Global Generosity in Times of Crisis Project – Executive Summary

COVID-19 is a global health crisis unlike anything most of us have experienced in our lifetimes. Despite all devastation, there are some positive outcomes of this pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, people have helped one another, donated money, given their time, and worked shoulder-to-shoulder to address some of the most pressing issues that our societies face. Understanding how philanthropic behavior manifests during times of crisis is of practical concern for governments, societies and nonprofits. This study contributes to an increased understanding of philanthropy, especially in times of crisis, by studying the conditions under which such behaviors may be threatened or promoted across different countries and cultures.

Although a great deal is known about particular forms of philanthropic behavior, such as charitable giving (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011) or volunteering (Clary and Snyder 1995), there is not yet a broader understanding of how philanthropy manifests in different cultures (Wiepking 2020), especially in times of crisis (but see Han et al. 2020 for an interesting example).

At the start of the COVID-19 crisis, we brought together philanthropy scholars from over twenty counties, to study people’s individual philanthropic response to COVID-19 in different countries. The pandemic presented a unique opportunity to study how people living across different countries and contexts, with various welfare and health systems and different public and private responses to manage COVID-19, manifested generosity behaviors.

Between June and December 2020 we surveyed 31,222 people in 12 countries (US, Australia, Russia, South Korea, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, China, Austria, Germany and Israel). We analyse data to consider the prevalence of different generosity behaviors across countries, including informal helping (including participating in local and virtual mutual aid groups; donating to food banks; helping neighbors or strangers), formal volunteering, and charitable giving, and how these have been affected by the crisis. Using two step estimation and data visualization, we also study how contextual level factors, such as severity of the COVID-19 crisis in terms of hospitalization and deaths, government responses to the crisis, including (semi)lockdowns and available public social support, influence individual philanthropic responses.

Results will contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of philanthropic behavior across countries and cultures, especially in times of crisis. In addition, we will work closely with representatives of governments and civil society (network) organizations to communicate results and identify policy implications.

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References

