



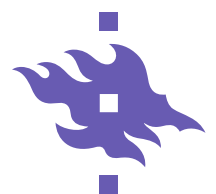
Generosity in Times of Crisis

Finnish Helping Behaviors During
the COVID-19 Pandemic

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We are a collaborative research group involving over 50 scholars from more than 20 countries led by Professor Pamala Wiepking from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in the United States.

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1. Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world into a health crisis that has had devastating effects on the global economy and public life in many countries. Little is known about how people have responded to two competing pressures caused by the crisis in many countries: increased community need coupled with decreased financial capacity to help others. We surveyed 1000 Finns in July and August 2020 to understand how their generosity behaviors manifested and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. By generosity we mean all forms of behavior that people engage in with the intention of benefiting others (including people, animals, and environments).

Two key findings emerged:

1. Generosity manifested in diverse ways during the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland. A vast majority of respondents had helped others during spring and summer 2020, especially in ways which one can carry out informally in the everyday life. The most common ways of reaching out were informal helping of someone one knows, giving money to someone in need who one personally knows, and continuing paying people or businesses for services they were unable to deliver due to restrictions. Organized forms of generosity behaviors were less common.
2. People were eager to engage to help others, and many stated their willingness to help others had increased. At the same time, helping others was difficult, as restrictions disallowed many volunteering opportunities, and prohibited interacting with other people more generally.

Managerial Implications. Nonprofits may wish to:

- As quickly as possible, offer new ways to participate and volunteer when regular ways of participating have been restricted. These new ways can include online volunteering opportunities and outdoor activities. NGOs should also communicate to the wider audience about new and emerging needs of people, as well as of donation needs and opportunities.
- Map needs, ideas, and successful ways of acting at the grass-roots level, across the affected communities and groups of people they work with. NGOs should actively communicate these needs and ideas to governments and local authorities.
- Communicate crisis related information (e.g., on restrictions) to the communities they work with. Also, even more widely in the society, for all citizens, NGOs should aim at providing a sense of safety, communality, and solidarity, for example by communicating about opportunities to receive, as well as to give support.

Policy Implications. Governments may wish to:

- Facilitate cross-sector collaboration and communication in 'normal' times to ensure preparedness in times of crisis. Further, they should acknowledge how needs may vary across geographic locations and sub-groups of the community, and collaborate with local organizations and individuals, who have knowledge about and access to these locations and sub-groups.
- Support people who are (a) in a particularly vulnerable position, (b) without close social networks, and/or (c) without digital skills or access to digital services, as generosity typically focuses where social connections and mutual generosity already exist.
- Lead cross-sectoral crisis responses. Help NGOs coordinate by securing their resources and the continuity of their work. Direct them to challenges, issues, geographic locations, and sub-groups of the community where they are needed the most.

2. Introduction: COVID-19 and Public Generosity

In early 2020, the world was thrown into a health crisis that had devastating effects on the global economy and social life in many countries: the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing (September 2021), more than 225 million people have contracted the virus globally and over 4.6 million people have died (Worldometer, 2021). By April 2020, more than 3.9 billion people from 90 countries – around half the world’s population – were told by their governments to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus (Sandford, 2020). These restrictions had knock-on effects for people’s social lives, as many people were separated from friends and family for long periods of time. Restricted movement (and associated dampened spending) also devastated many economies, with more than 225 million full-time jobs being lost from the global economy and unemployment rates skyrocketing in many countries (Hassan, 2021). In short, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a global crisis that has severely impacted social and economic life in many countries.

The pandemic has had two competing effects in relation to the provision of social support to communities in need. On the one hand, the crisis amplified need: many more families than usual found themselves in need of support due to sickness or unemployment, especially families from vulnerable communities. On the other hand, because the global economy was straining and many families were facing difficult times, nonprofits and social programs faced reduced flows of income and support (CAF, 2021). Yet little is known about how people responded to these twin pressures: did the pressures of the pandemic constrain generosity, or were people able to find ways to help each other regardless? The purpose of this report is to answer this overarching question:

How have generosity behaviors manifested and changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

We define generosity as all forms of behavior that people engage in with the intention of benefiting others (including people, animals, and environments).¹ Generosity behaviors therefore include both formal and informal support. Examples of formal generosity behaviors are donating money to charities, volunteering for nonprofit organizations, or giving blood. Informal generosity behaviors include helping people they know, helping strangers, and participating in grassroots community groups.

