



LAMPRECHT UND STAMM · SOZIALFORSCHUNG UND BERATUNG AG

Volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic

Analyses by MOSAiCH

Summary

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Summary

Evaluation of the COVID-19 panel conducted by MOSAiCH

On behalf of the Migros Culture Percentage, the social research firm Lamprecht und Stamm conducted a study on the development of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data are drawn from the COVID-19 panel of MOSAiCH, a representative survey of the Swiss population. In the survey, between 1,200 and 2,400 people aged 18 and over were asked at three different points in time between spring 2020 and spring 2021 about their life situation (work, family, leisure, health, etc.) and various aspects relating to the COVID-19 pandemic (fears, trust in political and social institutions, satisfaction with how the crisis is being managed, etc.).

Detailed data on volunteering

The COVID-19 panel also includes information about volunteering. Wave 1 focused on general questions regarding activities in clubs, political groups and charitable or religious institutions, whereas waves 2 and 3 engaged in detail with different forms of volunteering. This included volunteering in clubs and organisations, supporting and caring for children, seniors, the sick and disabled, as well as assisting others (helping out in the neighbourhood, etc.).

Considerable decline in volunteering

The study shows that there was a significant decline in volunteering in the first phase during the lockdown of spring 2020. Whereas 65 per cent of the population volunteered in some form before the outbreak of the pandemic, by autumn 2020, this had declined to 58 per cent. Between autumn 2020 and spring 2021, there was a further decline from 58 to 55 per cent, though considerably less precipitous than during the first half of 2020.

New volunteers

However, although some people gave up or were forced to give up their volunteering activities at least temporarily during the pandemic, there were others who began to volunteer for the first time during this period. One-twelfth of the population took up a new volunteering activity. The number of people helping out in their neighbourhood increased during the pandemic, whereas formal volunteering in clubs and organisations, but also informal support and care for children, seniors, the sick and disabled, suffered more under the restrictions resulting from the pandemic.

Different forms of volunteering and impact of the pandemic among different groups

Whether and how people volunteer depends greatly on factors such as sex, age, nationality, region, education, household income and employment status. For example, people of pensionable age are especially active in providing support and care to children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled. This support and care work provided by older people was particularly affected by the pandemic, and often had to be reduced or stopped entirely. The volunteering done by young people also suffered during the pandemic. Yet at the same time, it is young people in particular who have newly taken up volunteering. In the age group of the under-25s, the pandemic has led to a de facto exchange of volunteers. In terms of volunteering in clubs and organisations, it is noticeable that

an especially large proportion of foreign volunteers have had to reduce their activities. In analysing the changes in volunteering activities, there is no discernible difference between the French-speaking and German-speaking parts of Switzerland, nor any noteworthy differences between city dwellers and those living in the countryside. The level of volunteering is higher in rural communities than in larger cities, but was not more affected by the pandemic.

People who volunteer do better during the pandemic

People who volunteer have weathered the pandemic better in several ways than those who do not do any volunteering. Although not every person who volunteers is more trusting of political and social institutions, they are more satisfied with their lives, receive more social support, are less socially isolated and suffer fewer bouts of depression. Among those who frequently felt unhappy, depressed and socially isolated in spring 2021, there was a disproportionate number of people who had had to give up volunteering during the pandemic. By contrast, people who had been able to maintain their volunteering or even start a new form of volunteering were often also the people who felt socially supported.