



Volunteers as a Force of Solidarity in Times of Crisis

Volunteers as a force of solidarity in times of crisis

- Research on (crisis) volunteering -

October, 2020



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Introduction

The research goal was to examine attitudes and perspectives on volunteering and volunteers, specifically on volunteering during various crisis situations. In our research the emphasis was on the refugee crisis that took place in Europe between 2015 and 2017 and the subsequent work with refugees in integration processes. All countries involved in this research had an influx of refugees and issues and challenges on the borders during that period. Consequently, they engaged volunteers and organized volunteer work via different organizations.

The research population was determined by the project partners and countries their organizations were stationed in. Every partner had to spread the survey across the country, contacting their partners and associates in other NGOs so we could have a more widespread sample geographically. The sample consisted of 265 participants from Belgium, 301 participants from Croatia, 256 participants from Italy, 193 participants from Poland and 357 participants from Serbia. The data was collected between May and September 2020.

When planning the research and the project, the aim was to gather answers from 2500 participants in total, so that the contribution of each partner was equal. Since the data collection was happening during the global pandemic, which was indeed an unforeseen circumstance, in total only 1372 participants were included in the research, and unevenly distributed across countries (disproportionate in relation to their population). Analysis was adapted according to that, so we only analysed differences between respondents with emphasis on their sociodemographic characteristics (such as gender, age, education level, etc.), while not taking into consideration the variable “country of residence”.

Survey was designed in cooperation with University of Split (Department of Sociology), and it consisted of six parts:

1. Sociodemographic questions
2. Trust scale (general) – trust towards others and institutions
3. Statements on volunteering and volunteering experience
4. Volunteering during crisis in general
5. Volunteering – refugee crisis
6. Volunteering – COVID-19 crisis



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Not to confuse the terms refugee, migrant and asylum seeker, respondents were given the following definitions¹:

Refugee - someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (1951 Refugee Convention).

Migrants - people who move by choice rather than to escape conflict or persecution, usually across an international border ("international migrants"), for instance to join family members already abroad, to search for a livelihood, or for a range of other purposes (UNHCR).

Asylum seekers - someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed (UNHCR).

The analysis of the results was conducted in software package SPSS Statistics, using parametric tests such as ANOVA for quantitative data and chi-square test (with Cramer's V as a test of strength of connection between variables) for qualitative data. All tests were made at a significance level of 95%.

¹ unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/02/UNHCR_Refugee_or_Migrant_EN.pdf



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Sample and sociodemographic variables

Gender	Male	34,4% (472)
	Female	64,4% (883)
	Other	1,2% (17)
Age	18 – 30	44,5% (611)
	31 – 40	21,6% (297)
	41 – 50	12,2% (167)
	51 – 60	10,3% (142)
	61+	11,3% (155)
Country of residence	Belgium	19,3% (265)
	Croatia	21,9% (301)
	Italy	18,7% (256)
	Poland	14,1% (193)
	Serbia	26% (357)
Size of current place of residence	Village or small town (less than 50 000 residents)	22,4% (308)
	Small city (50 – 200 000 residents)	18,7% (256)
	Medium-sized city (200 – 500 000 residents)	13,9% (191)
	Metropolitan area (500 000 – 1 500 000 residents)	19,3% (265)
	Large metropolitan area (more than 1 500 000 residents)	25,7% (352)
Level of education	No education	0,4% (5)
	Elementary school	2,9% (40)
	High school	32,1% (441)
	College	58,2% (799)
	PhD	6,3% (87)
Employment status	I work full time	45,6% (626)
	I am in flexible work arrangements (project engagements, part-time, seasonal work, freelancing, etc.)	14,6% (200)
	I'm currently in school/university	19,6% (269)
	I am unemployed	9,2% (126)
	I am retired	11% (151)
Relationship status	Married	31,1% (427)
	Civil/life partnership	11,2% (154)
	In a relationship	21,6% (296)
	Single	36,1% (495)
Children	Yes	37,7% (517)
	No	62,3% (855)
Religious beliefs	I am a firm believer	18% (247)
	I am religious/spiritual	28,6% (392)
	I am not religious	24,1% (330)
	I am a firm atheist	15% (206)
	I am agnostic (undecided, unsure)	14,4% (197)
Standard of living compared to others	Much higher than average	12,5% (171)
	Somewhat higher than average	30,3% (416)
	Comparable to the average	34,2% (469)
	Somewhat lower than average	11,4% (157)
	Much lower than average	4,5% (62)
	I don't know, I don't want to answer	7,1% (97)
Volunteering experience	Volunteered in the past 12 months	63,6% (873)
	Did not volunteer in the past 12 months	36,4% (499)

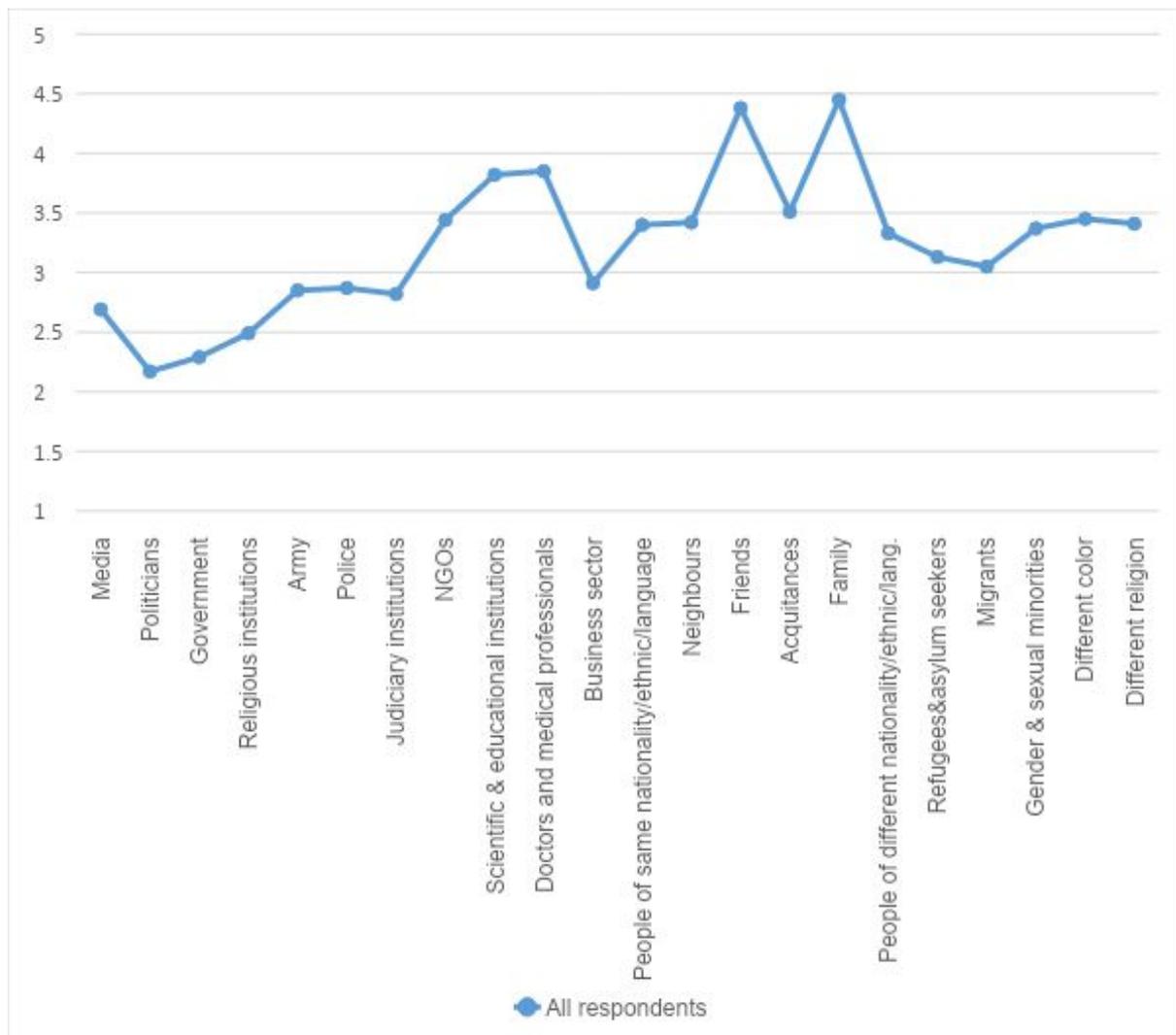


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Total respondents | 100% (1372)

Trust in others and institutions

Trust in others and institutions is an important scale in social research, as it says a lot about the social capital of the country. The trust also affects people's willingness to volunteer, and in particular affects their willingness to accept foreigners in their own community (important for example in volunteering with refugees).



The graph above shows the average scores for all respondents on a trust scale (1 marks complete distrust and 5 complete trust). Respondents exhibit low levels of trust towards media, religious and public institutions. The highest levels of trust they exhibit towards their



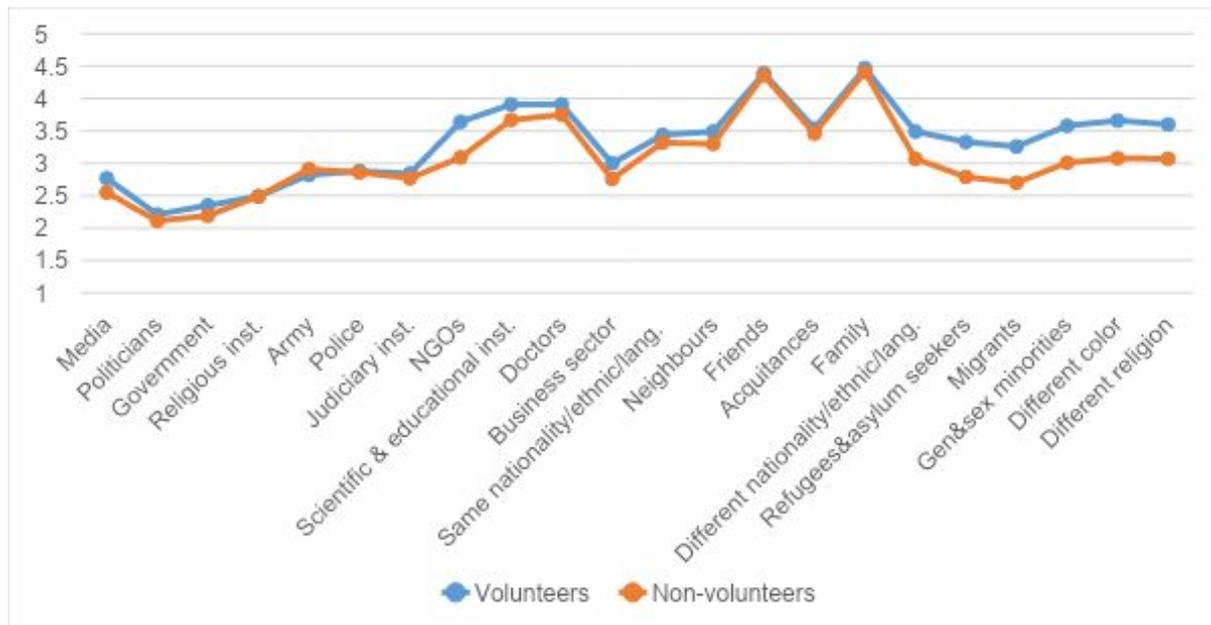
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friends and family, scientific and educational institutions, doctors and other medical professionals.

Trust and volunteering experience



Statistically significant differences, as seen in the above graph of average scores, were found in trust towards NGOs, members of different nationality, ethnic or language groups, refugees and asylum seekers, migrants, gender and sexual minorities, and towards people of different colour and different religion. Volunteers exhibit slightly more trust towards the above mentioned groups and institutions than non-volunteers, most likely because compared to non-volunteers, they came into more contact with these organizations and groups during their time volunteering.

Attitudes on volunteering in general

Attitudes on volunteering were measured with the following statements:

1. Volunteering is a good way of making friends.
2. Volunteers can help resolve local community issues.
3. Volunteering can help a volunteer solve their personal problems.
4. Volunteers are often used as free labour.
5. Volunteering is a good way to acquire new skills.

