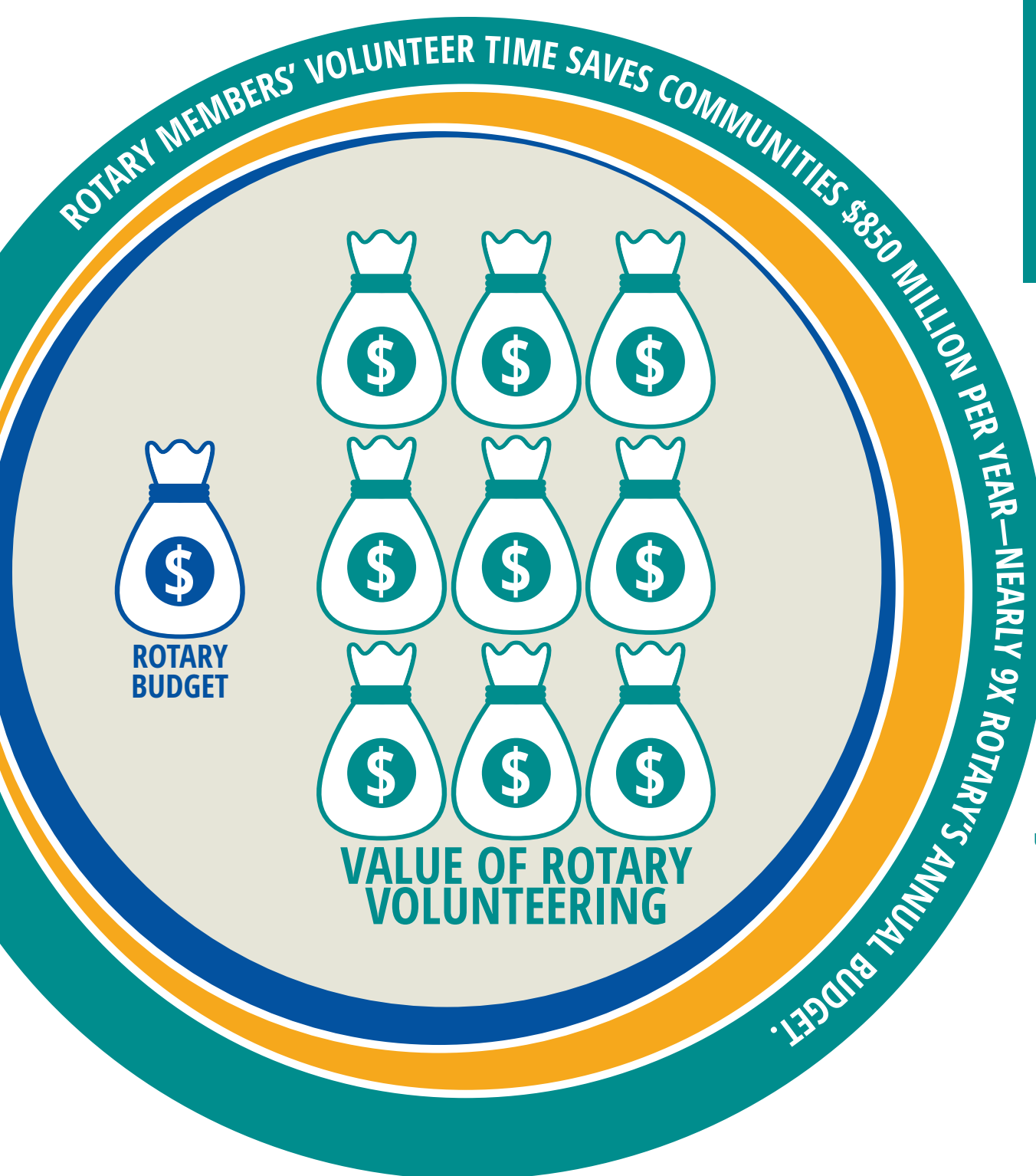
FINDING 2

Leveraging Rotary's paid staff

Put somewhat differently, once these hours of volunteer effort are translated into the number of "full-time equivalent" workers they represent, it turns out that **Rotary International is mobilizing a workforce for social progress each year that is equivalent to nearly 27,000 full-time equivalent workers—nearly 50 times larger than its own 563 paid staff.**

This is a remarkable record of leveraging the unique renewable resource for social problem-solving that volunteering represents.