To answer our research question, we formed a team of researchers working in eleven countries to collect data on the formal and informal generosity practices that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries included in the research project were Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States.

Country reports will be available online at: www.globalgenerosityresearch.com. This series is part of a broader research initiative from “The Global Generosity Project” led by Professor Pamala Wiepking from the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in the United States.

In this report, we focus on the Finnish context and compare high-level findings to those from another nine countries where scholars also collected data about generosity during the pandemic: Australia, Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States.

By understanding generosity responses to this particular crisis, we can learn more about how individuals and societies respond to crises in general. Such knowledge can be used to develop policies and practices that ensure Finland will be able to withstand future shocks while maintaining a thriving and harmonious social fabric. To this end, we include a summary of our key findings and recommendations for both nonprofits and government.

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in eleven countries during the second half of 2020 and early 2021, with at least 644 participants per country (range 644 – 5900). In many countries, efforts were made to generate a nationally representative sample of participants.

The Finnish data was collected with telephone interviews, and carried out by a market research company (*Kyselytutkimus*). The sample represents the Finnish population over 15 years of age excluding the autonomous region of Ahvenanmaa. The data was weighted to correspond to the age group and gender distribution of mainland Finland. This weighted version of the data is used in reporting national findings (sections 4.1 and 4.2), but not in the global comparison, which instead reports unweighted data (section 3).

The sample was selected based on previously reported gender. 51 % of the respondents were female, and 49 % male. The respondents ranged in age from 15 to 90 years ($M=50.29$, $SD=19.042$). A little over a third (36,6%) of the respondents lived in a household of two adults with no children, almost a third (32.2%) in a single-person household, and a little over a quarter (26.4%) in a household of two adults with children. A small minority lived with their parents (2.5%) or in a single-parent household (1.5%). A clear majority (85.2%) reported that their household was able to make ends meet easily or very easily.

3.2 Timing and COVID-19 Context

The Finnish telephone interviews were conducted between 14 July and 18 August 2020. At that time the COVID-19 situation in Finland was very calm with less than 30 new cases daily in the country of more than five million inhabitants. However, the respondents were asked to think about their generosity behavior throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning the previous four months before the interview. During spring 2020 the COVID-19 situation had been far worse, and the country had witnessed several restrictions.

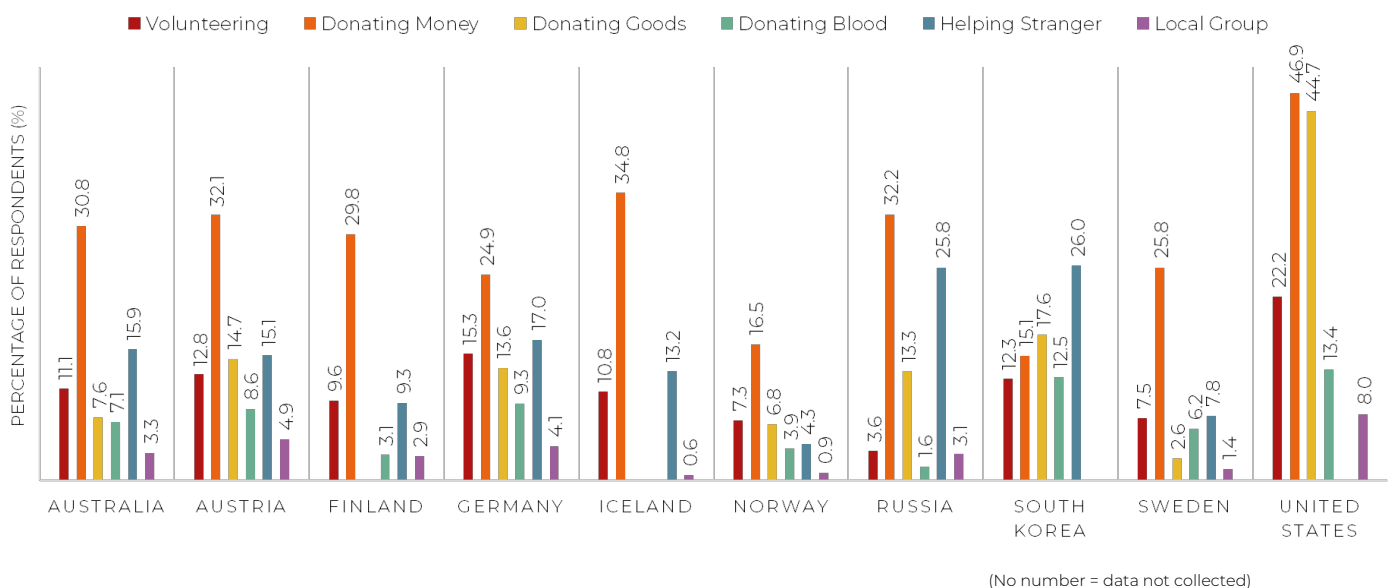
People over 70 years of age were, for example, firmly instructed to stay in quarantine-like conditions, social distancing was encouraged for all, and many services were closed or modified to online services. Finns were, however, not in total lock-down at any point, and the amount of deaths from COVID-19 has remained relatively low.