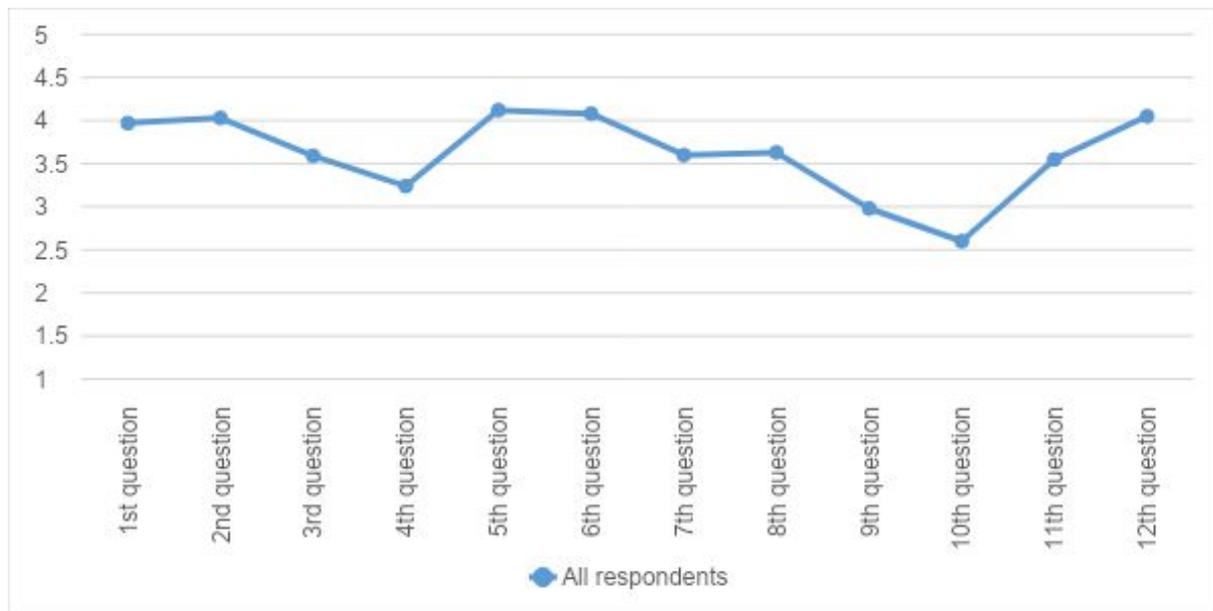


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6. Volunteering is a good way to spend free time.
7. Volunteering can be useful in finding employment.
8. Volunteering is not recognised enough in the society.
9. Volunteers are usually individuals with a lot of free time.
10. Volunteers are mostly individuals who are well off financially.
11. Volunteers are happier with themselves than people who do not volunteer.
12. Volunteering creates an atmosphere of trust and solidarity in the community.

The graph below shows average scores on these statements for all respondents (1 marks complete disagreement and 5 marks complete agreement with the statements). As seen in the graph, respondents show a really positive attitude on volunteering in general (marks above 3.5).



It was found that there were no statistically significant differences between respondents of different gender, religious beliefs or sizes of place of residence.

Attitudes on volunteering and age

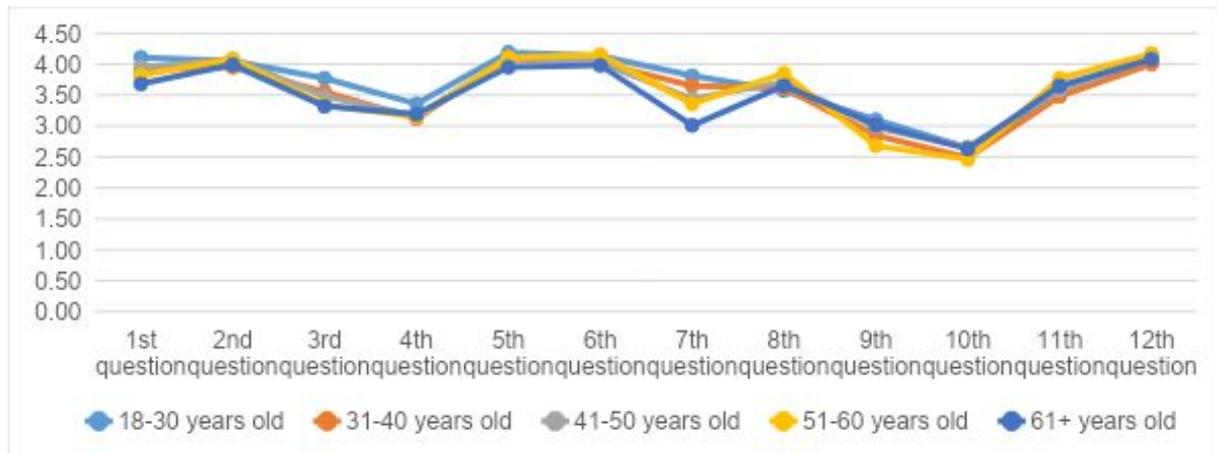
When it comes to age, we found statistically significant differences in two statements:

3. Volunteering can help a volunteer solve their personal problems.
7. Volunteering can be useful in finding employment.



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Older respondents show less agreement with the latter compared to younger respondents, as seen in the graph below.



Attitudes on volunteering and volunteering

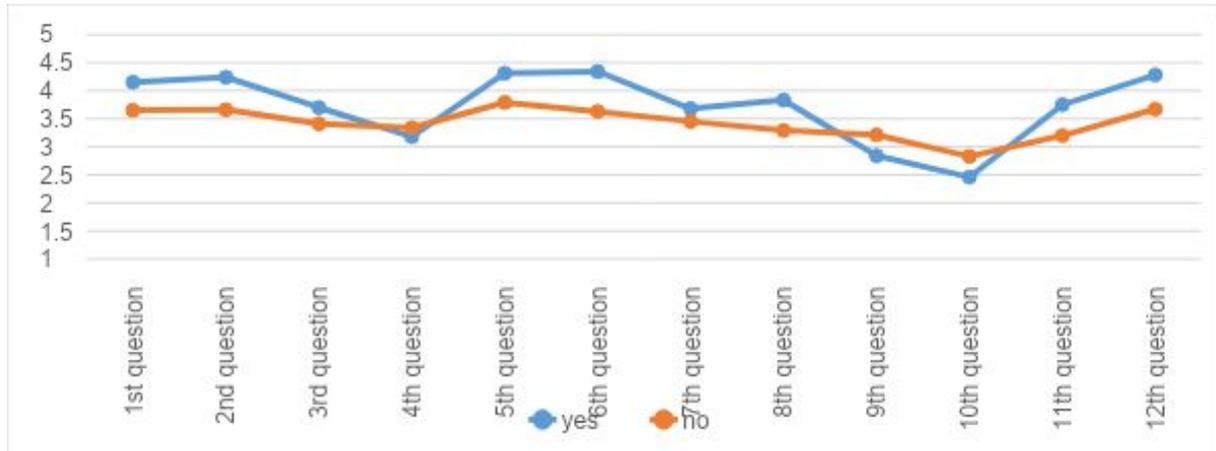
Statistically significant differences were found in the following eight statements, and volunteers (as expected) showed more positive attitude towards volunteering:

1. Volunteering is a good way of making friends.
2. Volunteers can help resolve local community issues.
5. Volunteering is a good way to acquire new skills.
6. Volunteering is a good way to spend free time.
8. Volunteering is not recognised enough in the society.
10. Volunteers are mostly individuals who are well off financially.
11. Volunteers are happier with themselves than people who do not volunteer.
12. Volunteering creates an atmosphere of trust and solidarity in the community.

Average scores for all questions are shown in the graph below.

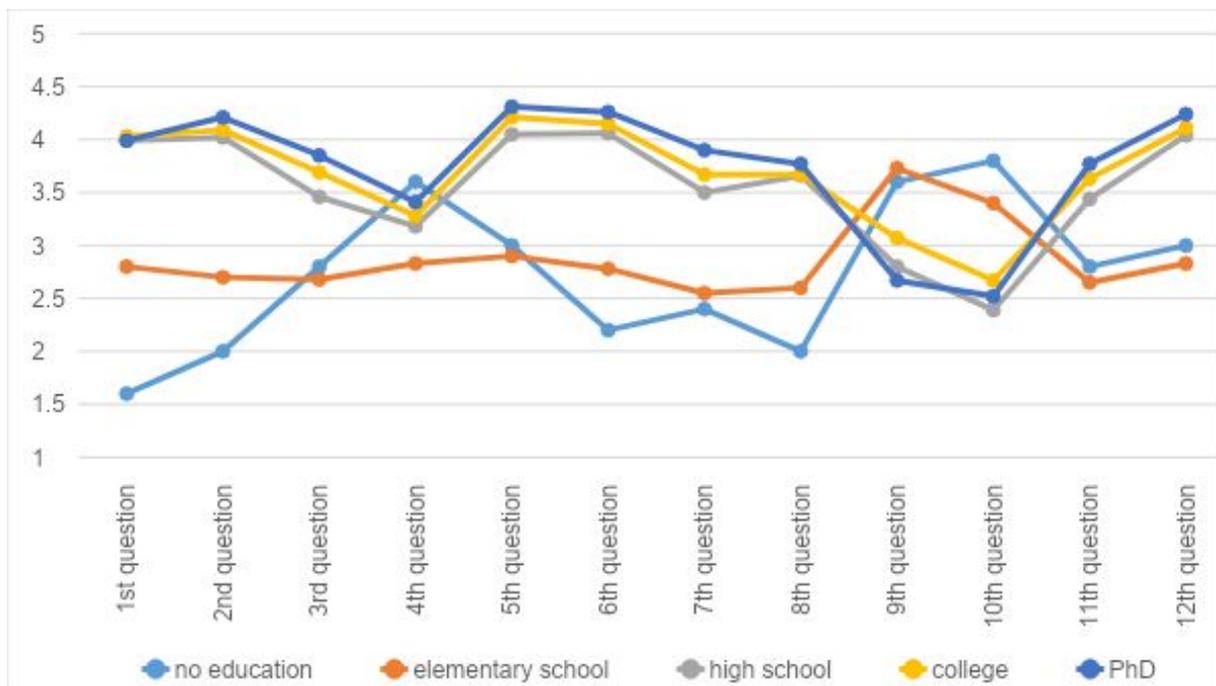


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Attitudes on volunteering and education

Statistically significant differences were found in all statements. Respondents with more education show more positive attitude towards volunteering, probably because during their schooling they were more encouraged to volunteer and were made more aware of the importance of contributing to the community through volunteering and humanitarian work. Average scores on the questions are shown below.



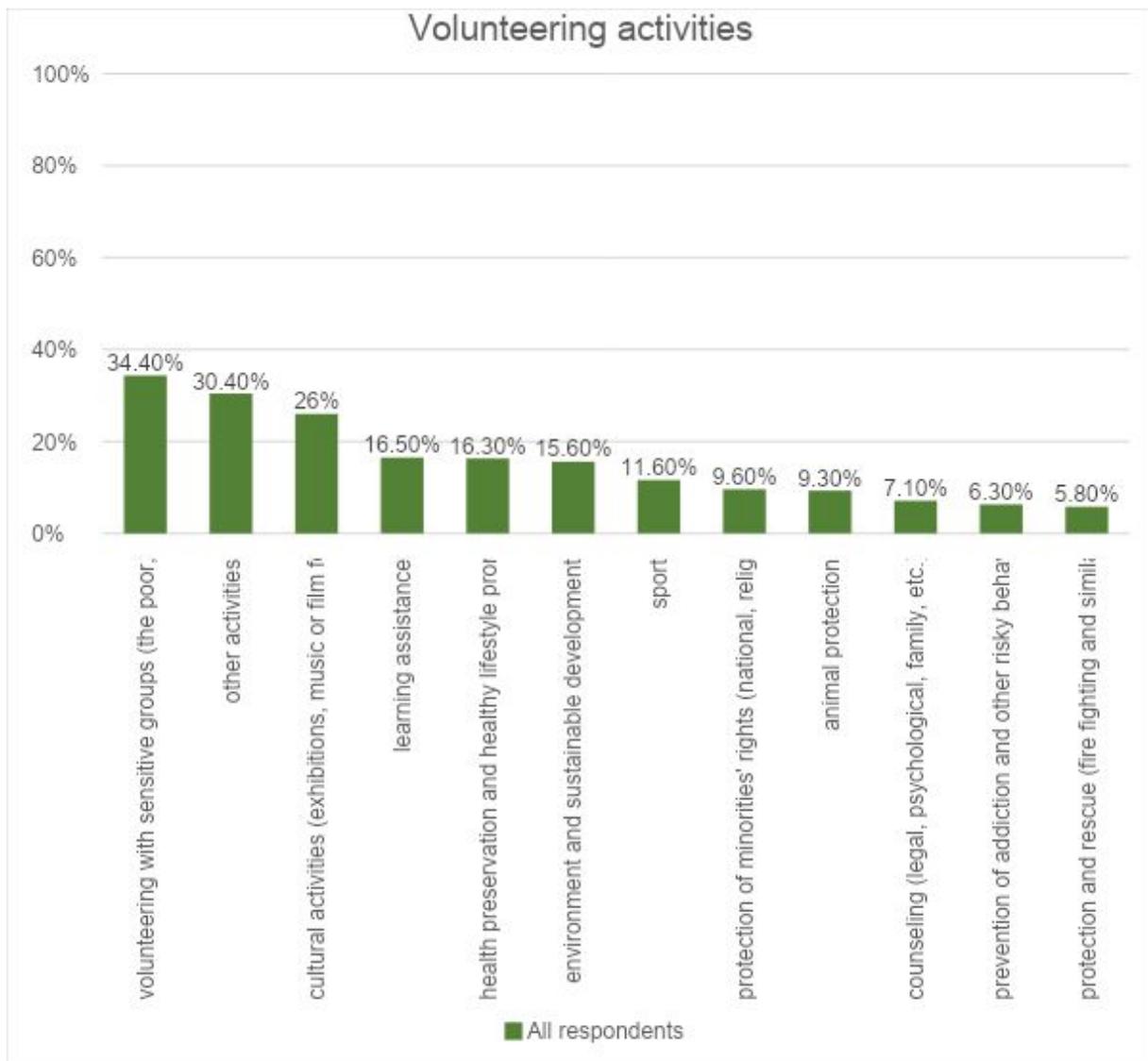
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Volunteering activities

The most common volunteering activities offered were: volunteering with sensitive groups, cultural activities, learning assistance, health preservation and healthy lifestyle promotion.

