



ARTICLE IN THE SPECIAL SECTION

From Informal to Formal: Features of Volunteering in Arab Countries

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the potential of Arab volunteers in solving social problems in their communities. Conceptually, volunteering is viewed as both part of social participation and a form of helping behavior. The research is based on the analysis of data from an online survey conducted among adult volunteers from 20 countries in the North Africa, Middle East, and Gulf regions. These countries include Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and the Palestinian territories. The study identifies distinctive features of Arab volunteers engaged in diverse forms of helping behavior, including their social, demographic, and other characteristics. Remarkably, Arab volunteers showed the same level of trust at both near and far social distances, which distinguishes them from Russian volunteers. The findings suggest that there is a positive environment for the further development of formal volunteering in the Arab world. It has been found that targeted government support has significantly contributed to the development of the culture of volunteering and building its infrastructure in countries of the Arab region.

KEYWORDS

informal volunteering, formal volunteering, helping behavior, social trust, social problems, nonprofit organizations, Arab nations

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Introduction

Volunteering is a set of prosocial collective activities that “extend over time, are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation, and often through formal organizations, and that are performed on behalf of causes or individuals who desire assistance” (Snyder & Omoto, 2008, p. 3; see also Duncan, 2012). Volunteering has gained wide social recognition in the modern world based on the principles of equality, humanism, and mutual assistance. Theoretically, volunteering can be explored through various conceptual lenses. In a broad sense, volunteering is part of social participation together with a wide range of other social, public, and individual activities, such as charitable giving, being a member of a local community group, and practicing ethical consumption or advocating for the protection of certain plant and animal species. Social participation refers to collective activities. As Brodie et al. (2011) have found, social participation is widespread phenomenon, embedded historically, and centrally important to people’s lives and the communities where they live.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) proposes a broad spectrum of activities based on increasing levels of participation. At one end of the IAP2 spectrum, participation activities may involve the provision of information through, for example, websites and factsheets and lead to a “shallow” form of participation, which is just little more than information sharing. At the other end of the spectrum, citizens’ participation contributions include consultations and other forms of collaboration with government agencies on issues of importance to the community (Brodie et al., 2009). Arnstein’s ladder of participation (1969) heavily affects the IAP2’s spectrum. Arnstein’s typology, which highlights different levels of participation, moving from nonparticipation to citizen control, was later widely referred to Guaraldo Choguill (1996), Tritter and McCallum (2006), Cornwall (2008), Collins and Ison (2009).

Along with being a tool for citizen empowerment through social participation, the phenomenon of volunteering is examined as a form of helping behavior when people actively identify opportunities to help others often at considerable personal cost. There are certain characteristics that mark volunteering as a distinctive form of helping.

Unlike spontaneous helping that can be provided in response to difficulties or urgent situations, volunteers typically look for opportunities to help or in other words, select themselves to engage in volunteering. Unlike the obligatory helping that occurs in the context of ongoing relationships, volunteers typically do not know those they help in advance (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Typically, the extant research defines both formal and informal volunteering as unpaid work that is carried out for a charitable, social, or political purpose while distinguishing the two types of volunteering by whether one engages in unpaid labor in a formal organizational setting (e.g., foodbank, school, church, animal shelter) or on an individual basis, as part of informal networks, including friends and neighbors. An essential aspect of both types of volunteering, formal and informal, is helping those who are in need (Taniguchi, 2012; Wang et al., 2017).

Indeed, although both types of volunteering generate benefits for the society, the literature focuses much attention on the formal volunteering undertaken through an organization, mainly in the US context. However, recent studies have revealed that participation in prosocial behaviors is multifaceted. By simply focusing on formal volunteering, scholars might miss the plurality of behaviors, which enable civic engagement (Cnaan & Park, 2016; Reed & Selbee, 2001).

The socio-economic situation, religious beliefs, and cultural aspects of the Arab region, comprising most of the countries of North Africa, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, directly affect the philosophy of volunteering in this area. While being an interesting, rapidly developing social phenomenon, it is just a new name for an age-old tradition there. In particular, Arab society has a long history of informal volunteering based on religious and humanitarian values, mainly on compassion and empathy for others. Traditionally, it has been predominantly informal and has been linked to supporting each other and society through religious and cultural practices (Haddad, 2015) that encourage prosocial behavior and promote altruistic thinking, as noted by the United Nations Volunteers [UNV] (2019).