4. Global Comparison

As seen in Figure 1, manifestations of generosity behaviors varied across national contexts. We asked participants which generosity behaviors they had engaged in since the beginning of the pandemic. Some countries did not ask about all behaviors. In most countries, donating money was the most common generosity behavior reported. In comparison to other countries, Russians and South Koreans were more likely to help strangers, and Americans were more likely to donate money, goods and volunteer time.

In Finland, the most typical generosity behavior was offering financial support, yet the country ranked behind the top six countries in this. Also, compared to other countries included in this comparative study, donating blood was on particularly low levels in Finland. Similarly, in helping strangers and joining local groups, Finns did not rank very positively. In volunteering, Finns were amongst the average in activeness.

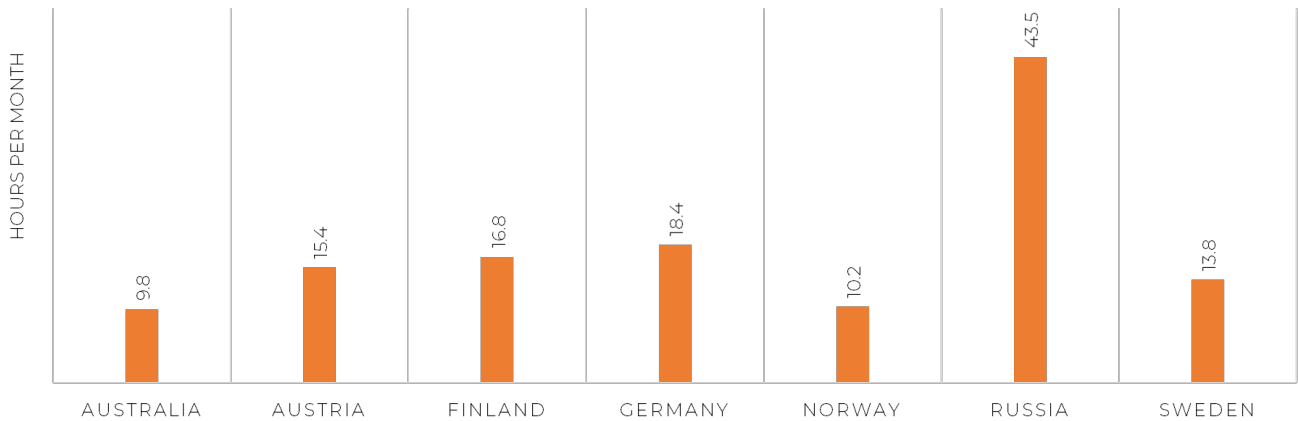
Figure 1. Generosity responses during pandemic



The extent of generosity behaviors varied significantly across nations. Respondents in different countries showed large differences in terms of the number of hours they volunteered each month² (see Figure 2). Of the hours volunteered per month (Figure 2), Russia stands out with 43.5 hours, about 2.5 times more hours than volunteers in Austria, Finland, Sweden and Germany. Yet Russia also had the lowest percentage of volunteers during the pandemic (Figure 1: 3.6%), compared with 22.2% of Americans, 15.3% of Germans and 12.8% Austrians. Those Finns who volunteered during the pandemic, volunteered on average less hours than volunteers in Russia, but more than volunteers in Norway and Australia.