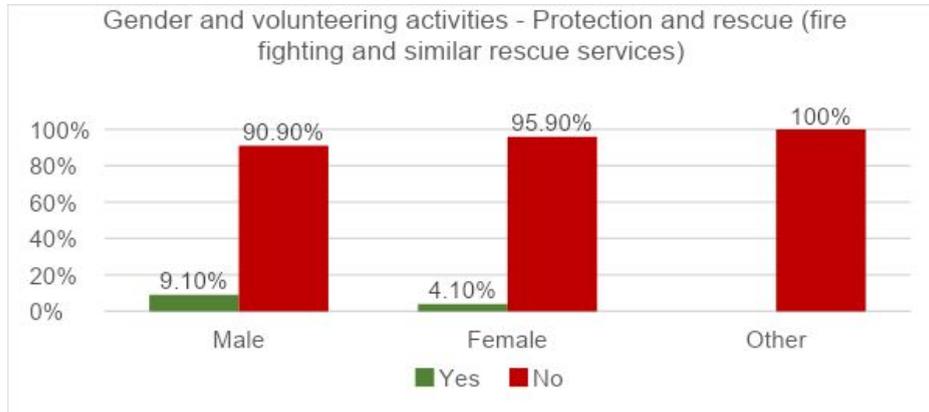
More volunteering activities and the percentage of volunteers in the sample that volunteered in those activities are shown in the graph below.



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Volunteering activities and gender

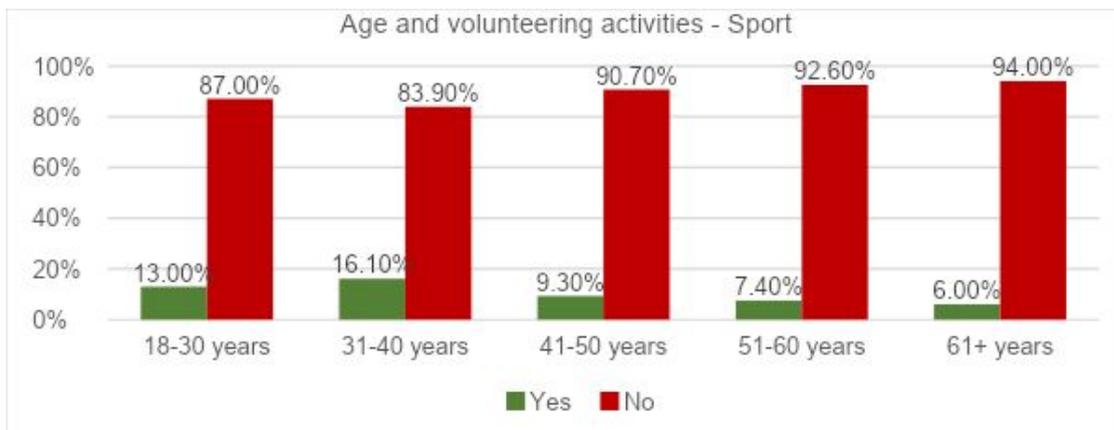
The statistically significant differences between genders were found only when it comes to protection and rescue activities, in which males volunteer more than others (Cramer's $V = 0,11$ – moderate association between variables).



Volunteering activities and age

The statistically significant differences between different age groups were found in several different volunteering activities. Younger respondents (up to 40 years old) tend to volunteer more in sports, environment and sustainable development activities, animal protection while respondents 40 years and older tend to volunteer more with sensitive groups. When it comes to volunteering in health preservation and healthy lifestyle promotion, in those activities the most common volunteer age groups are 51-60 and 31-40 years old.

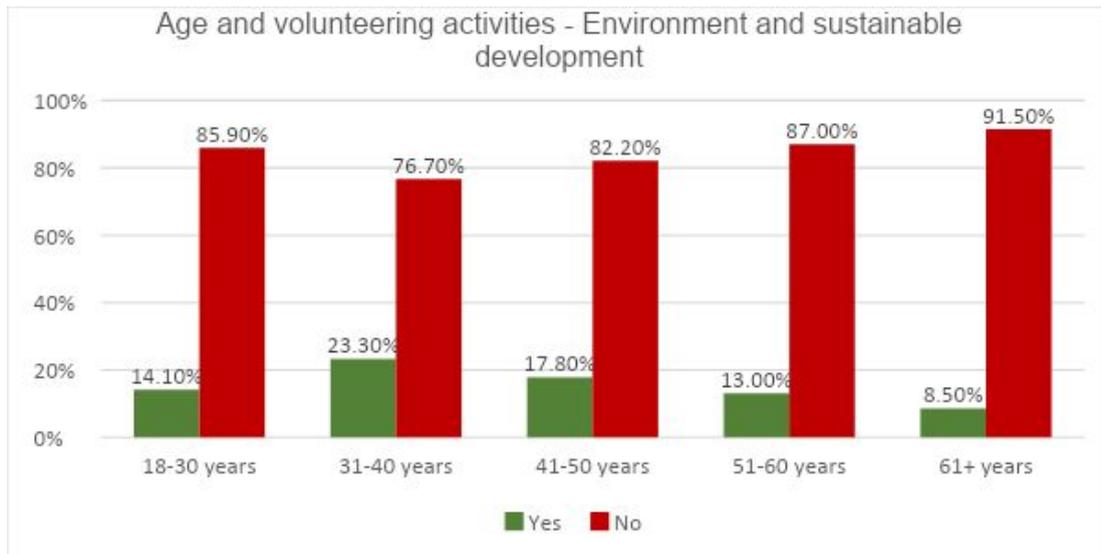
Graphs are shown below.



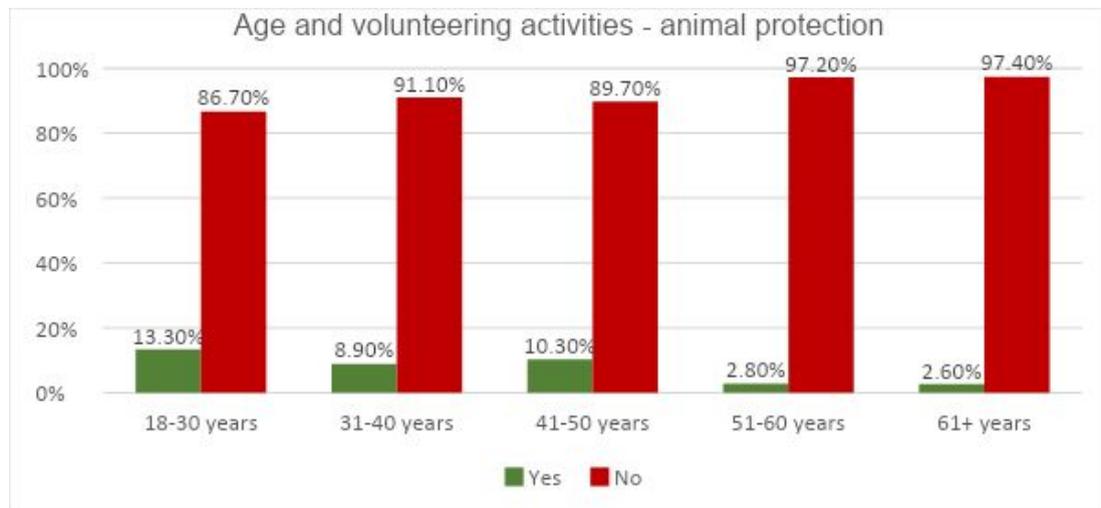
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Cramer's V = 0,11 – moderate association between variables



Cramer's V = 0,127 – moderate to strong association between variables

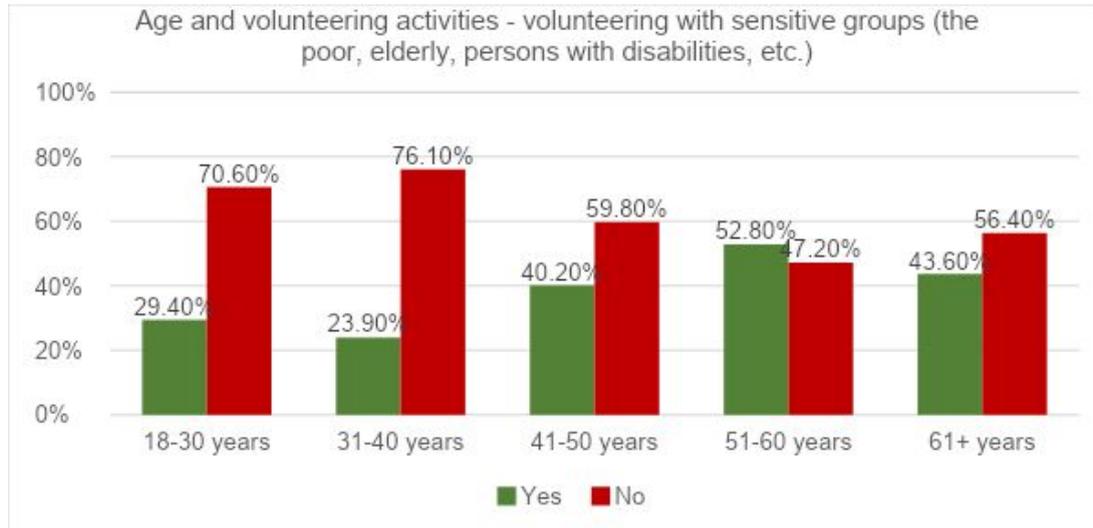


Cramer's V= 0,147 – strong association between variables

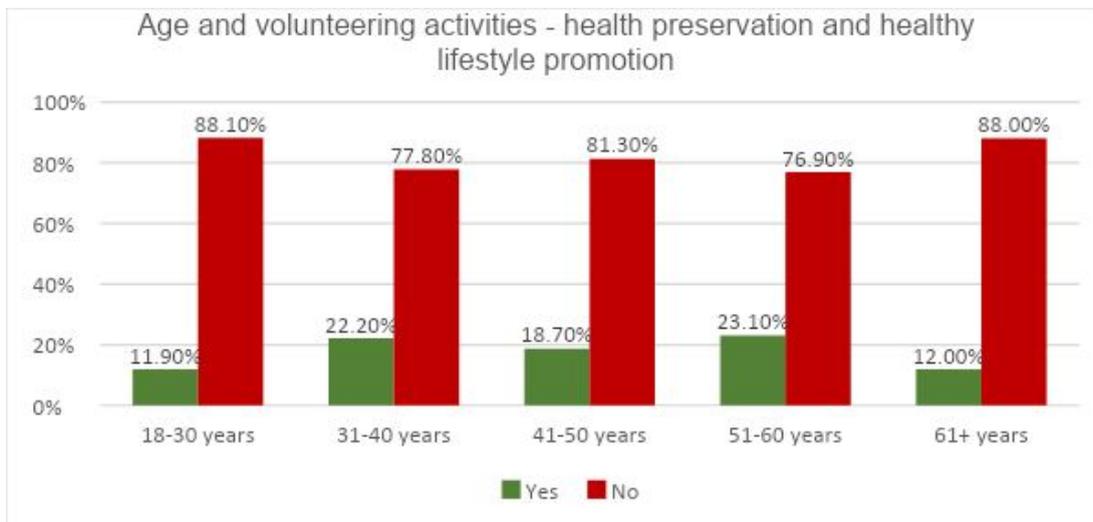


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Cramer's V= 0,2 – strong to very strong association between variables



