

weltwärts 

Findings of the
2020 weltwärts programme
volunteer survey (North-South)

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Dear reader,

This report presents the findings of the eighth annual volunteer survey for the weltwärts programme (North-South). This year, the survey looked at the volunteers who completed service between 16 November 2019 and 15 November 2020. The survey was again conducted by Umfragezentrum Bonn.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the previous years' positive results were corroborated in the latest survey, with 94% of respondents stating that they were satisfied with their voluntary service. In some cases, the satisfaction ratings for preparation for service and support for volunteers were higher than ever before. These extremely positive results confirm that the weltwärts programme meets the needs of young adults, even in difficult times, and that the organisations responsible in Germany and overseas implement the development volunteers' service to optimum effect.

In 2019/2020, there were around 3,300 volunteers on the weltwärts programme, all of whom had to return to Germany in spring 2020 due to the pandemic. 1,878 volunteers participated in this year's survey, putting the response rate at 58%. We would like to thank everyone who participated in or supported the survey.

The volunteer survey helps ensure that the programme constantly evolves as a development learning and exchange service for the volunteers and the participating organisations in the Global North and South. To ensure comparability across the years, it was decided that no changes should be made to the survey despite the extraordinary situation triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The repatriation operation in spring 2020 and the programme-wide crisis-management activities have been evaluated separately.

The quality criteria for the development volunteers' service are set out in the funding guideline for the weltwärts programme and the weltwärts quality standards.

The survey's very positive findings strengthen us in our resolve to continue our efforts. Moreover, they are testimony to the weltwärts stakeholders' successful, continuous work on the quality and impact of the programme and to their ability to pull together to overcome the major challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic posed last year. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone involved for their dedication and cooperation.

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Target group and participation rate

The target group of the latest survey comprised all weltwärts volunteers who completed their service in the twelve months between mid-November 2019 and 2020. The 2019/2020 cohort's voluntary service took place under extraordinary circumstances. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all North-South volunteers had to return to Germany in the spring of 2020, which was in the middle of their assignment for most of them, and were unable to complete their period abroad as planned. The majority were released from their duties after they arrived back in Germany. However, many took advantage of the opportunity to continue service in Germany in a development-related and/or SDG-related role.

1,878 volunteers completed the entire questionnaire and the evaluation for 2019 is based on their responses. At 58%, the response rate (see Figure 1) was thus just as high as the previous year despite the extraordinary circumstances of 2020.

The volunteers surveyed participated in the weltwärts programme through 141 different sending organisations and worked in 57 different countries. The most common destinations were South Africa, India, Peru, Bolivia and Ghana.

Survey population

The findings regarding the participant make-up largely correspond to those of previous surveys. It is therefore now possible to produce a very precise picture of the target group reached through the programme.

The volunteers surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 29¹ at the end of their period of service. The average age was just under 20 years.

It is still the case that most of the volunteers (83%) took part in the weltwärts programme straight after they finished their schooling. The majority of them (98%) held an "Abitur" or "Fachabitur" school-leaving qualification, permitting them to study at a university/university of applied sciences. At 2%, the share of volunteers with an intermediate school-leaving qualification or a qualification from a "Hauptschule" remains small. This year again, 12% of the volunteers said they already had a qualification. In most cases, this was a higher education degree (8%). 3% had completed training within Germany's "dual system" and a further 3% had completed another form of education.

There continue to be more women participating in the weltwärts programme than men: 69% of the target group for the 2020 volunteer survey were female. The gender breakdown among the survey participants was roughly the same: 72% identified as female, 27% as male and 1% as other (see Figure 2).

The share of volunteers who have a "migrant background" as defined in the official statistics, or who come from immigrant families, has grown consistently (one percentage point per year) over the past three years and now stands at 15%.

Inclusion of people with an impairment or disability and removal of barriers to access remain important tasks for the weltwärts programme. The share of volunteers with a disability or impairment was 2.2%, as in the previous year.

¹ As a general rule, the weltwärts programme is open to young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 but the maximum age for prospective volunteers who have a disability or impairment is 35.