In addition, volunteering in Arab countries is associated with helping people during holidays or difficult times and is seen as a religious duty and charitable work (UNV, 2011). The word “volunteering” is *tatawa’a* in Arabic, which means donating something. It also means participating in charitable activities that are not a religious requirement. It originates from the word *al-taw’a*, which means compliance, smoothness, and flexibility.

The concept of volunteering is taking on new forms as a result of modernization and the development of governmental and non-governmental institutions. In general, helping others is seen as part of a religious obligation rooted in the religions of Arab peoples, and the line between giving time voluntarily and as a duty is not sharply defined (UNV, 2015). However, recent years have also demonstrated new emerging trends in Arab philanthropy as it is expanding beyond religiously motivated giving and giving to family and relatives. The philanthropy sector is contributing to the relief of the immediate needs of the poor and the provision of basic services, as well as to the accomplishment of sustainable development goals, including education, health, and economic empowerment (Haddad, 2015).

The Arab world, consisting of more than two dozen countries, presents significant disparity regarding economic and social development. Across this highly diverse region, there is a lack of solid academic research and data on volunteering. This poses a serious challenge to sustaining and expanding volunteerism projects and initiatives in the above region (UNV, 2015).

Some important facts about the development of volunteering in a few countries in the researched region can be found in the evidence library of the knowledge portal¹ for volunteerism for development practitioners and policy makers. The web database includes local studies on activating the role of women in volunteering in Saudi Arabia (Afif, 2010) and Algeria (Zizah, 2018) and identifying the role of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in activating youth volunteering in Oman (Al-Ani et al., 2016). Particular attention should be paid to the paper describing new emerging trends in the relationship between volunteers and the state explored in the Arab world (Haddad, 2021).

The available comprehensive estimate of the total volunteer workforce in Arab countries, prepared as background research (UNV, 2018), presents a figure of nine million full-time equivalent workers who volunteered either informally outside an organization, i.e., helped as unorganized individuals or with friends and relatives, and formally through an organization or institution.

The next global study (UNV, 2021) used a different approach to estimating the volunteer workforce based on international statistical standards and with a reference period of one month. The study showed that the monthly number of volunteers aged 15 and over in the Arab countries was 26.2 million.

In 2018, Arab nations had one of the largest shares of informal volunteers in the world (82,9%), with only African volunteers (86,9%) ahead of them (UNV, 2018). Overall, formal volunteering has become an established practice in many cultures (especially in western countries) with the availability of nonprofit organizations that direct volunteers' time and services to those who need assistance.

Traditional prevalence of informal volunteerism has been a result of numerous challenges that formal volunteerism faces in the Arab countries, such as the absence of clearly outlined policies concerning civic engagement and volunteering, restricted funding, and a lack of enthusiasm for volunteering due to the minimal institutionalization of philanthropy.

Indeed, as researchers note, even when willing to engage in formal volunteering, people will not be able to do so unless the necessary institutions exist (Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Wang et al., 2017). In the nonprofit sector of the Arab world, the lack of funding and a fairly low institutionalization of philanthropy brought about a lack of enthusiasm for formal volunteering. It is only recently that governments have begun to recognize the importance of volunteering and support it through targeted policies raising awareness about its positive impact on society. States are promoting the concept of volunteering by establishing the necessary legal and political frameworks. They have integrated the notions of civic engagement and volunteering into school

¹ <https://knowledge.unv.org>

curricula (Haddad, 2015, 2020). Consequently, by the next measurement (UNV, 2021), the gap between the number of informal and formal Arab volunteers had narrowed, moving slightly towards the world average (“70% and 30%”).

Thus, individual volunteers from Arab countries show a tendency to be more motivated about joining a coordinated volunteer group if there is a certain level of institutional support. Without institutional support, those who would like to volunteer would choose to do it informally. Another possible reason for a rise in formal volunteering statistics is that potential volunteers see more benefits for their personal and community development by engaging in formal volunteering. Both a growing statistic of volunteering through nonprofits and enhancing public awareness about public benefits of volunteering in the Arab region have been strongly facilitated by local governments’ policies. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, the government promotes the culture of volunteering for sustainable development and a better future for the next generation. Government support in UAE has led to the launch of the National Volunteer Program for Emergencies, Crises and Disasters, which aims to form a base of volunteers and qualify them to assist government agencies in case of emergencies. In 2017, the government of Dubai launched “A Day for Dubai,” an initiative calling on residents to volunteer on one day in a year to help those in need and support community services by offering their time, knowledge, or skills. Government initiated the opening of Emirates Voluntary Academy in Abu Dhabi and Dubai Volunteering Center (Volunteering platforms, n.d.). Officials in the State of Qatar promote the culture and values of volunteering by widely celebrating the Arab Volunteer Day, which falls on September, 15 (Officials to QNA, 2022). Examples of government current support for volunteering in the countries of the Arab region are numerous. However, there is a noticeable lack of systemic data and analytical research on measuring and evaluating the work of volunteers. Nevertheless, a growing influence of volunteering in the above region on personal development, individual trust to other persons, and their willingness to contribute to the social development of local communities motivated the authors to carry out this study and address the gap in the empirical data on volunteering in the Arab region.