Cramer's V= 0,133 – moderate to strong association between variables



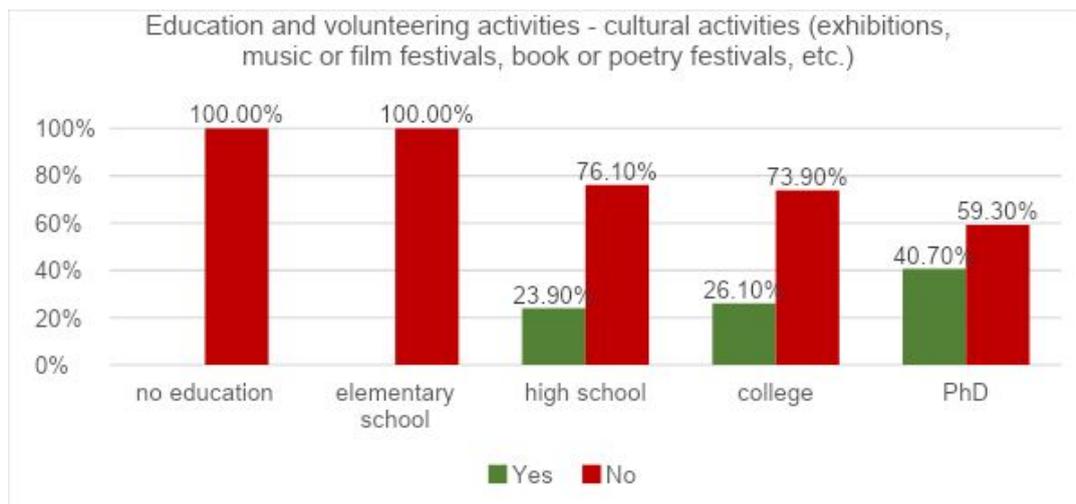
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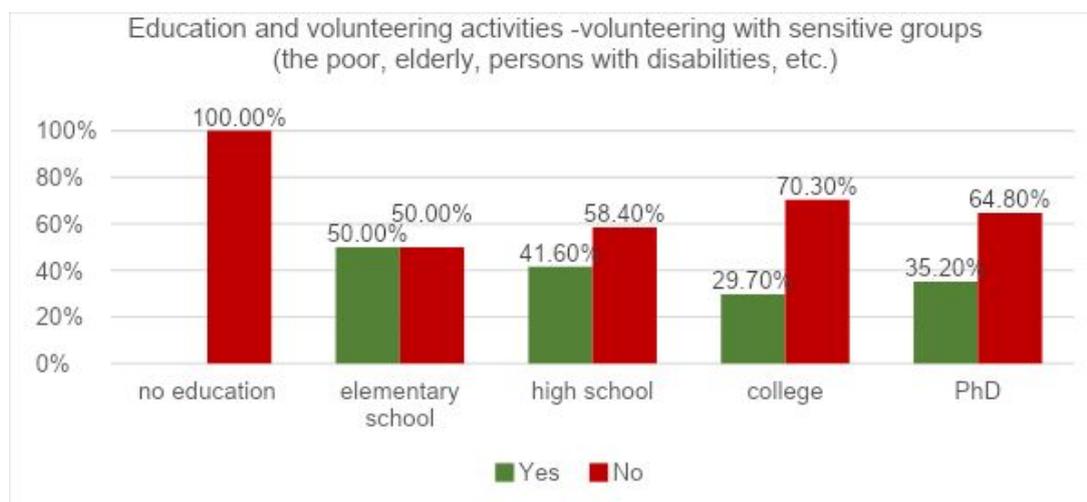
Volunteering activities and education

When it comes to volunteering activities and education, respondents with higher education tend to volunteer more in cultural activities (exhibitions, music or film festivals, book or poetry festivals, etc.), while those with lower education tend to volunteer more with sensitive groups.

Graphs with percentages of those who volunteered and those who did not volunteer in those activities are shown below.



Cramer's V = 0,1 – moderate association between variables



Cramer's V = 0,124 – moderate to strong association between variables



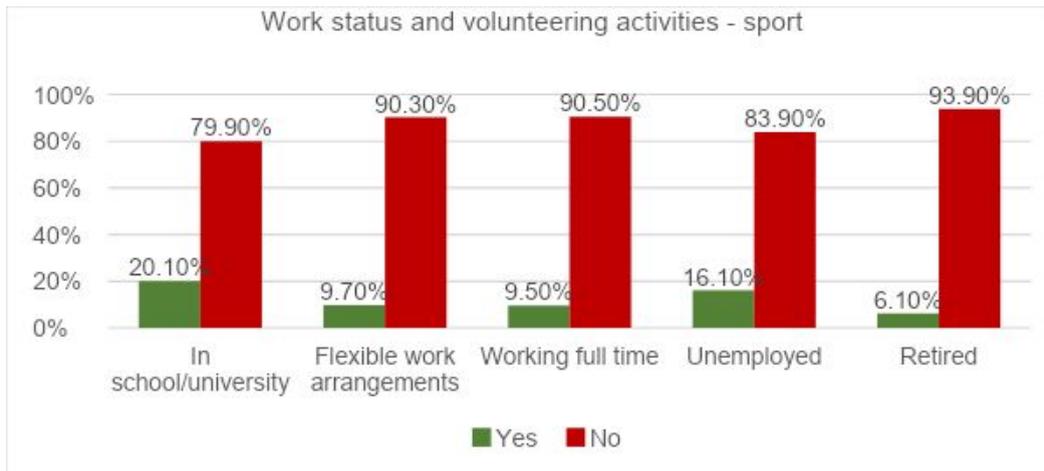
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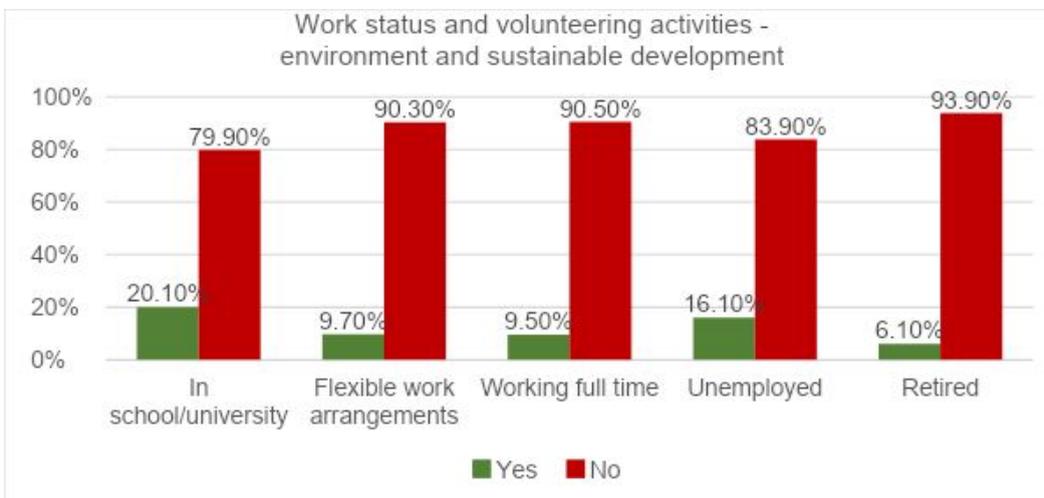
Volunteering activities and work status

When it comes to volunteering activities and work status of respondents, there are statistically significant differences for several activities. For example, those in school/university and those unemployed tend to volunteer more in sports, activities connected to environment and sustainable development and in animal protection. Retired respondents volunteer with sensitive groups the most, followed by those who are unemployed, and in school/university.

Graphs with differences among respondents with different work statuses are shown below.



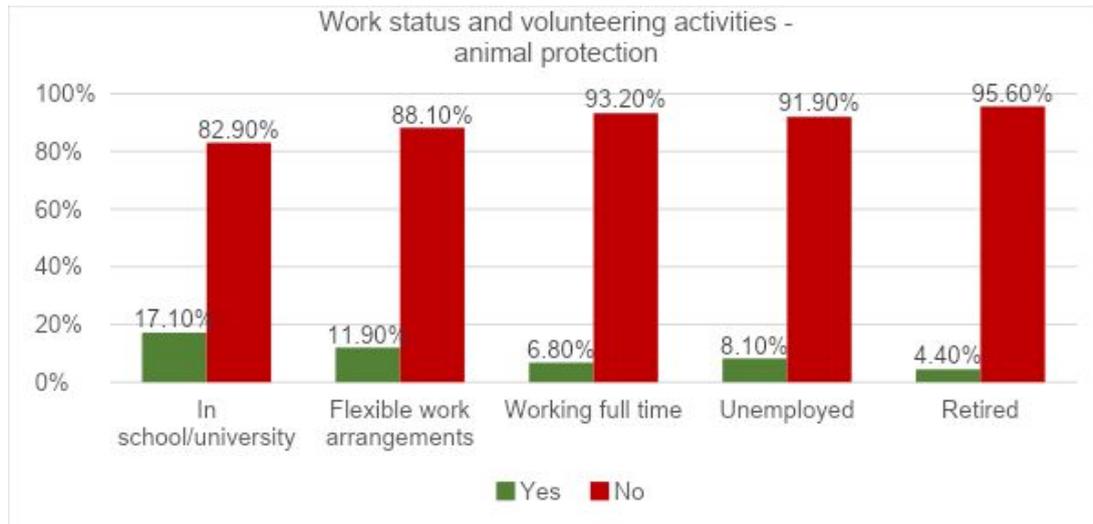
Cramer's V= 0,145 –strong association between variables



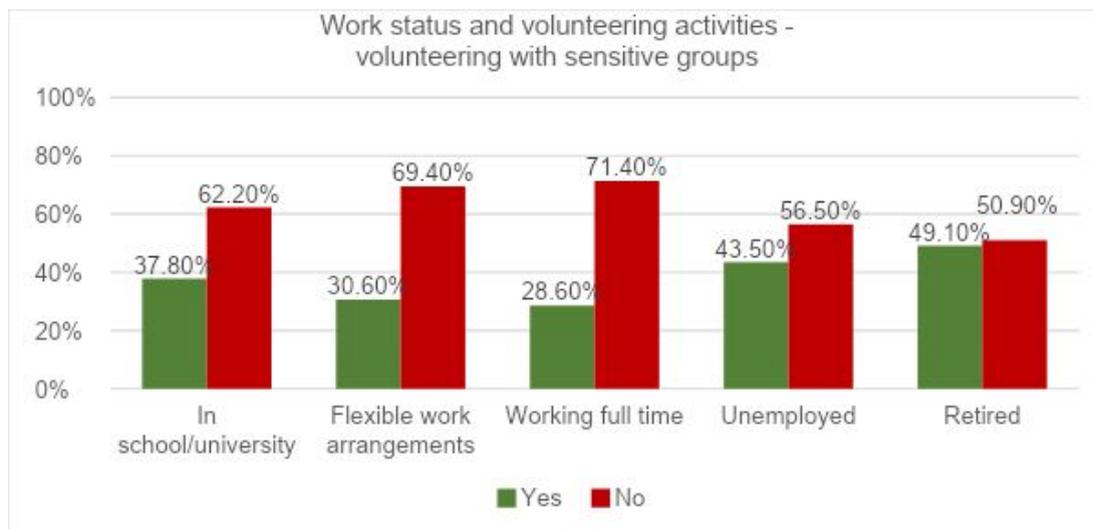
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Cramer's V= 0,12 – moderate association between variables