FINDING 3

The economic impact of Rotary-inspired volunteering

The value of the time Rotary members give to volunteering has a significant economic, as well as social, value.

Even conservatively estimated, if communities and organizations had to pay for the services Rotary volunteers provide, it would cost them an estimated total of **US\$850 million a year**. **Rotary thus saves communities nearly US\$850 million in service costs.**

This is nearly **nine times larger** than the Rotary's annual expenditures, underlining again the **tremendous leverage that Rotary's affiliated clubs achieve through their organization of volunteer opportunities for their members.**

FINDING 4

Capturing the benefits of Rotary's emphasis on service

The overwhelming majority of Rotary International members identified Rotary's emphasis on service as one of the organization's major attractions to its members.

From the evidence of this survey, it appears that Rotary members, and the Rotary organization, have delivered impressively on this feature.



HOW IMPORTANT WAS ROTARY'S FOCUS ON SERVICE TO YOUR DECISION TO BECOME A MEMBER?

EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, 27.6%

VERY IMPORTANT, 45.8%

MODERATELY IMPORTANT, 20.7%

SLIGHTLY IMPORTANT, 4.6%

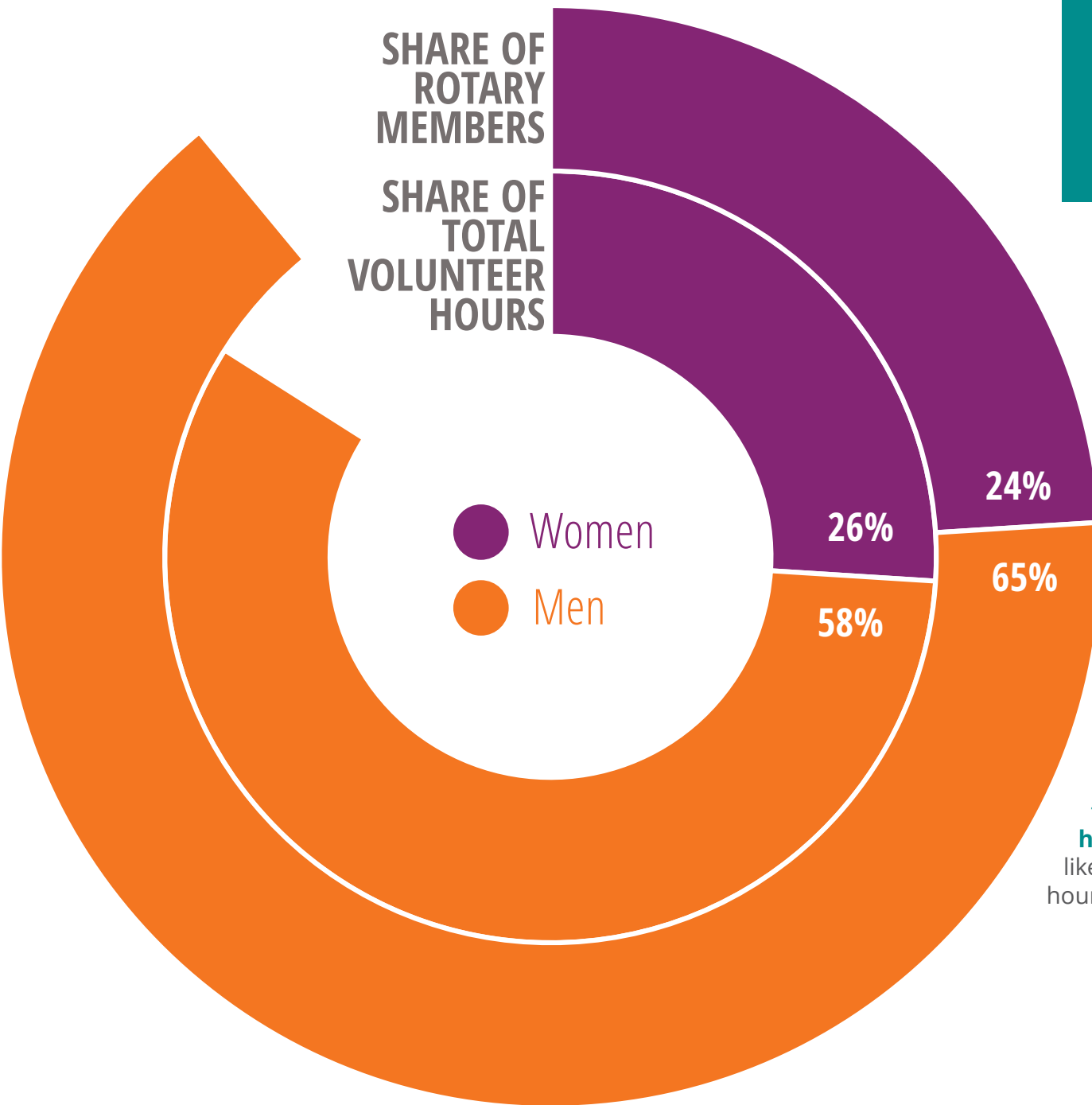
FINDING 5

Gender and Rotary volunteering

Most Rotary-organized volunteering is carried out by men, but Rotary women contribute disproportionately to the total.

More specifically, Rotary men contributed more than twice as many total hours of volunteer work as Rotary women (58% versus 26% of total hours). That is not surprising since Rotary's membership is predominantly male. However, while accounting for 65% of Rotary members, men accounted for a disproportionately smaller 58% of the volunteer hours.