Methodology

The authors carried out an anonymous online sociological survey of volunteers from the Arab world over the period from August to September 2023. They initially approximated the sample size at 720 participants aged 18 years and older, with an average set of 40 participants from each of the 18 selected countries in the region.

The geographical scope of the survey included Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Palestinian Territories. They were selected from 24 countries traditionally assigned to the Arab region. Turkey and Afghanistan, which are not formally part of the Arab world, were also included.

During the course of the survey, volunteers from Djibouti, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman were added to the pool of respondents. At the same time, volunteers from

Afghanistan and Turkey were passive in relation to the survey or something prevented them from active participation. Therefore, these two countries were excluded from the list of participating countries due to low response rates.

Survey participants were asked to answer 20 questions using a computer or smartphone. The questionnaire asked the respondents about various aspects of their volunteer experience, their willingness to unite in a group activity, their level of trust in the people around them, their assessment of the contribution of volunteers to solving social problems, their social background, gender, education, age, and other characteristics of the portrait of a social group of volunteers.

The questionnaire was developed on the basis of the tools used in the ongoing monitoring of the state of civil society in Russia. This monitoring has been carried out since 2006 by the Centre for Studies of the Nonprofit Sector and Civil Society at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University) with the support of the University's Program for Basic Research. Similar questionnaires used in the HSE University monitoring and in the present research have enabled a comparison of the data obtained in the Arab region with data that characterize a sector of Russian volunteers.

The dissemination of the invitation to participate in the survey was mainly made by the activists of the nonprofit association International Organization for Volunteerism (IOV). They shared links to the survey website through social media platforms, especially chat rooms, and through personal contacts. Their efforts played a significant role in promoting the survey (HSE University & International Organization for Volunteerism, n.d.).

A total number of 768 individuals aged between 18 and 69 from 20 different countries were interviewed over a period of two months. In terms of gender, 49% of the participants were male and 51% were female. About half of the respondents could be classified as young people and about two thirds of them had a higher education. Most respondents were urban residents from megacities with at least one million inhabitants (23%) and large cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (20%). Rural areas, represented by settlements with less than 10 thousand inhabitants, accounted for 14% of the population surveyed. Detailed socio-demographic characteristics of respondents are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Question	Category	%
Gender	Male	49
	Female	51
Age	18–24	28
	25–34	13
	34–45	20
	45–59	32
	60+	7

Table 1 Continued

Question	Category	%
Approximately how many people live in your residence community (city, town, or village)? (one answer)	1 million or more	23
	From 500 thousand to 1 million	13
	From 250 to 500 thousand	11
	From 100 to 250 thousand	6
	From 50 to 100 thousand	7
	Less than 50 thousand	14
	Less than 10 thousand	10
	Less than 3 thousand people	4
How much formal education have you completed? (one answer)	I don't know	12
	Some secondary school, but no certificate	6
	Completed secondary school	8
	Secondary vocational technical school	2
	Special vocational technical college (medical college, etc.)	4
	Some higher education but no university degree	14
	Completed university degree (Bachelor's, Master's degree or equivalent)	64
	I don't know	2

During the survey, people were also asked about their financial situation. The question was: “Your household/family income comes from different sources and may be earned by several family members. As regards the monthly total income of your family, how easily does it allow you to meet basic needs?” It turned out that 48% of respondents found it in general easily (13% very easily, 28% easily, and 7% rather easily) and 52% found it difficult (7% with difficulty, 7% with great difficulty, and 38% with some difficulty).