Cramer's V = 0,149 – strong association between variables



Cramer's V = 0,155 – strong association between variables



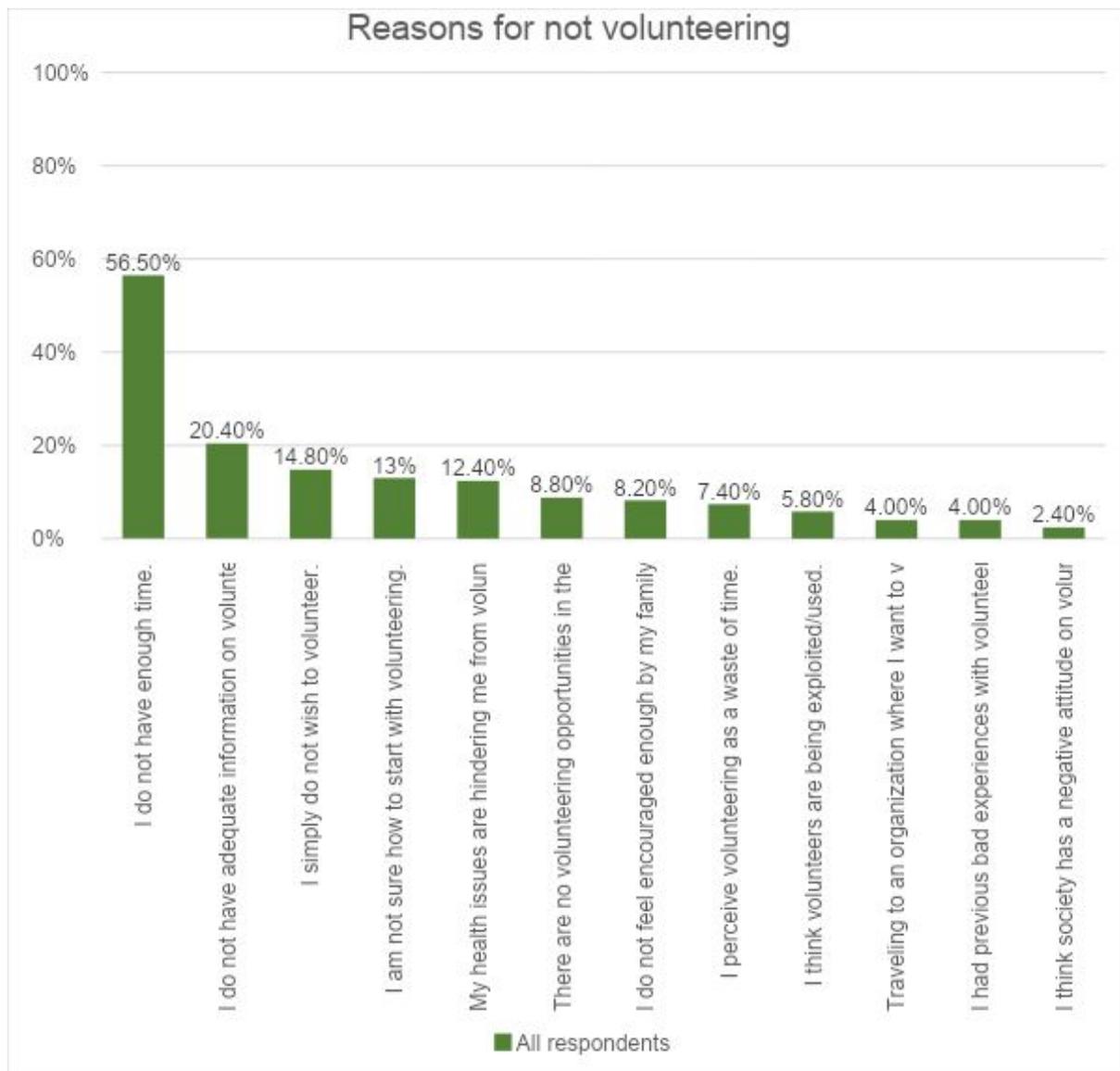
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Reasons for not volunteering

As the most common reasons for not volunteering, respondents cite not having enough time for volunteering and not having adequate information on volunteering opportunities.

The percentage of respondents who cite different reasons for not volunteering are shown below.

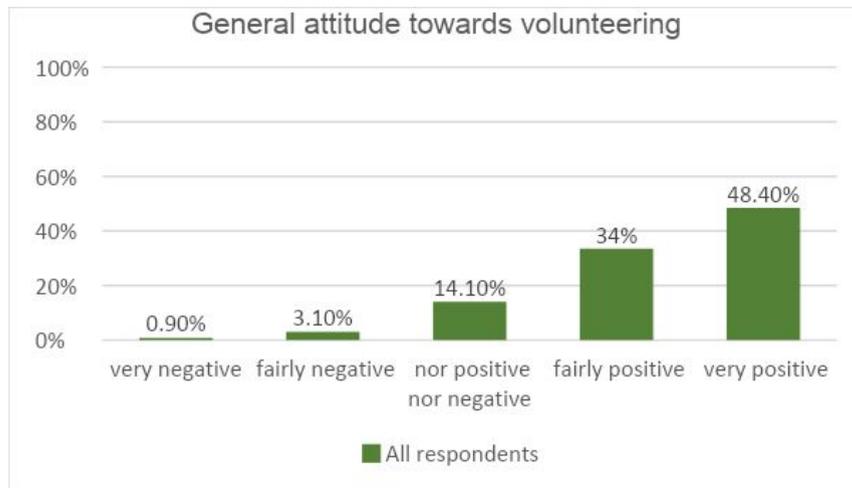


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General attitude towards volunteering

When it comes to the general attitude towards volunteering, around 80% of respondents perceive volunteering as positive. We can compare it with the percentage of those who volunteered in the past 12 months (63,6% of respondents volunteered in the past 12 months so additionally 18,8% of all respondents find volunteering positive).

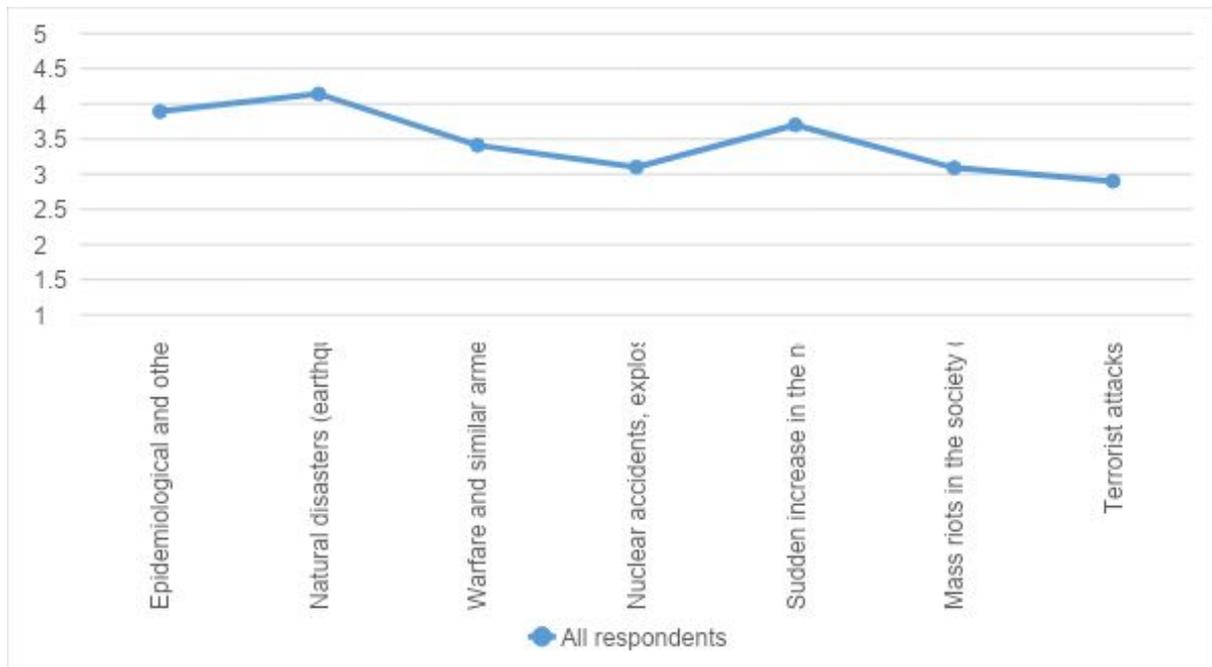


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Agreement with volunteer engagement in crisis

Respondents were presented with various types of crises: epidemiological and other situations that pose a threat of spread of contagious diseases (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic); natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, fires, etc.); warfare and similar armed conflicts; nuclear accidents, explosions and other crises with the release of hazardous substances into the atmosphere; sudden increase in the needs of migrants and refugees; mass riots in the society (conflicts with the government, between different ethnic or other groups) and terrorist attacks. Generally, respondents agree that volunteer engagement is necessary (marks are around 3 or higher) in every crisis.

Average scores of all respondents are shown below.



There was found to be no differences between respondents based on gender, age or religious beliefs.

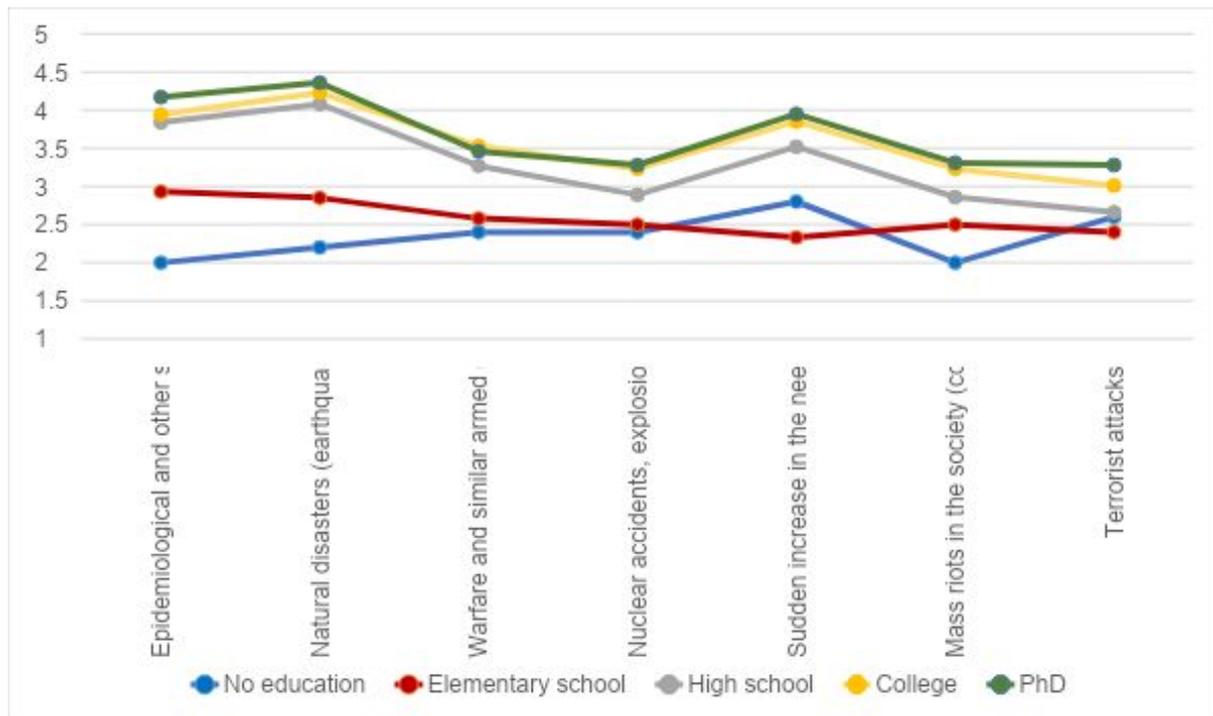


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Agreement with volunteer engagement in crisis and education level

When it comes to differences between respondents based on their education level, we found that for each crisis, differences between respondents were statistically significant. The higher the education, the more the respondent agrees with volunteer engagement in crisis situations. The largest difference between respondents was for volunteering during epidemiological crises, and the smallest difference was for volunteering in case of terrorist attacks.

Average scores of all respondents are shown in the graph below.

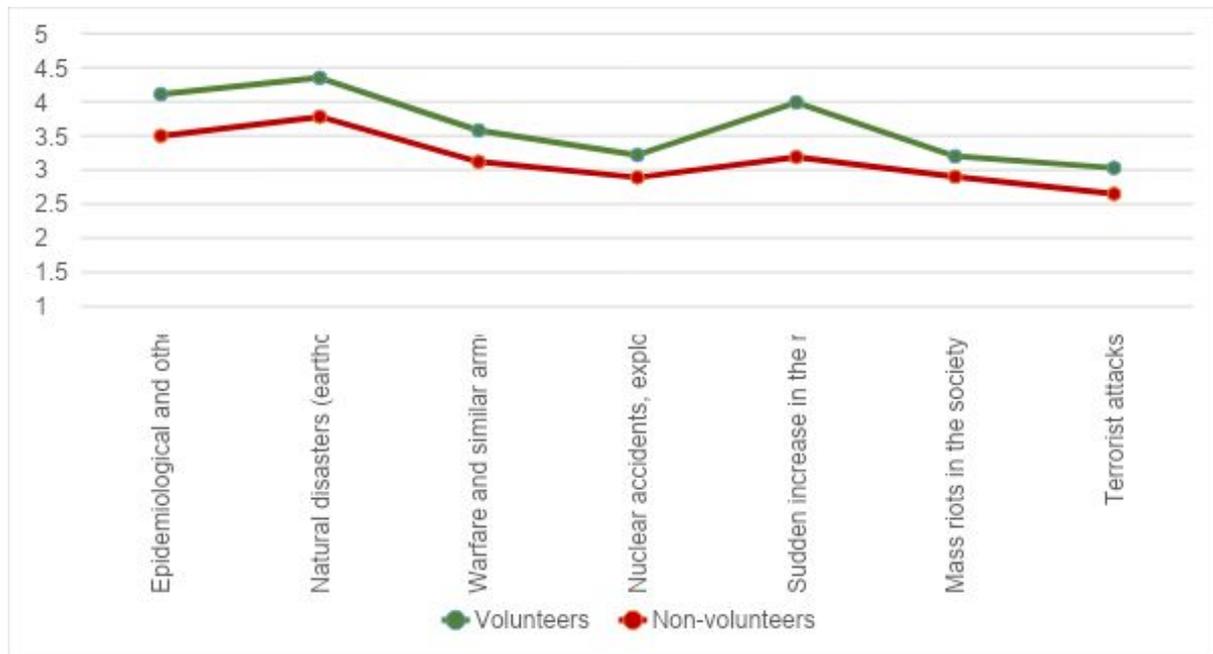


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Agreement with volunteer engagement in crisis and volunteering in the past 12 months

The difference between volunteers and non-volunteers is statistically significant for all types of crises (volunteers agree with volunteer involvement more than non-volunteers), and the largest difference between the two groups is when it comes to volunteering with migrants and refugees.