By contrast, **though only representing 24% of Rotary members, Rotary women accounted for a disproportionate 26% of Rotary volunteer hours**, suggesting that women were either more likely to volunteer than men or volunteered more hours, or some combination of these two.



FINDING 6

Age and Rotary volunteering

Rotary members aged 56 and up account for over half (53%) of Rotary-organized volunteering, roughly proportional to their share of Rotary members, while those aged 25–55, while accounting for nearly a third of this volunteer activity, lag slightly behind what their share of members would suggest.

The youngest members of Rotary, those from 15–24 years of age, make up a much smaller share of Rotary’s membership and volunteer hours—but this may reflect the fact that these younger participants generally enter the Rotary ranks through its affiliated organizations, Interact and Rotaract, which were not covered by this research.



SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

23.8%

HEALTH CARE

17.5%

EDUCATION

13.3%

CULTURE & ARTS

13.1%

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

4.3%

ENVIRONMENT

3.7%

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

2.2%

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

1.3%

ADVOCACY

1.1%

OTHER

19.8%

FINDING 7

Rotary volunteers contribute in a variety of fields

Survey respondents reported up to nine different volunteer activities. **Half of all Rotary-organized volunteer time is devoted to health, education, and social assistance (e.g., child, elder, or disability care, soup kitchens, refugee support services), with culture and arts a close fourth.** The remaining hours were split among other categories of activity, including economic and community development, environment, international cooperation, emergency response, advocacy, and a broad “other” category.