As for the health condition of the volunteers surveyed, 39% of the respondents rated their health as very good, 44% as good, and only 2% as poor. The rest of the participants assessed their health as average. It should be noted that 86% of the sample of respondents had been involved in volunteering within the last year. In addition, volunteering was defined as an activity for social benefit, without compulsion or payment, and not to help family members or close relatives. Accordingly, 14% had volunteered in the past.

Finally, if we characterize the respondents in terms of the institutional type of their volunteering, 12% were informal volunteers, 36% were formal volunteers, and 48% were involved in both formal and informal volunteering. These groups serve as the basis for the further description of the empirical data collected during the survey. To better understand the factors that may be associated with both formal and informal volunteering, we organize the Results section around our central independent variables.

Results

Helping Behavior

Volunteers from Arab countries showed high levels of engagement in various helping behaviors, whether helping strangers monetarily or by donating items, or through specific actions or deeds. An impressive 97% of respondents reported engagement in at least one form of helping behavior over the past year. Specifically, 88% of respondents gave money to unknown people, 83% donated items, and 90% helped through certain actions or behaviors.

Among those who provided financial help to strangers, there were slightly fewer men than women (48% and 52%, respectively). The distribution by age was as follows: 27% of those who donated money were aged 18–24, 12% were aged 25–34; 21% were aged 35–45, 32% were aged 45–59, and 8% were aged over 60. Overall, the largest proportion of those who helped with money was found among volunteers aged 35 and over, with a rate of 91–94%. The share of those who gave money is high in almost all income groups, ranging from 88% to 94%. Even among those whose family income makes it very difficult for them to meet their basic needs, a substantial proportion (67%) still offered monetary help. The same level of money aid (67%) is observed among those who consider their health to be poor. Among the respondents in good or very good health, 89% had given cash donations to strangers in the past year, compared with 83% of those who regarded their health as average.

Looking at those who helped strangers in need by giving them material goods over the past year, it was found the gender breakdown was nearly equal, with 51% male and 49% female. The age composition of this group closely mirrored that of those who provided financial help. It was observed that the proportion of people who helped with things was higher among those aged 35–59 varying from 92% to 94%, compared to 72–75% for the youngest and oldest. Individuals with the highest incomes and good health assessments were more likely to donate items to unknown people.

When considering other acts of mutual aid, it became evident that 51% of men and 49% of women helped unfamiliar individuals in need through specific actions or behaviors. The age distribution of this group closely corresponds with the above-mentioned groups of volunteers. However, the youngest (18–24 years old) and middle-aged (35–45 years old) volunteers most frequently helped others through actions or behaviors, with proportions of 96% and 97%, respectively. In the remaining age groups, this share ranged from 77% to 87%, with the percentage observed among those aged between 25 and 34 years. Notably, lower-income individuals were a bit more likely to engage in this form of helping behavior. Nevertheless, a tendency to help through certain actions or deeds to assist others did not demonstrate any significant correlation with self-reported health status.

These findings support the idea that more resourceful people are more likely to help others, which makes sense as everyone needs to have resources to share them. However, education level does not have the same effect. The data shows that highly educated Arab volunteers do not help strangers in need more frequently than volunteers with less education.

Social Trust

Previous studies on the relationship between social trust and volunteering are mixed. Usually, the research differentiates between the so-called generalized trust, which refers to the trust in strangers outside the family and friendship spheres and particularized trust, sometimes referred to as interpersonal trust, and which is characterized as the trust in others that people know personally, such as family members, relatives, and friends. According to Uslaner (2002), the difference between generalized and particularized trust is similar to the distinction Putnam drew between “bonding” and “bridging” social capital. In this paper, we use the terms “trust at the near social distance” and “trust at the far social distance” describing nearly the same dichotomy. Overall, generalized trust guides individuals to identify common goals and facilitates collective action. This type of social trust promotes prosocial activities that help strangers. Particularized trust is “extended only toward people the individual knows from everyday interactions” (Freitag & Traunmüller, 2009), which limits individual’s possibilities to collaborate with others for collective action.

The extant literature on volunteering suggests various correlations between trust and people’s decision to volunteer. Brown and Ferris (2007) find that individuals’ trust in others and in their community are important determinants of volunteering in the United States. Bekkers (2012) conducted longitudinal analysis using panel data from the Netherlands. He finds that people with low trust are more likely to quit volunteering, and hence, volunteers exhibit higher levels of trust as a result of self-sorting. Liu et al. (2020) find that generalized trust is identified to be positively associated with volunteering participation among Hong Kong Chinese, which leads to recommendations for the government to strengthen efforts in promoting volunteerism via building generalized trust.