Naturally, the opportunities for organized volunteering decreased during the pandemic in Finland as many services were closed. Also, people over 70 years of age, who usually volunteer relatively actively in Finland, were indeed advised to stay in quarantine-like conditions, and could hence not volunteer as much as usually. Furthermore, many of them did not have the digital skills or resources demanded to volunteer online.

Figure 2. Average number of hours per month spent volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic



5. National Findings

The key purpose of this report is to examine how Finns responded to the COVID-19 crisis; in particular, how individuals came together to help support those directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19. Below we consider the different forms of generosity behavior that were common in Finland during the pandemic and how these generosity behaviors changed during the pandemic. We then discuss a particular example of how generosity manifested in Finland during the crisis.

The total sample of the study consisted a total of 1000 completed interviews, as noted above. The sample was formed by simple random sampling within predefined regional quotas. The material is weighted to correspond to the age group and gender distribution of mainland Finland. The weighted data was used for the following results.

5.1 Generosity During COVID-19

Finns were most likely to help those near to them: two thirds (66 %) of Finns reported to have helped people who they know personally, like family members, friends, neighbors. Similarly, many people (42%) had given money to people they know personally.

A popular way of helping, that was not directed towards family or friends, was supporting service providers or businesses affected by the crisis. Almost a third of Finns (28%) had paid for services that were cancelled due the pandemic. Further, 26% had donated to charity. Somewhat less typical had been showing solidarity and emotional support by taking part in COVID-19 related communal campaigns (17%).

Finns were not very active to help strangers in need: 12% had helped strangers, and 10% had volunteered. Even fewer people had donated blood (7%). Informal groups had been formed because of their flexible and quick response in organizing help. 5% of Finns reported having helped as a part of such a group. Only 4% reported giving money to strangers. Volunteering for elderly people was the most popular sector (45% of those who had volunteered).

As donating money was the most common generosity response in the COVID-19 crisis, the question arises; how much did a typical Finn donate? Amounts that people donated in total during the crisis ranged from less than 5 euros to 2500 euros. On average, donors gave 26 to 50 euros to charity, the most common donation being 20 euros. Most of the donations were directed towards health care (33%) and social services (31%). Less often (23%) were the donations directed towards international aid.

Not many statistically significant differences could be found between different groups of respondents in their generosity behaviors during the pandemic. Gender, for example, did not play a key role. Some interesting differences were, however, found. For example, education was significant in donating to charity ($\chi^2=43.854^{***}$, $df=5$), as respondents with a higher education had donated more likely than those with a lower education. This result is in line with results from the time before the pandemic. Ability to make ends meet was statistically only almost significant ($\chi^2=9.208^*$, $df=3$) in donating to charity. Those respondents who had difficulties in making ends meet had less likely donated to charity compared to those who could make ends meet easily. At the same time, those who could make ends meet 'with great difficulty', had helped strangers significantly ($\chi^2=21.710^{***}$, $df=3$) more likely (38%) than the average (13%).

Respondents who stated religion to be very important or important in their life, volunteered ($\chi^2=23.446^{***}$, $df=3$) and donated money to charity ($\chi^2=46.014^{***}$, $df=3$) more likely than respondents, who did not hold religion important. These results are in line with research on religion and volunteering and religion and giving before the pandemic; especially activity in religious communities correlates with a higher likelihood to volunteer and give. This connection thus persevered also during the COVID-19 pandemic despite restrictions to volunteering and religious activities.

5.2 Changes in Generosity

When compared with research on volunteering and donating to charity in Finland before the pandemic, the results in our data indicate a strong decline in both. Comparing the proportion of Finns who reported to participate in volunteering before the pandemic, with those volunteering also at a later stage of the pandemic in the spring of 2021, we found a significant reduction in volunteering during the first wave of the pandemic compared with pre-pandemic times, and also compared with the later stage of the pandemic. More than a third of the population reported to have volunteered during the last four weeks in studies conducted in 2018 and 2021 (Kansalaisareena 2021).

Similarly, the proportion who report donating to charity, has been significantly higher. It is possible, that some respondents only reported volunteering and donating related to COVID-19 in our research. However, the restrictions related to COVID-19 affected volunteering, as many volunteering opportunities were discontinued. People's willingness to donate was probably also affected by layoffs and in general economic insecurity. Thus, at least some of the decline can be evaluated to be real.