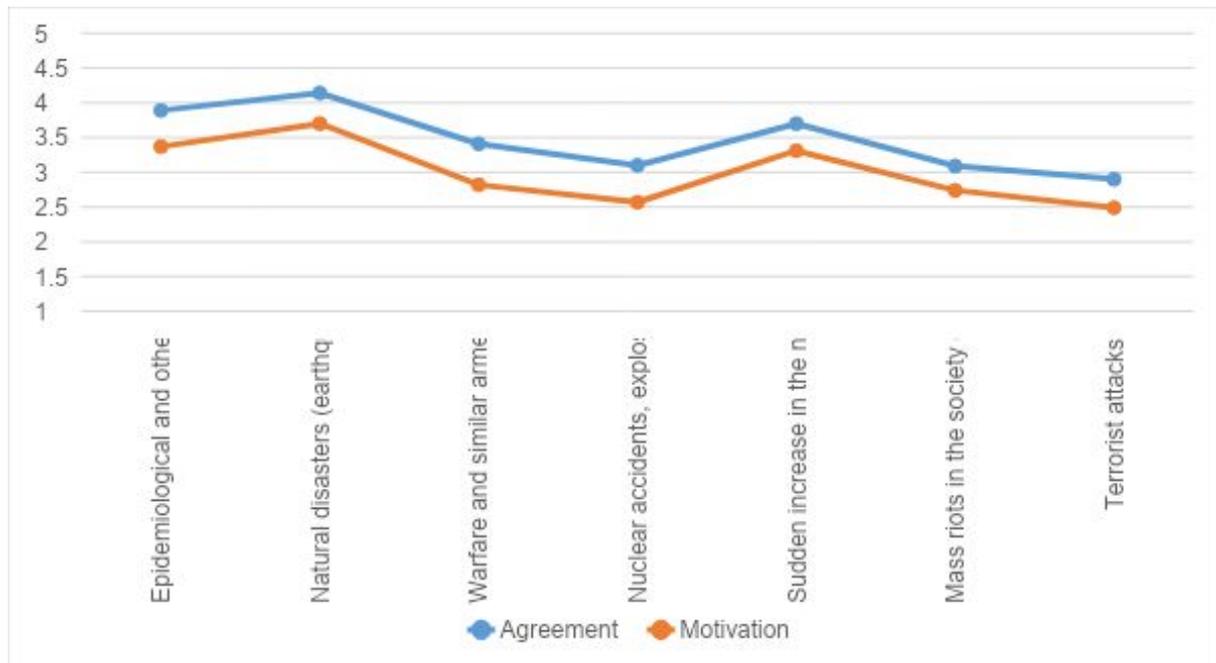
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Motivation to volunteer in crisis

Respondents exhibit slightly lower motivation to volunteer in crises than agreement that volunteer engagement is necessary. We found no differences between respondents based on gender, age or religion.

Average scores of all respondents in motivation and agreement with volunteer engagement are shown in the graph below.



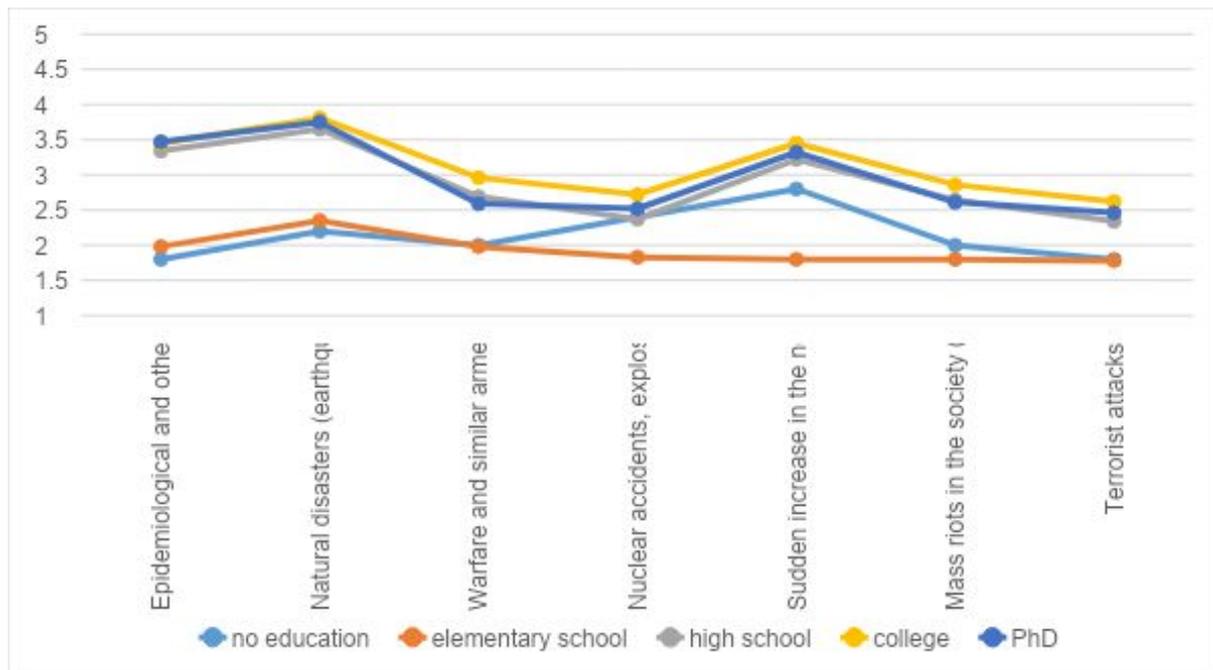
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Motivation to volunteer in crisis and education level

Differences between respondents are statistically significant for every crisis. Respondents with higher education express higher motivation to volunteer in crises than those with lower education.

Average scores among respondents with different education levels are shown in a graph below.



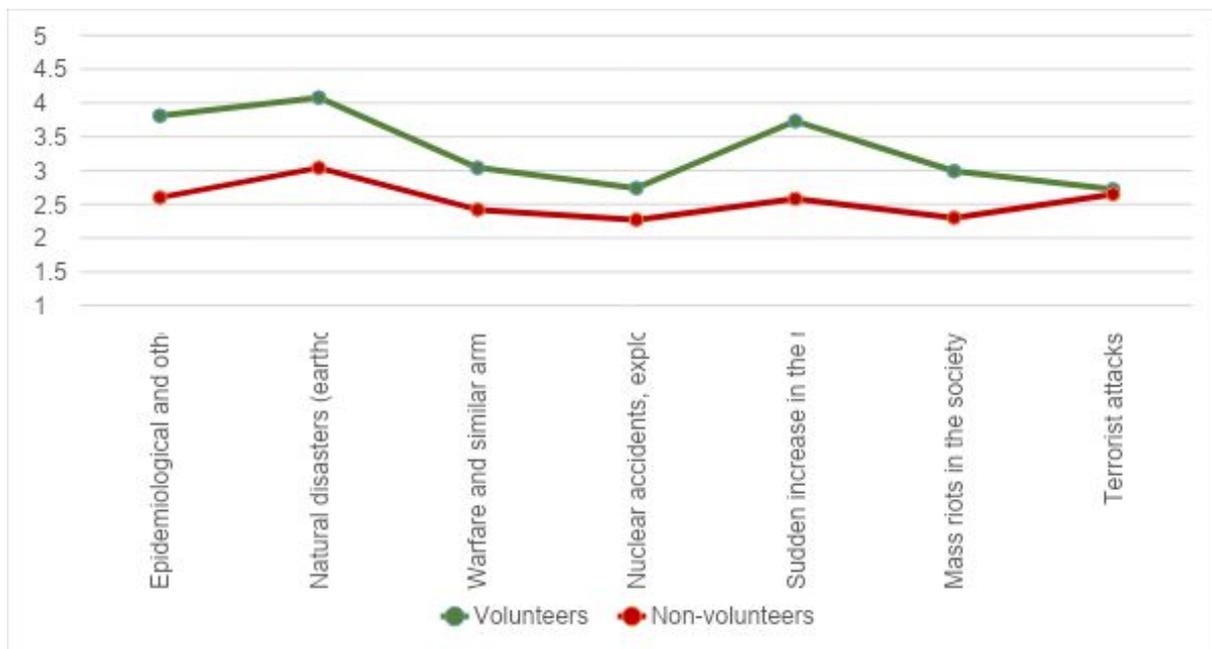
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Motivation to volunteer in crisis and volunteering in the past 12 months

The difference between volunteers and non-volunteers is statistically significant for all types of crises (volunteers have higher motivation than non-volunteers), and the largest difference between the two groups is when it comes to volunteering with migrants and refugees.

The average scores for each group are shown in a graph below.



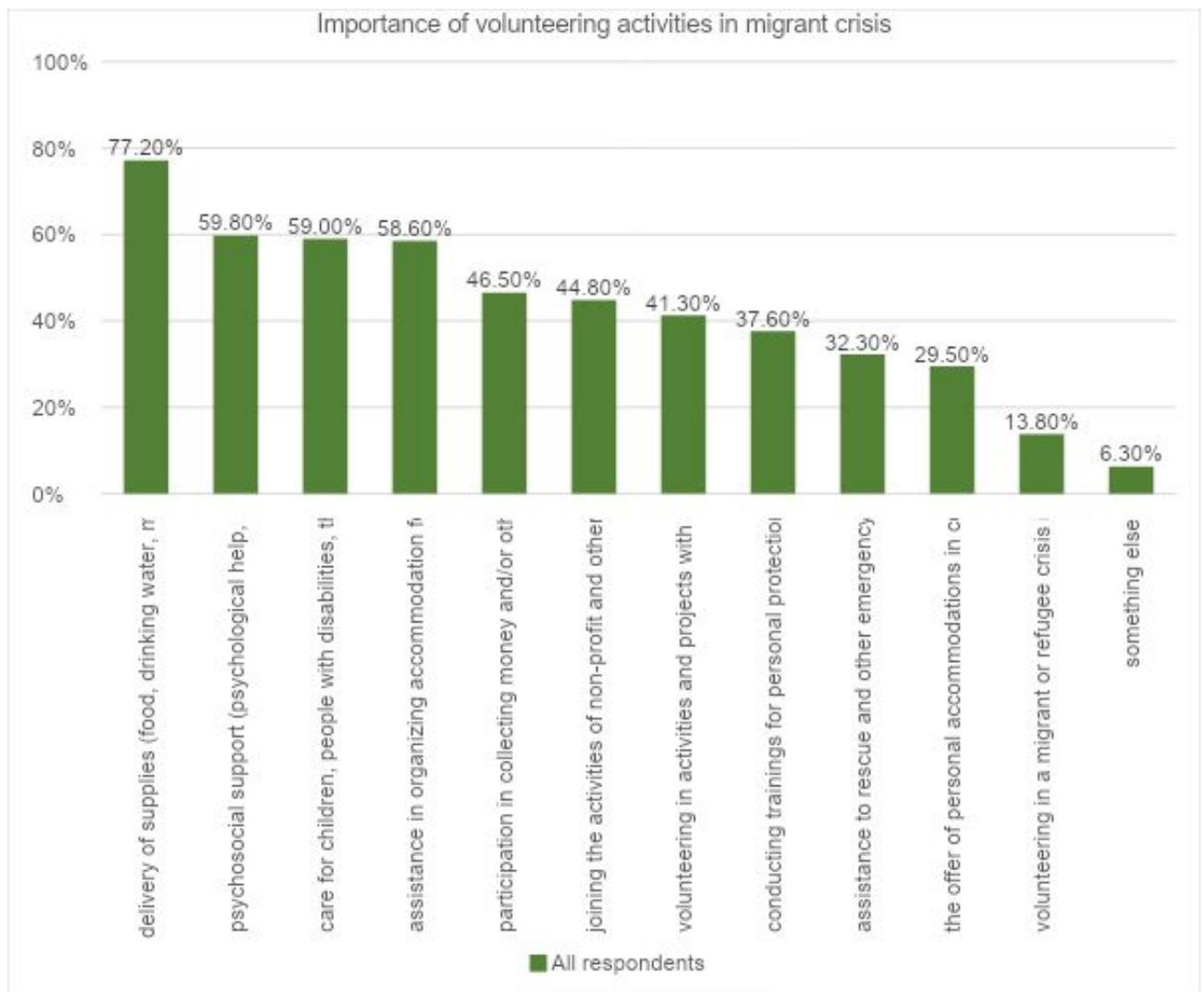
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Importance of volunteering activities in migrant crisis

When it comes to the importance of volunteering activities in a migrant crisis, respondents perceive delivery of supplies as the most important activity. Psychosocial support and care for children, people with disabilities, the elderly and the infirm follow.