During data analysis, an intriguing characteristic of Arab volunteers was observed. Specifically, there is no significant difference in the level of trust they have at the near and far social distances. To measure the level of trust at the far social distance, the respondents were asked the question: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?” As a result, 37% of respondents said that “Most people can be trusted.”

However, only 50% believed that most people from their immediate environment can be trusted, while 49% answered that they should be careful in dealing with people close to them. However, only 50% of respondents believed that most people in their immediate environment could be trusted, with 49% answered that they should be careful in dealing with people close to them.

Similar studies performed in Russia (Kak izmenilos’ otnoshenie, 2023) showed a considerable difference in trust levels between near and far social distances. Specifically, only 19% of those who participated in volunteer activity in Russia believed that most people can be trusted, whereas 63% held trust in most individuals within their immediate environment.

Concerning volunteers from Arab nations, women display greater overall trust in people (40% compared to 34%). However, they surprisingly demonstrate less trust in those within their immediate social circle (48% compared to 52%). Trust in the

immediate surroundings increases significantly with age, rising from 33% in the 18–24 age group to 70% in the 45–59 age group, but then drops again to 33% amongst the oldest respondents.

Regarding the level of trust at a far social distance, the youngest respondents once again showed the lowest inclination towards trust at only 24%, and the highest level of trust reaching 51% was demonstrated by the respondents aged 41–59. However, no clear linear trend can be observed within the data.

Trust is traditionally considered as a crucial prerequisite for engaging in prosocial behavior and the collected data support this notion. The respondents who believe that most people can be trusted were more likely to participate in NPOs activities (76% versus 68%). In addition, they were more likely to offer help to strangers in need: with money (92% versus 86%) or things (89% versus 79%). Interestingly, there was no such connection observed for assisting with actions (84% versus 94%). It can be assumed that sharing material resources requires a greater level of trust in comparison to offering assistance through non-material acts of kindness.

Impact to Social Issues

The absolute majority of respondents (98%) from Arab nations holds a remarkably positive view towards engaging volunteers to address social issues. They firmly believe that volunteers should be involved in solving social challenges within their countries. In detail, 87% of respondents answered that volunteers should certainly participate, while 11% held the view that they should do this rather than should not.

The difference between volunteers who served formally and informally in this matter is minimal. For example, 83% of individuals who volunteered on their own or with friends or family, and 87% of people who volunteered through various organizations like NPOs, volunteer centers, educational institutions, and corporations along with 88% of those who engaged in both formal and informal volunteering, think that volunteers should play a visible role in solving social problems.

Regarding the current efforts of volunteers to solve social issues, Arab volunteers have a high level of appreciation for their work. More than half of respondents (54%) viewed the current contribution of volunteers positively, and additionally 34% of respondents described it as satisfactory, indicating a generally positive view of the work of volunteers. Only 7% of respondents had negative views on the volunteers' contribution.

Moreover, the data indicates that individuals who engage in organized volunteer activities are likely to evaluate the impact of volunteers even more favorably. Specifically, among those volunteers who engaged in volunteering on their own or with their friends and relatives, only 44% positively assessed the current contribution of volunteers to solving social issues within their country. In contrast, among organized volunteers, the share of positive ratings is 62% for those who solely participated in formal volunteering and 60% for those who engaged in both formal and informal volunteering.

These findings suggest that direct contact with other volunteers, registered groups, and nonprofit organizations, as well as a deeper awareness of their activities and the outcomes of their efforts, lead to more positive evaluations of the contribution of volunteers to solving social problems.

Further evidence to support this claim is the fact that awareness of nonprofit organizations also positively influences the evaluation of the contribution of volunteer activity. The question was: “In many countries, there are organizations that call public attention to social issues and provide support to the needy people. These are, for example, non-governmental, nonprofit organizations (supporting veterans, people with special needs, families with many children as well as leisure, cultural, youth and sports organizations), and charities. Do you know, have you heard of such organizations in your residence community? Or do you hear about them for the first time now?” Among those who confirmed that they knew about nonprofit organizations in their residence community, 57% positively rated the contribution of volunteers to solving social problems, while among those who only “heard something” about such organizations, the figure stands at 49%. A similar disparity can be observed between those who participated in the activities of such organizations (58% positive ratings) and those who did not participate (45% positive ratings).