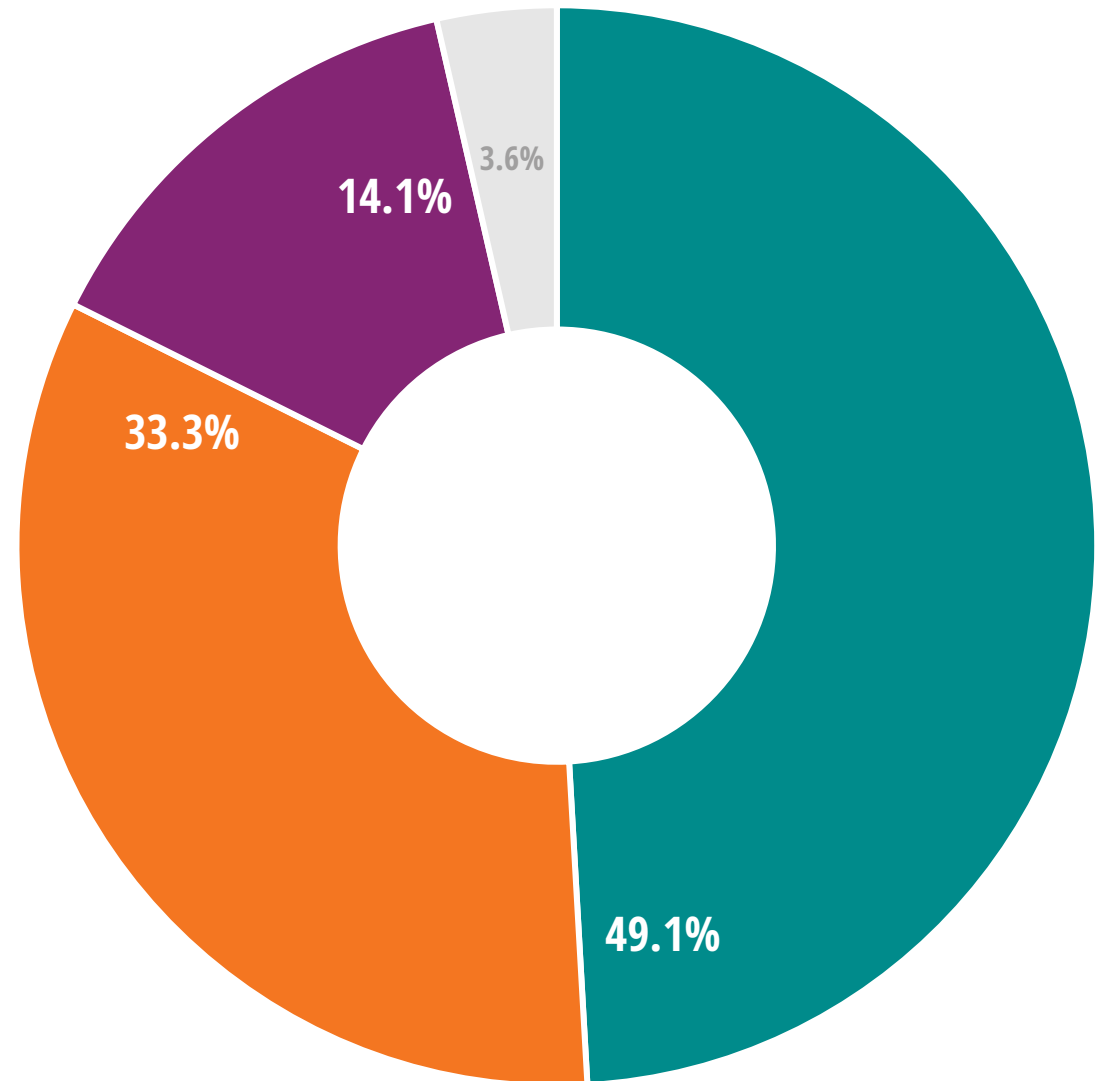
During the reference period for this survey, World Polio Day activities took its place among those noted here, boosting the overall level of volunteering, but reducing the share of hours accounted for by these other activities. World Polio Day activities accounted for nearly 10% of Rotary-organized volunteer hours during this 4-week period. These data are not included in the figure.

