



Middle-Class Volunteers: A Stable Backbone of Swiss Civil Society?

Oto Potluka & Georg von Schnurbein – Center for Philanthropy Studies, University of Basel

Many people believe that the middle class is the main group involved in formal volunteering. But as the middle class shrinks under economic pressures, is volunteering shrinking too? Is the middle class at risk of becoming less involved?

To find out, the authors looked at data from the Swiss Volunteering Survey, which collected responses from over 5,000 people in 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2019. They wanted to see if the middle-class's involvement in volunteering has changed over time.

What they found was surprising and gives hope to nonprofits and community leaders. Results show that the middle class does play a key role in formal volunteering, especially when compared to people with lower incomes. While there is a positive connection between belonging to the middle class and volunteering, this study didn't find strong evidence that this link has grown or shrunk over the years. In other words, the middle class's level of volunteering has stayed about the same during this period.

[#volunteering](#) [#middleclassvolunteering](#) [#formalvolunteering](#) [#SwissVolunteering](#)

Background

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Context



- The middle class is often seen as a good indicator of how well a society is doing, both economically and socially. It is often regarded as a crucial reservoir for volunteering. Middle-class individuals are socially included and materially secure, making them more likely to volunteer compared to less wealthy groups.
- Middle-class is not a universal term, so the authors looked at it in two different ways. First, at the "income middle class," which is based on income levels. Second, at the "employment middle class," which combined income rules with work-related criteria.
- Social capital, especially trust in others and institutions, boosts willingness to volunteer, making social connections critical for engagement.
- Although people in the middle class might be more involved in politics, this doesn't always mean they volunteer more. Being interested in politics can motivate people to get involved, but it also depends on a person's personality, skills, and the political issues that matter to them.
- Having skills, knowledge, and experience (known as human capital) not only makes it more likely for someone to be part of the middle class but also increases their chances of volunteering. Having the right knowledge and skills is also important because volunteers need them to help nonprofit organizations do their work well.
- On the contrary, the most common reasons people don't volunteer are not having enough time, not wanting to volunteer, and poor health.

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Take aways & Learnings



- Using national survey data from more than 5,000 Swiss citizens across 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2019, the researchers mapped how volunteering changed.
- Here’s the surprising news: **the middle class is still the backbone of formal volunteering in Switzerland**. Even though their share of the population shrank, the percentage of middle-class volunteers remained pretty stable between 2006 and 2019. However, **belonging to the middle class itself does not necessarily increase the likelihood of becoming a volunteer**.
- **Trust strongly predicts volunteering engagement**, indicating that nonprofit organizations must invest in building and maintaining trust with potential volunteers.
- **Time availability is a crucial barrier**: middle-class individuals with heavy work commitments are less likely to volunteer.
- **Political engagement correlates positively with volunteering**, suggesting that organizations linked to civic activism may attract more volunteers. Non-profits can also focus on politically engaged people as they’re already active citizens and may be especially open to joining volunteering initiatives.

What Drives Volunteering Among the Swiss Middle Class?

Exploring the Key Factors Behind Middle-Class Engagement in Formal Volunteering

FACTOR		EFFECT ON VOLUNTEERING	
Trust		Strongly increases volunteering engagement	
Time Availability		Heavy work commitments decrease volunteering	
Political Engagement		Positively correlates with volunteering	

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