

The benefits of voluntary work for the working population

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Gainfully employed people who volunteer in their spare time are healthier and more satisfied with their work-life balance than people who do not engage in voluntary work, shows a study funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Although the majority of people doing [unpaid work](#) are also gainfully employed, earlier studies mainly focused on the effects of [voluntary work](#) on pensioners. Now researchers from ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich have surveyed adult members of the working population in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and - after evaluating a total of 746 questionnaires - have published their results.

Greater sense of balance thanks to voluntary work

About one-third of the employed people who participated in the survey are also engaged in voluntary work on the side. In spite of the higher workload, they are more satisfied with their [work-life balance](#) than salaried people without a side-job. Although the difference is small, the researchers see it as an indication that voluntary work might provide a feeling of control over one's life and time management. This feeling of competence, along with the conviction that one is doing something useful for the community, can in turn generate positive health effects, such as reduced stress symptoms as well as psychological, emotional and social well-being. Nevertheless, Romualdo Ramos, who is affiliated to ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich, asserts that "our study cannot

rule out the possibility that the relationship is due to the fact that healthy people are more likely to take up voluntary work in the first place."

In addition, only those whose motivation for doing voluntary work is sincere could benefit from its positive effects. "If people feel pressured to engage in voluntary work or if they do so as a way of career advancement, the positive effects will probably fail to materialise," says Ramos.

Socialising beyond retirement age

The benefits of voluntary work are more pronounced in pensioners who do unpaid work. According to Ramos, this may be due to a higher intrinsic motivation to volunteer among elderly people than among the working population. In this context, voluntary work might play a compensatory role, providing social contact and integration after withdrawing from the workforce. Generally, those with rather weak psychosocial resources – such as unemployed persons or migrants – might benefit the most from the positive effects observed in connection with voluntary work.

More information: "Busy Yet Socially Engaged: Volunteering, Work-Life Balance and Health in the Working Population," R. Ramos, R. Brauchli, G. Bauer, T. Wehner and O. Hämmig, *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (in press) [DOI: 10.1097/JOM.0000000000000327](https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000000327)

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