FINDING 8

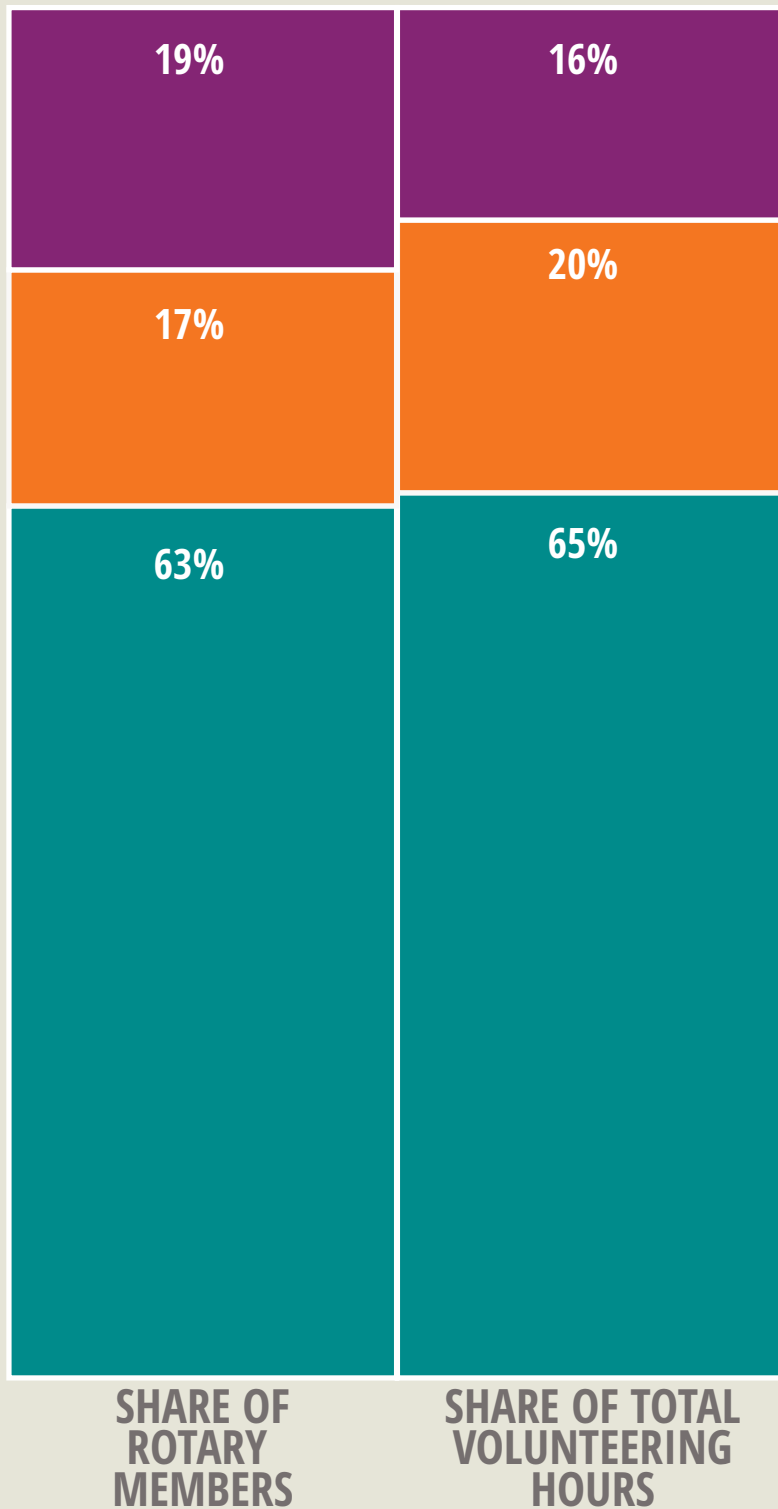
Rotary volunteers do a variety of jobs

Rotary members performed a variety of different jobs in their volunteer work. By far **the largest proportion of hours (49%) was devoted to manager, organizer, or coordinator functions.**

The second largest proportion of hours (33%) went into manual labor activities—including cooking, serving food, cleaning, construction, operating vehicles, typing, making phone calls, and distributing information. Another 14% of the hours went into professional or technical activities, such as legal, medical, accounting, and fundraising services.



- Manager, organizer, or coordinator
- Manual work
- Technical or professional services
- Not declared



LENGTH OF ROTARY MEMBERSHIP

- 2 years or less
- 3-5 years
- 6 years +

FINDING 9

Rotary is succeeding in initiating its new members into its service expectations

Not surprisingly, long-time Rotary members (those who have been members for 6 years or more) account for nearly two-thirds of Rotary-organized volunteer work, roughly proportional to their share of members.

Significantly, however, those who have been members of Rotary for 3-5 years account for 20% of volunteer hours, exceeding their 17% of membership.

