



Why do people volunteer for refugees? Exploring Volunteer Motivations

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This article addresses the motivations of volunteers to volunteer for refugees. This study is relevant for practitioners because it sheds light on popular and unpopular motivations for volunteering for refugees. It helps better understand and mobilize volunteers by designing more targeted policies to recruit and retain volunteers.

What are the key motivations driving individuals to volunteer for refugees? Do these motivations differ from or complement motivations to volunteer in general? And how can these insights enhance volunteer management?

Results show that volunteers are driven by diverse motivations, including altruism, a sense of social justice, and personal development. Understanding these motivations allows organizations better to align their recruitment and retention strategies with volunteer expectations, leading to more effective and sustainable volunteer involvement. Tailoring engagement approaches to these motivations can significantly improve volunteer satisfaction and impact.

[#VolunteerMotivation](#) [#RefugeeSupport](#) [#Philanthropy](#) [#VolunteerEngagement](#)
[#NonprofitManagement](#)

Background

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Context



- There are many **motivations for volunteering**, including **six key motivations explained in the Volunteer Function Inventory** (Clary et al., 1998): 1) **personal values**, 2) **understanding** others and developing new skills, 3) **social motivations** to be with one's friends or to engage in an activity viewed favorably by important others', 4) **career enhancement**, 5) **protective** motivations related to emotional needs, 6) **enhancement** of psychological grow and self-assessment.
- **Complementary motivations** include **social justice** & universalism (caring for social equality), **benevolence**, **generativity**, **care**, and **reciprocity**.
- Humanitarian crises mobilize people willing to volunteer for others who have fled. What **distinguishes volunteering for refugees** from other volunteering is that **time is given to a vulnerable group** of newcomers in society, who are **not considered to be part of the national ingroup**.
- Volunteers for refugees have an inclusive scope of justice and are motivated by moral duty.

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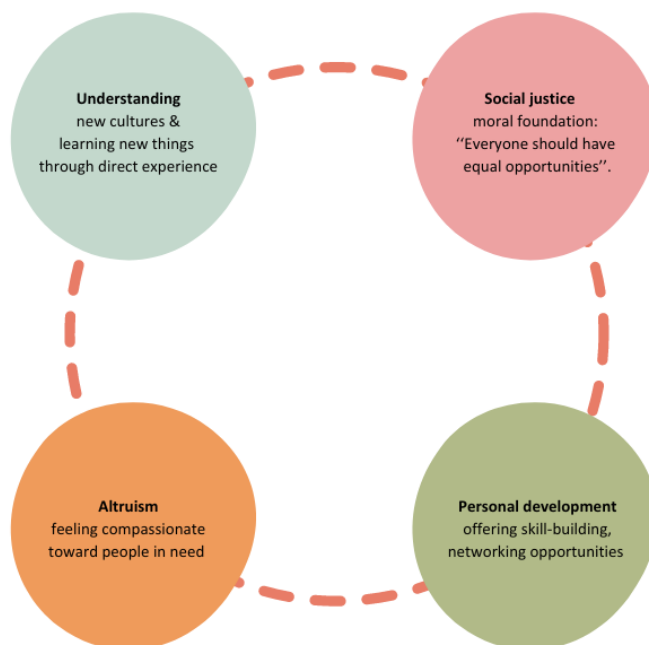
Academic articles on philanthropy through a practitioner lens

Take aways & Learnings



- The research is based on **eight focus groups with 44 volunteers for refugees and 5 interviews with coordinators** of refugee volunteer organizations, all working in the Netherlands.
- **Altruism and social justice are the main motivations for volunteering with refugees**, but **personal development** is also a significant factor. Except for popular motivations shown below, **four missing motivations** that were not covered by the VFI were identified:
 1. **seeking a meaningful role in life** through volunteering,
 2. **pragmatism and personal gratification**,
 3. **controversial messages, events** shown in the media (e.g., protests),
 4. **emotional identification with refugees** based on similar experiences.
- Interestingly, political and social motivations were not important according to volunteers for refugees, while career motivations were unimportant for older volunteers but important to younger ones.
- According to coordinators, some people volunteer for refugees to overcome their problems and to feel less lonely; such volunteer work can be a way to reintegrate into society after illness or burnout.
- Volunteer retention can be improved by **aligning organizational goals with the social justice motivations of volunteers**.

Figure 1. main motivations for volunteering with refugees



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