We also asked the respondents, whether the COVID-19 pandemic had changed their ways of helping others, volunteering, or donating to charity. 23% reported changes. We also asked those, who reported changes, how these ways had changed. Almost 200 respondents wrote an answer to this, stating a high motivation to share their experiences. Many stated that they now wanted to do more, or appreciated generosity behaviors, solidarity, or communality more than before. Some stated they had also helped more than before. One respondent described how they now notice the need for a helping hand as well as people's willingness to help others better than before. At the same time, respondents described how COVID-19 and the restrictions had made helping more difficult or hindered it by restricting volunteering opportunities and simply by making meeting other people difficult. On the other hand, the challenging situation also inspired new ways to volunteering and helping, some of which we describe in the following section.

5.3 Case Study

Right in the beginning of the pandemic, individual people and social media in particular, were central and fast in providing and enabling acts of generosity. Social media platforms such as local Facebook pages were used to coordinate opportunities for helping out, and people posted offers for helping their neighbors with, for instance, grocery shopping on the message boards of their residential buildings. Also local businesses were supported with campaigns, buying gift cards, and by not asking for refund for services that could not be delivered due to the restrictions. Especially bigger NGOs and local authorities were slightly slower in their ability to react to the crisis, but were still able to develop examples of innovative procedures. Our case study addresses a project, 'Helsinki helpline' where different stakeholders came together in Helsinki (the capital of Finland) to enable those over 70 years of age to receive assistance in grocery shopping, getting their medication, and having the opportunity for mental support over the phone during spring of 2020.

The city of Helsinki provided resources and employees, whose regular assignments were on hold. The Evangelical-Lutheran congregations (the majority church in Finland, almost 70% of Finns are members, even if fewer in the Helsinki region) of Helsinki similarly offered employees and pools of volunteers. The premises of local congregations were used as centers for organizing the grocery and medicine deliveries. Various NGOs came along with their expertise and volunteers. Businesses offered telephone systems for carrying out the extensive operation of organizing the calls to all residents over 70 years of age as well as cars for carrying out the deliveries. During spring and summer 2020 almost 70 000 calls and 6500 grocery or medicine deliveries were made.

Although cities have collaborated with congregations, NGOs, and businesses before, such an extensive cooperation project is rather unique in Finland where the core of the welfare system in many ways focuses on the government, local authorities, and tax-funded welfare services. Tommi Laitio, the executive director of culture and leisure at the city of Helsinki, whose role was central in starting the Helsinki helpline, stated: "One central thing to learn from the Helsinki helpline is that the city officials can admit that other organizations and individual citizens have skills and resources that the city does not have. That there are problems in which the city officials need help from others, and that the city can not cope alone" (Grönlund & Mäenpää, 2021).

This was a great initiative of different stakeholders coming together to help those in a vulnerable position. It hopefully leads to more extensive collaboration, benefitting from the strengths and resources of different organizations and city residents, also in the new normal.



Helsinki helpline, delivering commodities.
City of Helsinki / Material Bank, photographer: Paula Virta (2020).
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6. Conclusion

In this section we briefly summarize the findings about Finns' generosity behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic and elaborate potential implications both for government policy and NGO management.

6.1 Key Findings

There are two key findings from this report. First, generosity manifested in diverse ways during the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland. A vast majority of respondents had helped others during spring and summer 2020, especially in ways which one can carry out in the everyday, outside organizations. The most common ways of helping were (a) informal helping of someone one knows (66% of respondents), (b) giving money to someone in need who one personally knows (42%), and (c) continuing paying people or businesses for services they were unable to deliver due to restrictions (28%). Organized forms of generosity behaviors were less common, with donating money to charity being the most common (26%).²

Second, people were eager to help others, and many stated their willingness to help others had increased. However, helping others was also difficult, as restrictions disallowed many volunteering opportunities and interacting with people more generally.

6.2 Implications for Nonprofits

Results suggest that motivation to help and behave generously is strong during crisis. People particularly want to help the people they know, but they also wish to help others in need and to promote communality and solidarity in their communities. NGOs – especially together with local authorities – are central in enabling this.