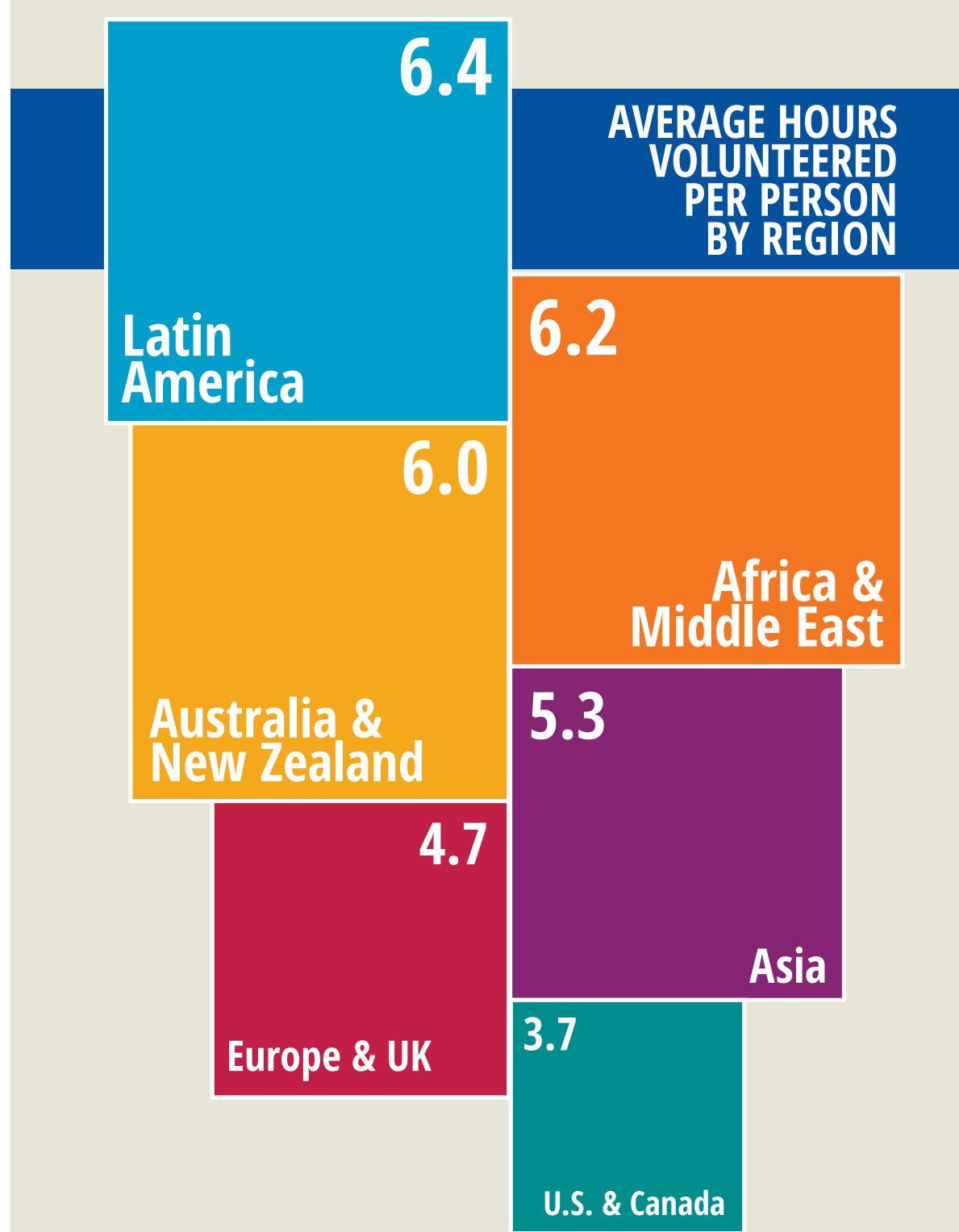
FINDING 10

Rotary volunteer rates and hours vary by region

The population of Rotary members varies significantly by region, with most of the members in Asia (32%), the US & Canada (29%), and Europe (25%).

Average hours of volunteering per volunteer also varied by region, but often not in proportion to the share of members. Thus, the average hours of volunteering per volunteer per month was higher in Latin America (6.4 hours) and Africa and the Middle East (6.2 hours) than in the U.S. and Canada (3.7 hours) and Europe and the U.K. (4.7 hours).

Reflecting these disparities, some regions, such as the U.S. and Canada, accounted for lower shares of volunteer hours than their share of Rotary members might have suggested, while other regions, such as Asia—embracing Southeast Asia, India, Korea, and Japan—accounted for higher shares of volunteer hours than their share of volunteer members might have suggested, as reflected in the map on the next page.



