



## Capability to Volunteer: Explaining the Varieties of Volunteering in Europe

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Through applying the capability approach to European data sets, this paper builds on existing research on factors impacting likelihood of volunteering and provides insight into the varying rates of volunteering across Europe.

Do different individual and societal factors impacting someone's capability to volunteer explain the variation in volunteering across Europe?

The author concludes that when applied to the European data sets, the capability hypothesis is supported and provides insight into the individual and contextual factors impacting the likelihood of volunteering. In particular, equality and social trust are key factors in an individual's capability to volunteer, and consequently, varying volunteer rates.

[#Volunteering](#) [#Europe](#) [#Capability](#) [#VolunteerParticipation](#)

### Background & Context



- Despite common history and traditions, **the rate of people volunteering varies greatly between European countries**, with high rates (50-30% of the population volunteers) in Nordic countries, and low rates in Southern post-Communist countries (8-3% of the population).
- A “micro-structural” approach focuses on a person’s values and resources, however, to explain why rates vary across countries, “macro-structural” explanations should also be considered. **Existing literature on this often lacks suitability for cross-border data or is limited** by an approach focusing on **specific factors rather than exploring how different factors relate**.
- Existing theories, such as voluntary failure/complementarity theory, resource mobilization hypothesis, and social origins theory, provide insight into the relationship between the state and voluntary sector. However, these theories explain more when considered together rather than as separate, rival theories.
- The capability approach applied here, aims to consider the impact of institutional regimes, apply a holistic framework to understanding economic, political, cultural and social factors, and bridge the micro-macro link, to explain the likelihood of volunteering.

# ERNOP Research Note

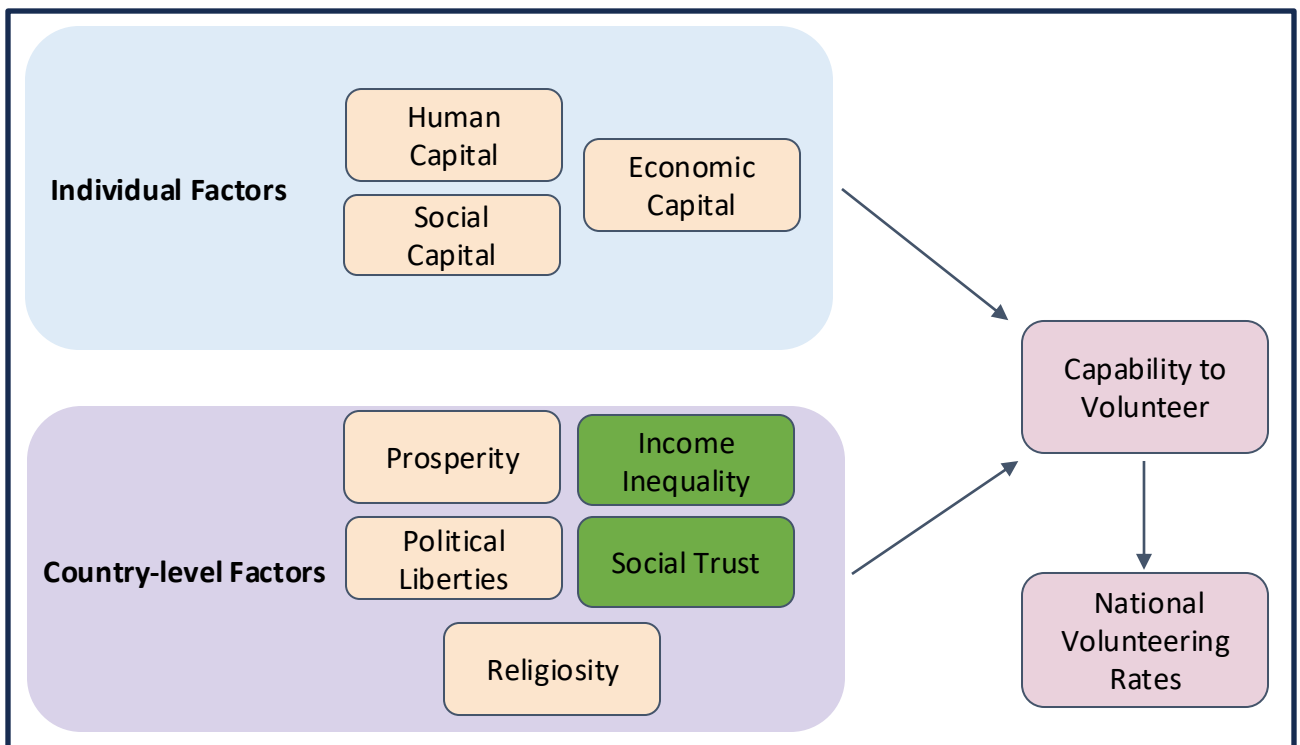
## Academic articles on philanthropy through a practitioner lens

### Take aways & Learnings



- The research applied the capability approach to data from two sources: the **2015 EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions**, which includes an ad hoc module on volunteering, and data from **Quality of Government Institute & the PEW research centre**.
- Different variables were identified to test the data against factors identified in the capability approach. **At the individual level**, this included **human, economic, and social capital**. **At the country level**, this included **prosperity (GDP), income inequality, political liberties, social trust, and religiosity**.
- The results showcased that **the factors identified, at both individual and country levels, did have a strong link with likelihood to volunteer**. The final factor, **religiosity**, was the only factor without a fully supported link, possibly due to Europe's high secularisation, however this **can still have an impact through increasing an individual's social network** - which does have a supported link to likelihood of volunteering.
- Through applying the capability approach, it is highlighted that **equality and social trust core factors in enhancing an individual's capability to volunteer and consequently have a substantial impact on volunteer rates across Europe**.

Figure 1: Factors influencing the likelihood to volunteer



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