Volunteering activities ordered by their perceived importance in a migrant crisis by respondents are shown in a graph below.

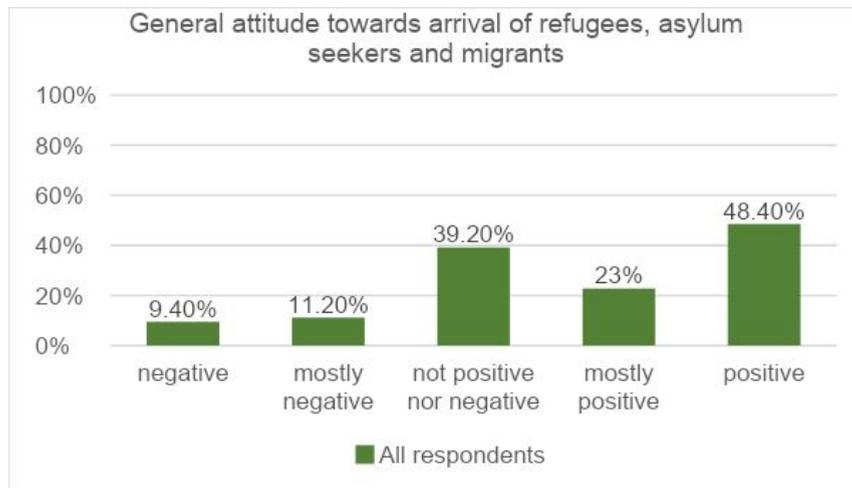


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View on the arrival of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from Asia and Africa

Around 70% of respondents find the arrival of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from Asia and Africa (mainly Middle East) positive and around 20% of respondents find it negative. Results are shown in a graph below.



There was found to be no statistically significant differences between respondents of different gender or age.

Education proved to be significant - around 50% of respondents with higher education (with college or PhD degree) have a positive attitude towards their arrival, whereas only 13% of those with no education or only elementary school and 30% of those with completed high school find it positive. Cramer's V is 0,174, which indicates a strong connection between variables.

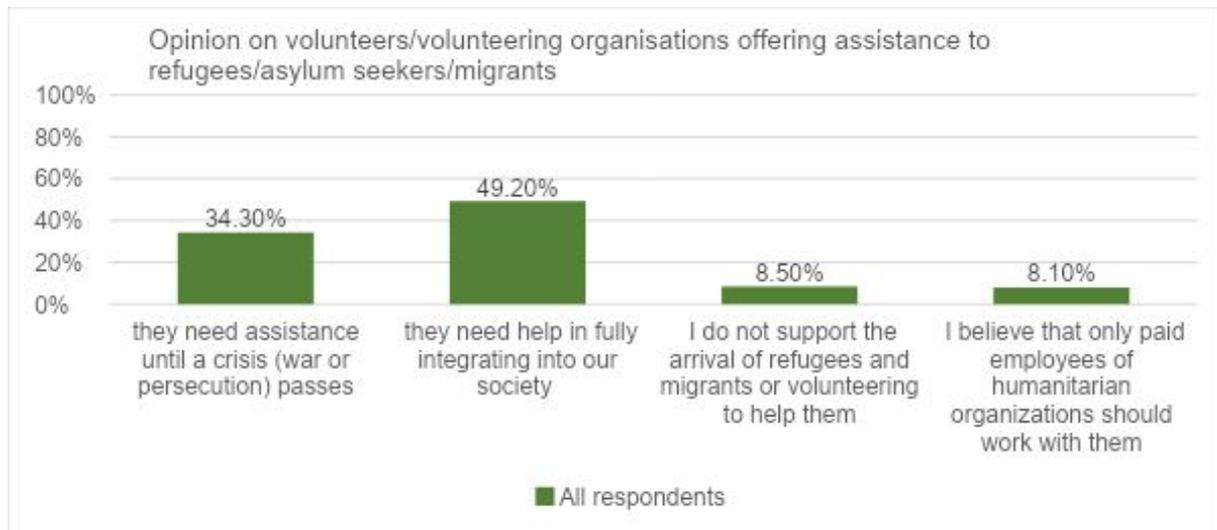
Religious beliefs were also found to be significant - around 30% of firm believers, 24% spiritual/religious, 18% of non-religious and 15% of atheists and 10% of agnostics find their arrival to be negative or mostly negative. Cramer's V is 0,125, which indicates moderate to strong connection between variables. The results could be connected with the differing religion and customs of migrants/refugees from the Middle East compared to the dominant religions and customs that people share in Europe. Naturally, more religious individuals are more inclined to "protect" their beliefs and customs.



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Opinion on volunteers/volunteering organisations offering assistance to refugees/asylum seekers/migrants

Most respondents believe that refugees, migrants and asylum seekers need help or assistance from volunteers (around 80% of all respondents) and 49,2% believe they need help in fully integrating into society. Percentages are shown in a graph below.



No differences were found based on gender, age and place of residence.

Statistically significant differences were found based on education (Cramer's $V = 0,2$ - strong to very strong connection between variables) - only 5% of those with no education or with finished elementary school support full integration of refugees or migrants, 38% of those with high school, and around 55% of those with higher education (college or PhD).

Statistically significant differences were also found based on employment status - 34% of the unemployed group support full integration of migrants/refugees, compared to around 54% of the employed group (Cramer's $V = 0,13$ indicates moderate to strong connection between variables).

Statistically significant differences were also found based on religious beliefs - 63% of atheists and agnostics support full integration, compared to only 39% of believers/religious respondents (Cramer's $V = 0,14$ - moderate to strong connection between variables).

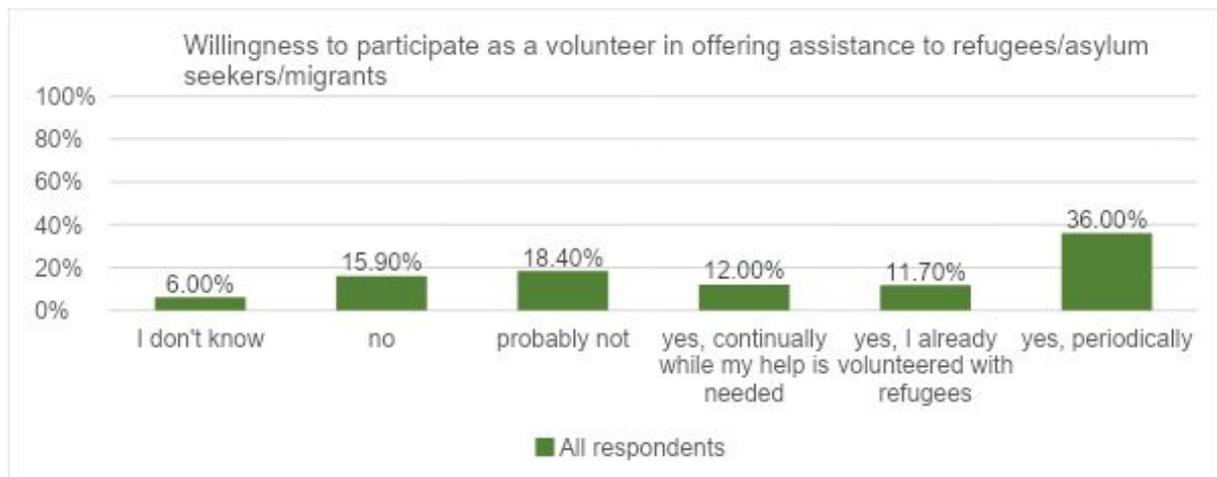


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Statistically significant differences were also found based on volunteering experience in the past 12 months - 60% of volunteers support full integration, compared to 30% of non-volunteers (Cramer's $V = 0,33$ - very strong connection between variables).

Willingness to participate as a volunteer in offering assistance to refugees/asylum seekers/migrants

Around 60% of respondents are willing to participate or have already participated as volunteers in offering assistance to refugees/asylum seekers/migrants. Around 34% of all respondents are not willing to participate in those activities.

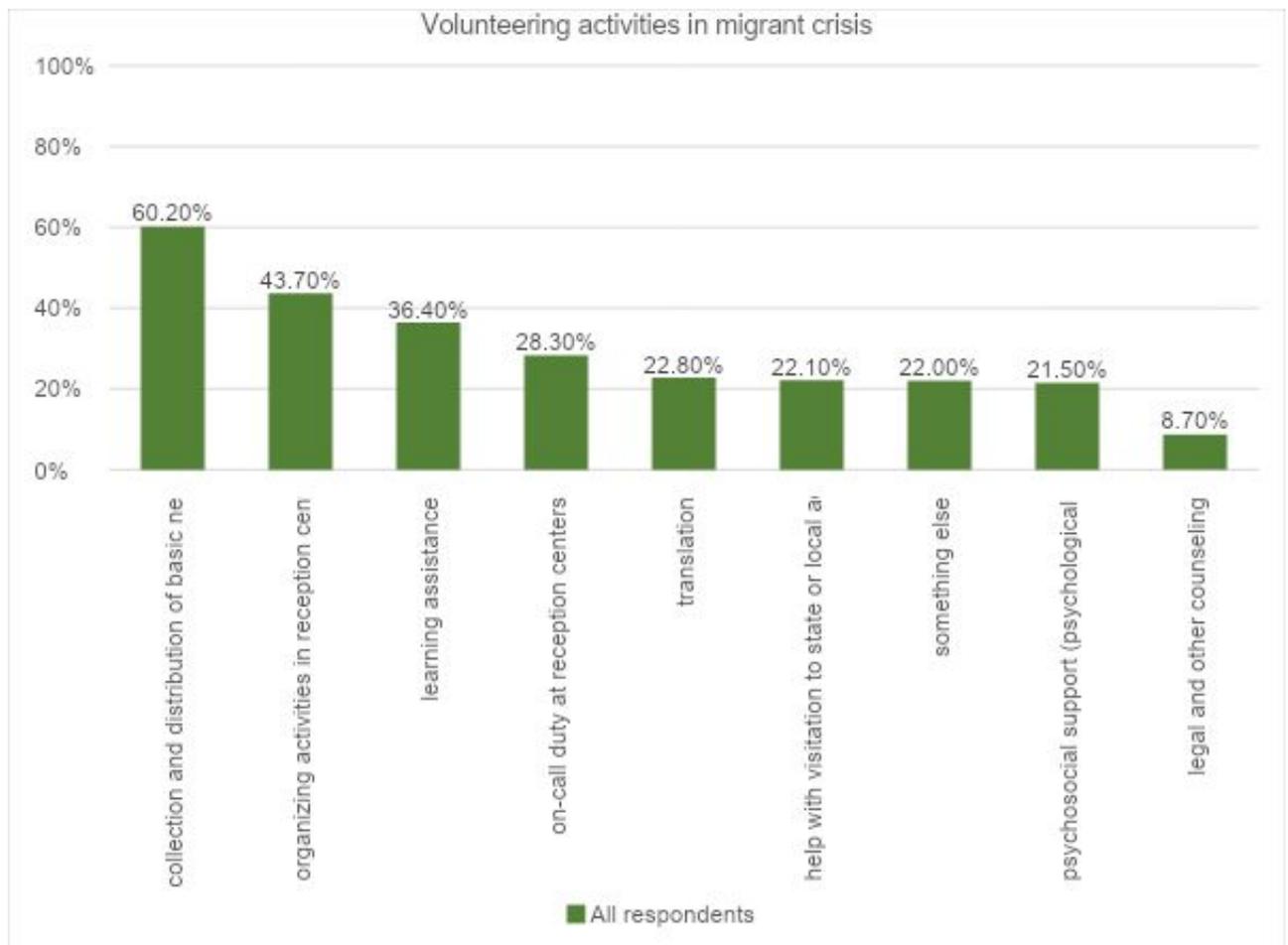


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Activities respondents would participate in or have already participated in

Most respondents who are willing to, or already have participated in volunteering activities are interested in collection and distribution of basic necessities.

The percentage of respondents interested in various volunteering activities in a migrant crisis are shown in a graph below.



Younger respondents (<40 years old) are more likely to participate in on-call duties at reception centres, as well with help with visitations to state or local administration institutions.