During times of crisis NGOs can:

- As quickly as possible offer new ways to participate and to volunteer, such as promoting online volunteer opportunities and outdoor activities. This is not easy; research has indicated the challenges of human-to-human connection online, particularly with more sensitive issues, such as needs of help (e.g., a Finnish report by Seppänen & Spännäri & Pessi, 2020). Thus, for instance, volunteers not only need to be recruited but also to be carefully supported in their wellbeing and self-compassion.
- Furthermore, NGOs can communicate volunteering and donation needs and opportunities to a wider audience.
- Map needs, ideas, and successful ways of acting at the grass-roots level, across the affected communities and groups of people they work with, and actively communicate these needs and ideas to governments and local authorities.
- Communicate information (e. g. about restrictions) to the communities they work with, as NGOs are usually known and trusted among the people they work with.
- Even more widely in society, NGOs can also be central in providing a sense of safety, communality and solidarity for all citizens, if they communicate about opportunities to receive as well as to give support. This is a crucial mindset for NGOs as it underscores their role not only in offering venues for generosity and for people coming together, but also in promoting and maintaining the rhetoric and discourse of generosity in the society.

6.3 Implications for Government Policy

Results suggest that government policies had a negative impact on people's generosity behaviors. People volunteered less, partly due to restrictions, and lacked opportunities to carry out their motivation to help those in need. This of course implies an unused resource, but lack of opportunity to act also affects individuals' and communities' sense of agency and feeling of communality, and through that impairs their resilience.

During times of crisis, and to prepare for them, governments can:

- Facilitate cross-sector collaboration and communication in 'normal' times to ensure preparedness in times of crisis. This will enable governments to take advantage of the innovation, skills, knowhow, resources (e. g. pools of volunteers), and networks of NGOs, businesses, and local residents, as well as their motivation to engage in generous behaviors in times of crisis.
- Acknowledge how needs may vary across geographic locations and sub-groups of the community, and collaborate with local organizations and individuals, who have knowledge about and access to these locations and sub-groups. For example, NGOs, religious communities, and local groups and individuals can be central in reaching and supporting hard-to-reach populations, as they have access and trust among these populations.
- Support people who are (a) in a particularly vulnerable position (homeless, undocumented migrants, people suffering from substance abuse, the elderly), (b) without close social networks, or (c) without digital skills or access to digital services. Research in Finland has shown that people in the most vulnerable position have suffered from the COVID-19 crisis the most (Koponen, Liukko, and Muurinen, 2020), and that people who do not have access to on-line information and digital services, have felt isolated and abandoned (Mäenpää, 2021). This is also reflected by the results presented in this report that show individuals have primarily supported people they already know. Generosity easily adds up in areas where social connections and mutual generosity already exist. Governments need to try to reach those who are easily left on the margins.
- Coordinate – and help NGOs too to coordinate by securing their resources and the continuity of their work – generosity behaviors to make them effective in times of crisis. Governments and local authorities can also direct generosity behaviors to challenges, issues, geographic locations, and sub-groups of the community where they are needed the most. As especially organized forms of generosity are segregated across socio-economic groups (e. g. Sipola & Grönlund, 2019), governments should together with NGOs and community partners also make sure people in less advantaged situations have opportunities to do their part and help others. This is central for wellbeing and resilience, during crises as well as more generally.
- Utilize social media and establish it as a strategic part of crisis protocol. According to research (Mäenpää, 2021) social media was central in local communication and finding information about needs for philanthropic behavior during the pandemic. Even city employees viewed social media central in gaining local information in the beginning of the pandemic. Social media was also central in keeping up good spirits, showing solidarity, and organizing activities.

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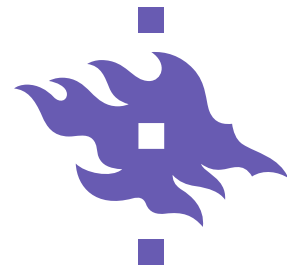
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8. Appendix

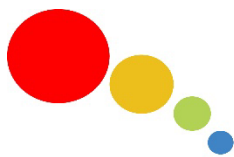
8.1 Notes

1. A full overview of generosity behaviors can be found on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/mznqu/>).
2. Due to unusual outliers, the data has been winsorized for two countries at the 99th (Australia) or 95th (Russia) percentile.



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