In general, volunteers from Arab nations had a more positive view on volunteer involvement in solving social problems compared to their Russian counterparts (Mersianova, 2022), as it is shown in Table 2. A total of 81% of Russian volunteers and 98% of Arab volunteers agreed with the notion that volunteers should participate in solving social issues within their countries. However, just 33% of individuals who participated in volunteer service in Russia expressed certainty that volunteers should participate, while 48% believed that they “should rather than shouldn’t”. Among the respondents from Arab countries, these shares reach 87% and 11%, respectively. Moreover, 15% of Russian volunteers were opposed to this idea, while only 2% of Arab volunteers shared the same view. Specifically, 5% of Russian volunteers thought that volunteers certainly should not engage in solving social issues within their country.

Table 2
Involvement of Russian and Arab Volunteers in Solving Social Problems

Question	Variants of answer	In Russia, %	In Arab states, %
In your opinion, should or should not volunteers participate in solving social issues in your country?	Certainly should	33	87
	Should rather than should not	48	11
	Should not rather than should	10	1
	Certainly, should not	5	< 1
	I don't know	4	< 1

When evaluating the contribution of volunteer activity in solving social problems, the respondents from Arab countries also had generally positive outlook. Both regions shared the same percentage (7%) for quite negative assessments. However, Russian volunteers were more likely to consider the contribution satisfactory (48%) with a positive assessment rate of only 37%. In contrast, 54% of volunteers from Arab countries rated the contribution positively, while 34% considered it satisfactory.

It should be noted that the respondents from Arab countries showed a high degree of self-identification as volunteers. Overall, 93% of respondents identified

themselves as volunteers and only 5% expressed any uncertainty regarding their self-identification. Interestingly, organized volunteers were somewhat more likely to affirm their self-identity as volunteers.

Among those who participated in volunteering either individually or with friends and family, 89% self-identify as volunteers and 6% have some doubts. Meanwhile, among organized volunteers, these proportions are 96% and 4%, respectively. In Russia, only one-third of those who participated in volunteer activity over the last year considered themselves as volunteers, while one-quarter expressed doubts. Thus, 41% of those who participated in volunteering in Russia did not actually identify themselves as volunteers.

The unstable volunteer self-identification could be one of the reasons why Russian volunteers, compared to their Arab counterparts, undervalue the contribution of volunteers to solving social problems and are less likely to perceive it as necessary. This is partly supported by the fact that some respondents from Arab countries who are uncertain about their volunteering identity also hold more negative opinions regarding the idea of participation of volunteers in solving social problems as well as about their contribution. At the same time, the sample size does not possess sufficient statistical power to draw definitive conclusions on this matter.

Conclusion

The study led to some findings regarding volunteer activity in the Arab world. Firstly, it is evident that volunteering in the region has become a social practice that continuously grows and progresses from a purely religion-related practice to a positive and sustainable mechanism for social change. Furthermore, volunteers from Arab countries exhibit a considerable level of involvement in diverse forms of helping behavior. Targeted government support for the development of the culture of volunteering and building its infrastructure in most countries of the region has contributed to the following positive changes reflected in the extant literature and supported by our data:

- a significant growth in the scope and diversity of volunteering activities;
- a perceptible increase in the statistics of volunteer workforce engaged through organizations (nonprofits and charities) gravitating toward the world average figures of organized volunteering;
- a higher degree of self-identification as volunteers and enhancing awareness about the importance of non-governmental, nonprofit organizations in solving social issues, providing a solid basement for further development of formal volunteering in the Arab region;
- consequently, an absolute majority of respondents from Arab nations holds a remarkably positive view towards volunteer engagement in addressing social issues because awareness of nonprofit organizations is positively associated with the evaluation of the contribution of volunteer activity.

Our data from the Arab countries supported previous findings from the other regions of the world indicating that more resourceful people have a stronger propensity to engage in volunteering.

Arab volunteers showed an almost equal level of trust at both near (particularized trust) and far (generalized trust) social distances, which is quite different from the Russian survey data. Most Russian volunteers hold more trust in the people from their near circle. The difference on this point may be accounted for by specificity of historical development, culture, and religion. However, this difference needs further exploration at the comparative level.

The present findings help to address a gap in the available empirical data from the Arab region and point to a strong role played by the governments of the Arab countries in promoting organized volunteering. However, further cross-country comparative research is necessary to identify intrinsic differences and similarities between different countries of the Arab region, on one hand, and between Arab countries and other countries of the world with the developing nonprofit sector, on the other.

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