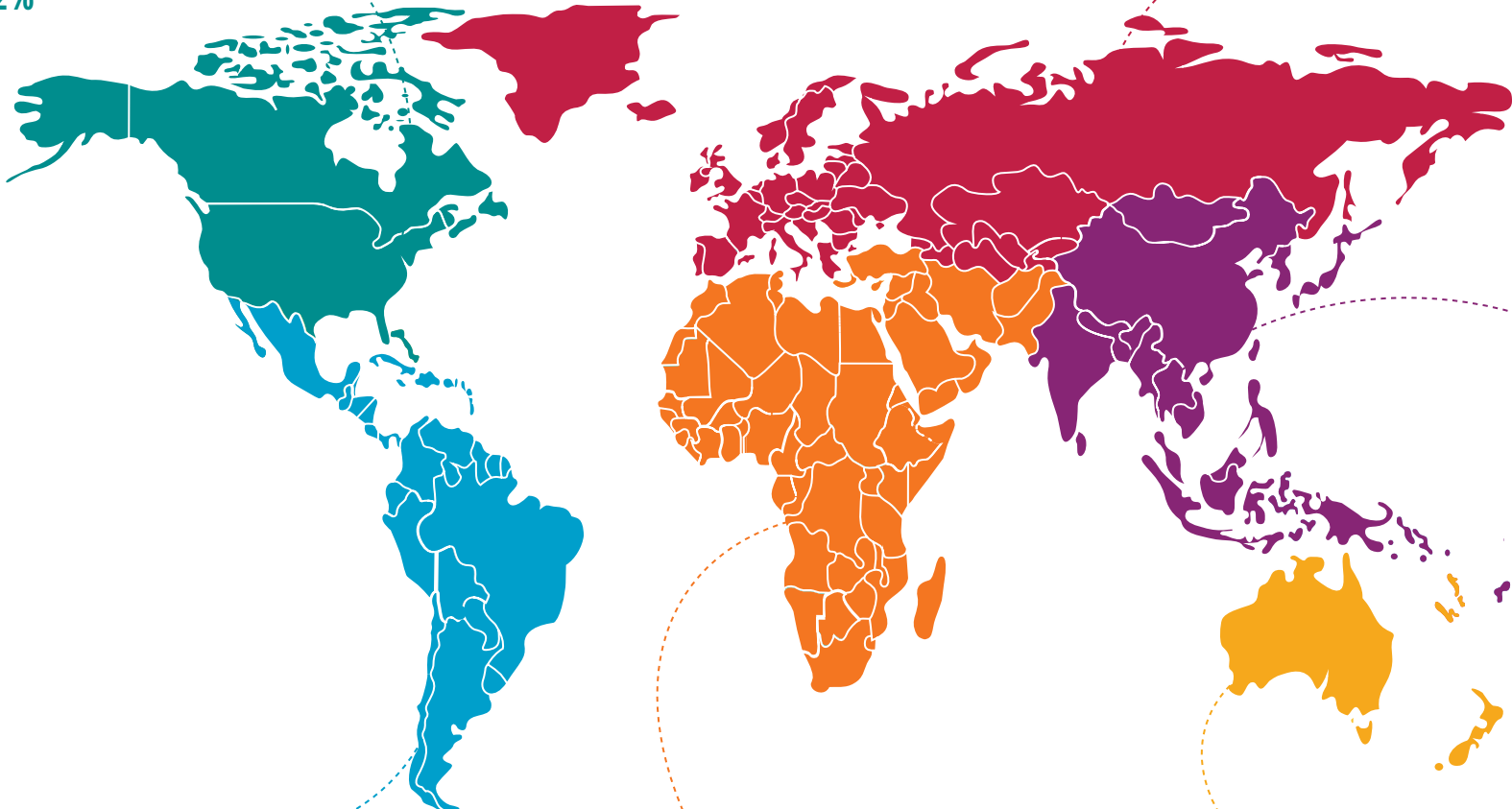
SHARE OF ROTARY MEMBERS vs. SHARE OF VOLUNTEER HOURS BY REGION

U.S. & CANADA

 
29% 22%

EUROPE & UK

 
25% 25%



LATIN AMERICA

 
8% 10%

ASIA

 
32% 35%

AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

 
3% 4%

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

 
3% 4%

CONCLUSION

This report provides the first systematic empirical analysis of the extent of volunteer activity generated by a major global service organization using an internationally sanctioned definition of volunteer work and widely recommended statistical sampling and weighting methods. To be sure, complicated estimating procedures had to be deployed to deal with the survey's relatively low response rate and the wide variations in the scale of Rotary membership among regions. At each turn, the analysis took the most conservative of the reasonable paths available to generate these estimates. Despite these complexities, therefore, readers can be confident that the results reported here are a reasonable approximation of the scale and character of the volunteer effort generated by Rotary and that they err, if at all, on the low side of the actual amounts.