Respondents who live in smaller towns/cities and medium-sized cities are more likely (around 70%) to participate in activities of collection and distribution of basic necessities, compared with those in larger cities and metropolitan areas (around 47%) - Cramer's V = 0,25 - a very strong connection. They are also more likely to participate in help with





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visitations to state or local administration institutions than those in larger cities and in activities such as psychological support and organization of activities in reception centres.

Education also proved to be statistically significant - those with lower education and high school graduates are more likely to participate in distribution of basic necessities, whereas those with higher education are more willing to participate in activities such as translation, learning assistance, help with visitation to state or local administration institutions and legal counselling (Cramer's $V > 0,1$ signifies a moderate to strong connection between variables).

Generally speaking, those who are currently in school/universities show more willingness to participate in volunteering with refugees/asylum seekers/migrants than those who are employed (whether it was full time or part time).

When it comes to gender - female respondents and those with "other" gender labels are more likely to participate in learning activities (around 40%), compared to male respondents (26%). Cramer's V is 0,15, which indicates a strong connection between variables. Around 27% of female respondents and those with "other" gender labels are more likely to participate in offering psychological support (around 27%), compared to male respondents (16%). Cramer's V is 0,10, which indicates a moderate connection between variables.

There was found to be no differences based on religious beliefs.



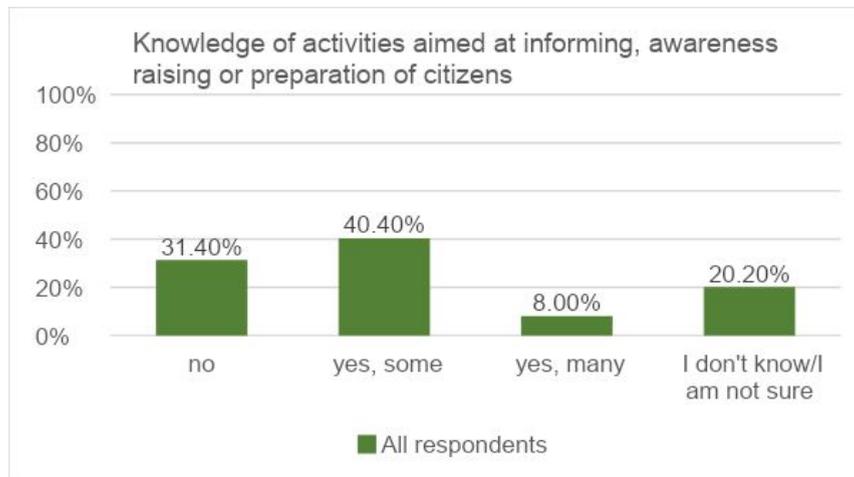
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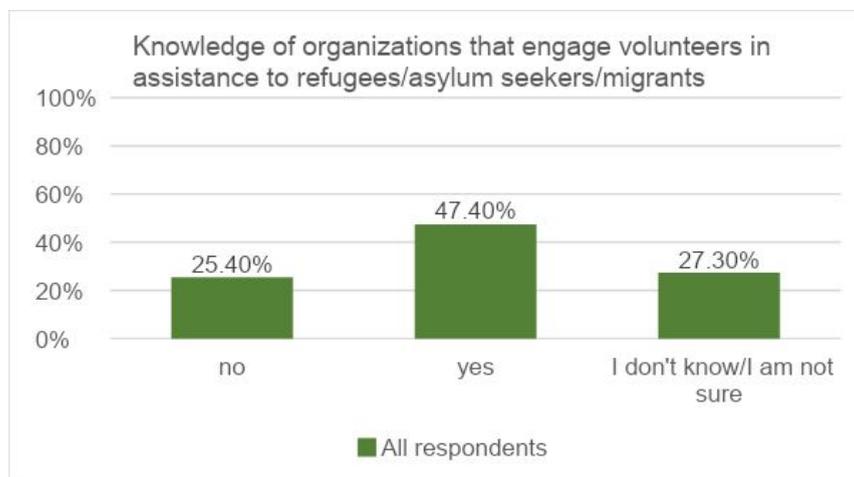
Knowledge of activities aimed at informing, awareness raising or preparation of citizens for arrival of migrants/refugees/asylum seekers

Around 50% of all respondents are aware of activities aimed at informing, awareness raising or preparation of citizens for arrival of migrants/refugees/asylum seekers. Percentages are shown in a graph below.



Knowledge of organizations that engage volunteers in assistance to refugees/asylum seekers/migrants

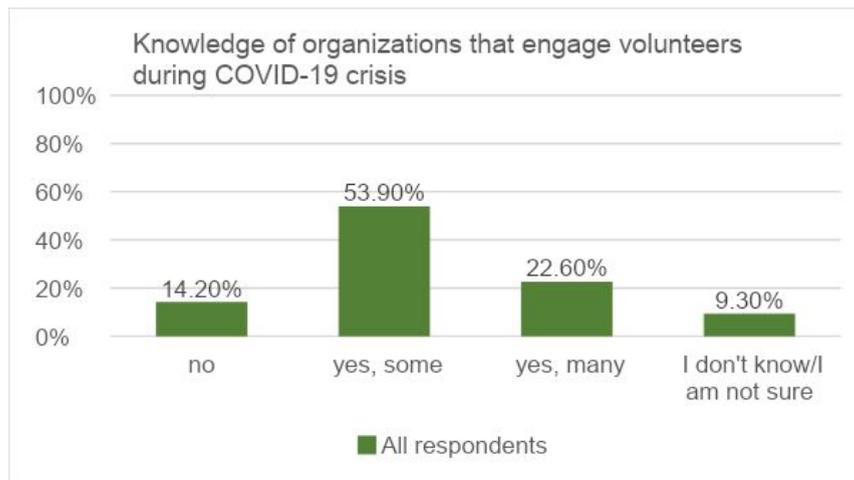
A majority of respondents have not heard of any organizations that engage volunteers in working with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, or were unsure/did not know. 47,4% of all respondents have heard of some organizations.



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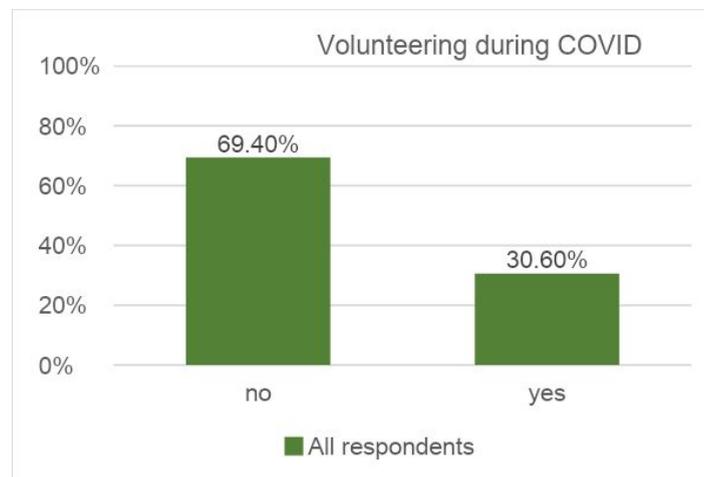
Knowledge of organizations that engage volunteers during COVID-19

Probably because the COVID-19 crisis is still current, and since it affected all citizens regardless of their language, ethnicity or religion, a majority of respondents have heard of organizations that engage volunteers during this crisis (around 76%). Percentages are shown below.

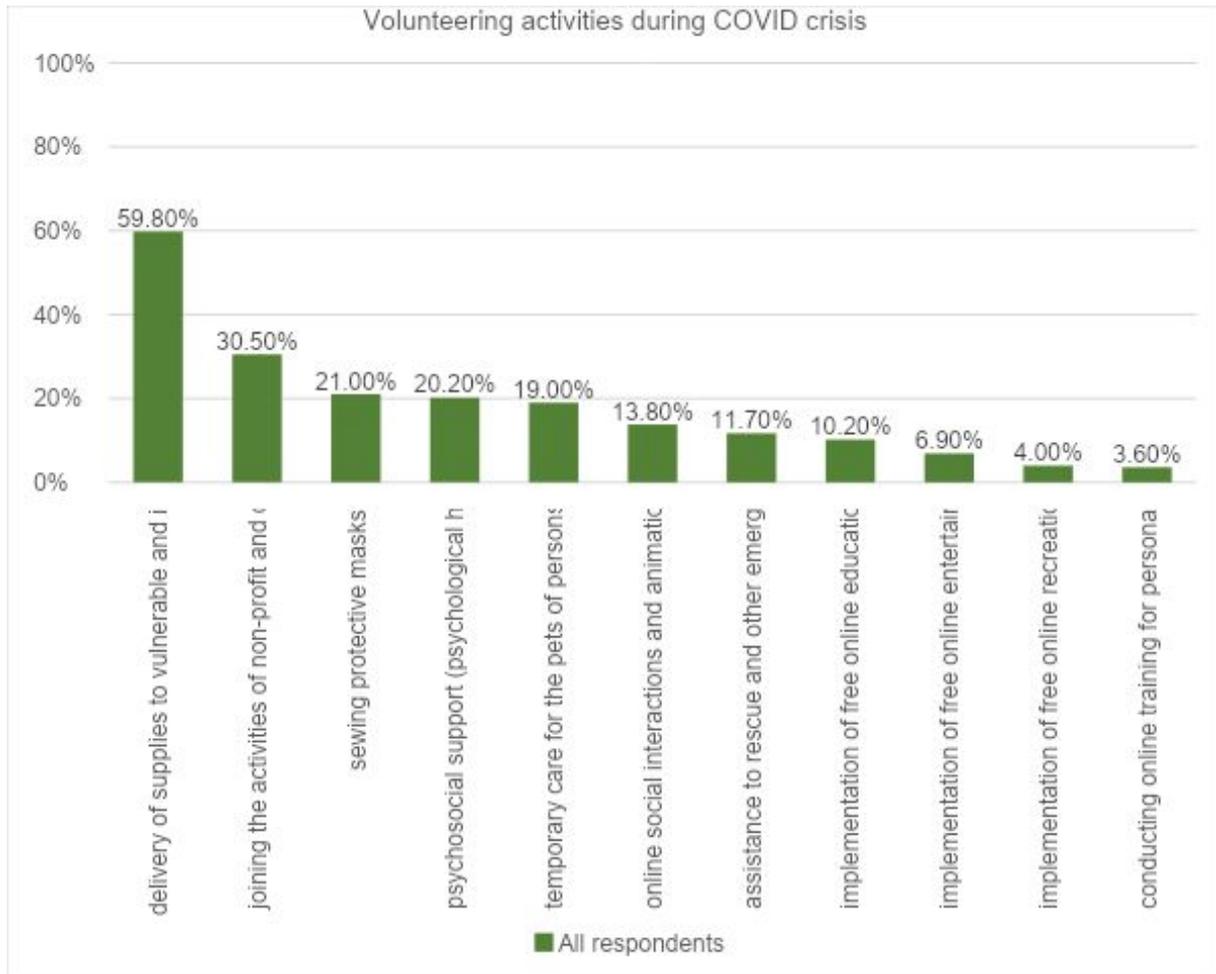


Participation in volunteering activities during COVID-19 crisis

Around 30% of all respondents volunteered during COVID-19 crisis, mainly in activities of delivery of supplies and in activities organized by NGOs, as shown in graphs below.



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Conclusion and recommendations

Due to the specificity of the sample (small number of respondents, unequal distribution of respondents compared to population of the countries included in the survey, online distribution of surveys by non-profit organizations), we cannot generalize the results to the general population, neither in the context of the countries included in the survey nor in context of Europe. However, the results are important for several reasons.

The levels of trust in others and institutions in society among our respondents are medium, despite the high percentage of those involved in volunteering. Additionally, most respondents generally consider volunteering to be important, as well as volunteering in a crisis. Positive attitudes are more pronounced among more educated respondents, indicating the need to promote volunteering and philanthropy at an earlier age, through early education, in kindergartens and elementary school.

Equally, the arrival of refugees and migrants is viewed more positively by more educated and (as expected) less religious respondents. Respondents are more interested in solving the immediate problems of refugees and migrants (delivery of food and water, care for the elderly, children and the infirm) than in their full integration into society, which indicates the need to better inform citizens about good practices in working with refugees and integration.

As mentioned at the VOCIS panel at CEV Autumn Congress, future research should be conducted on a representative sample and certainly examine more deeply the motivation for volunteering in general as well as specifically for volunteering in a crisis, examine how to encourage those involved in volunteering in an immediate crisis (such as COVID-19) to volunteer long- term. Media has an important role in this - if the needs of different groups (children, young people, people with developmental and/or physical disabilities) are not on the front pages, it does not mean that they do not exist.



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