

Coronavirus volunteers: Greater satisfaction thanks to online platforms

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Credit: University of Basel

Shortly after the lockdown began, a huge number of volunteers signed up to help people in coronavirus risk groups—primarily via online platforms. A study by the University of Basel has found that websites such as these can have a positive impact with regard to the mobilization, willingness and satisfaction of volunteers, including in the longer term.

Right at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of

[volunteer work](#) became abundantly clear: thousands and thousands of people signed up spontaneously—and generally outside of formal structures—to buy groceries for others or to help in another way, such as by supporting the public health system. Unlike in previous crises, everyone involved faced the same risk of becoming infected. Their efforts were therefore generally organized through various [online platforms](#) that matched up volunteers with people in need.

Offers of help significantly exceeded demand

On all of the platforms, the offers of help far exceeded demand. Now, researchers from the Center for Philanthropy Studies CEPS at the University of Basel have worked with colleagues from the University of Freiburg and the ZHAW in Winterthur to study the importance of online platforms when it comes to the motivation and willingness of volunteers. They have reported their findings in the journal *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.

The researchers' survey of a sample of 565 volunteers from a major [platform](#) reveals that online placement can help channel the oversupply of volunteers and thus reduce unrealistic expectations. By providing information on safety and health matters during participation in [voluntary work](#), the coronavirus platforms also had a [positive impact](#) on volunteer satisfaction.

Moreover, the satisfaction of active volunteers was higher the more afraid they were of catching the virus. According to the researchers, one possible explanation for this is that volunteer work boosted the volunteers' self-confidence -even more so when they believed themselves to be at greater risk.

Willingness to commit in the long term

"Greater satisfaction gained from spontaneous volunteering means people are more willing to commit to long-term volunteering opportunities at a later stage," says Professor Georg von Schnurbein, associate professor of foundation management at the University of Basel and co-author of the study. "Volunteer work is immensely important for our society—not only in times of crisis."

He highlights the importance of long-term commitment in many areas of society, such as in health and [social services](#), as well as in cultural activities and youth work. According to the most recent survey, 665 million hours of [volunteer](#) work were completed in Switzerland in 2013, while paid work in the entire health and social services sector amounted to 853 million hours.

More information: Stefan Trautwein et al, Satisfaction With Informal Volunteering During the COVID-19 Crisis: An Empirical Study Considering a Swiss Online Volunteering Platform, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0899764020964595](https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764020964595)

Provided by University of Basel

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