This makes the results reported here all the more remarkable, however. With a staff of 563 employees, Rotary International has mobilized a volunteer workforce that translates into the equivalent of 26,500 full-time workers. Translated into economic terms, Rotary is annually generating a scale of social and economic problem-solving effort that is worth nearly nine times more than it costs the organization to produce. Here is a powerful demonstration of the enormous leveraging possibilities available from mobilizing the unique renewable resource represented by volunteer work.

For a world challenged to meet a demanding set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the face of withering environmental catastrophes and limited governmental and philanthropic resources, the lesson is clear: **volunteer service is not only a feel-good calling—it may provide one of the more promising, and one of the more fulfilling—avenues through which to achieve the ambitious goals that the international community has set for itself.** By putting itself through the demanding inquiry described here, Rotary may thus have done a special service by opening this avenue for all to see. If so, this work will have more than met its objectives.



LA PORTATA E LA DIMENSIONE DEL VOLONTARIATO ROTARY

Un rapporto speciale preparato per Rotary International dal Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies

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PANORAMICA

Il servizio è da lungo tempo riconosciuto come elemento fondamentale dell'appartenenza al Rotary. Tuttavia, né il Rotary né altre grandi organizzazioni di servizio sono riuscite a misurare con precisione la reale dimensione o il valore economico del volontariato mobilitato. Grazie a una metodologia recentemente riconosciuta a livello internazionale per la misurazione del lavoro volontario, questo divario può ora essere colmato.

RISULTATO 1 – La forza lavoro volontaria del Rotary

Secondo l'indagine Hopkins globale, i 1,2 milioni di membri Rotary hanno contribuito con quasi 5,8 milioni di ore di volontariato in un periodo di riferimento di quattro settimane. Anche escludendo le attività legate al World Polio Day, le ore restano circa 5,1 milioni. Se tale livello fosse mantenuto per nove mesi, si otterrebbe una stima prudente di quasi 47 milioni di ore annue.

RISULTATO 2 – Valorizzare il personale retribuito del Rotary

Convertite in equivalenti a tempo pieno, queste ore corrispondono a quasi 27.000 lavoratori a tempo pieno, circa 50 volte il personale retribuito del Rotary.

RISULTATO 3 – Impatto economico

Se il lavoro dei volontari Rotary fosse retribuito, costerebbe circa 850 milioni di dollari l'anno, quasi nove volte il budget annuale del Rotary.

RISULTATO 4 – Benefici dell'enfasi sul servizio

La grande maggioranza dei membri considera il servizio una delle principali attrattive dell'organizzazione.

RISULTATO 5 – Genere

Gli uomini svolgono la maggior parte del volontariato, ma le donne contribuiscono in modo sproporzionato rispetto alla loro presenza.

RISULTATO 6 – Età

I membri di 56 anni e oltre rappresentano oltre metà delle ore di volontariato.

RISULTATO 7 – Ambiti di attività

Metà del tempo volontario è dedicata a salute, istruzione e assistenza sociale.

RISULTATO 8 – Tipologie di attività

Il 49% delle ore riguarda funzioni di coordinamento e organizzazione.

RISULTATO 9 – Nuovi membri

I membri con 3–5 anni di anzianità contribuiscono più della loro quota percentuale.

RISULTATO 10 – Differenze regionali

Le ore di volontariato variano significativamente tra le regioni.

CONCLUSIONE

Questo rapporto offre la prima analisi empirica sistematica del volontariato Rotary usando standard internazionali. Il Rotary mobilita una forza volontaria equivalente a decine di migliaia di lavoratori a tempo pieno e genera un valore sociale ed economico enorme.

APPENDICE – Definizione di volontariato (OIL)

Il lavoro volontario è definito come attività svolta da persone di 15 anni o più, per almeno un'ora, non retribuita, non obbligatoria e a beneficio di altri. Nel presente studio sono incluse solo attività organizzate dal Rotary.