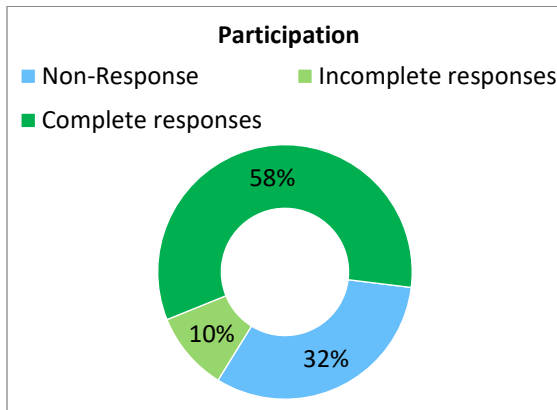


Figure 1: Response rate

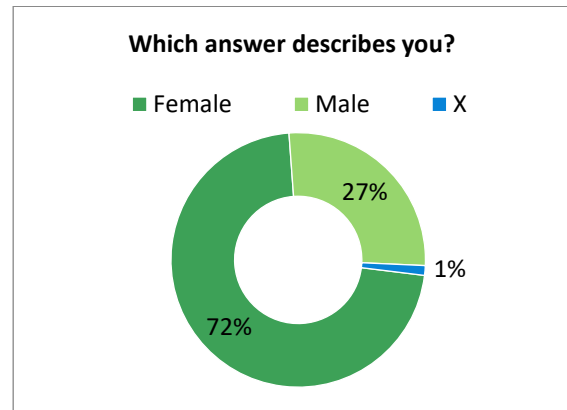


Figure 2: Gender identification

Satisfaction

Volunteers' overall level of satisfaction with their time on the weltwärts programme remains high. Even in the extraordinary circumstances of 2020, 94% were very or quite satisfied. Nonetheless, ratings of "very satisfied" were less common and "quite satisfied" more common than in previous years (see Figure 3).

All in all, these findings indicate that the weltwärts joint operation was successful in its efforts to provide satisfying volunteer service assignments, despite the difficult circumstances, even though the participants' personal wishes and expectations regarding a voluntary assignment abroad could not be completely fulfilled quite as often in the Covid-19 pandemic. The overwhelming majority still had a very positive view of weltwärts voluntary service overall, as shown in their continued high degree of willingness to recommend the programme to others. Two out of three volunteers (68%) were very likely to recommend volunteering with weltwärts to their friends.

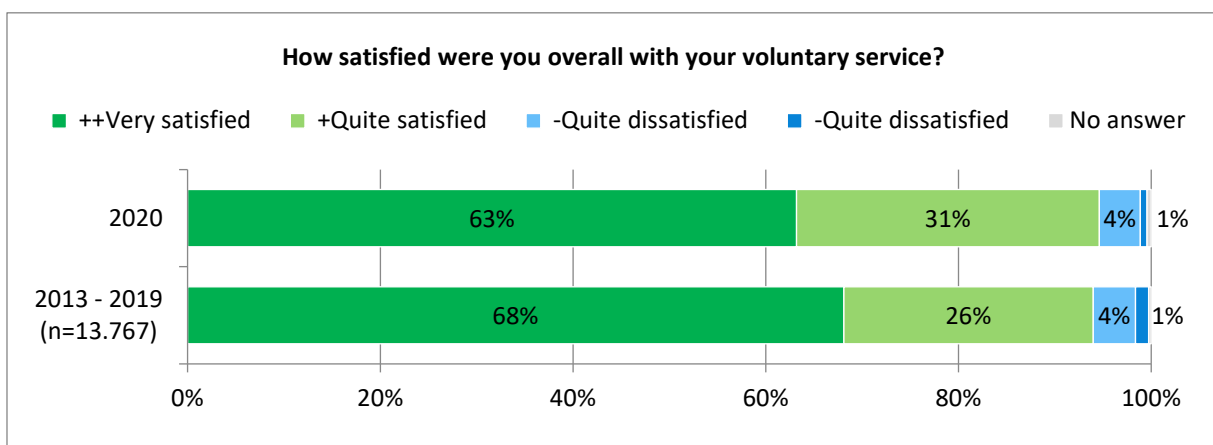


Figure 3: Overall satisfaction with time on weltwärts programme – Findings of the 2020 survey and combined findings for 2013-2019

Preparing for voluntary service

For several years now, the survey findings have confirmed that the sending organisations prepare weltwärts participants well for their voluntary service. This was particularly true of 2020 and is all the more remarkable because the crisis and emergency management procedures, which are included in the preparatory activities, had to stand the test of the very real conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The volunteers' feedback shows clearly that the sending organisations' preparation strategies worked well. 95% were very or quite satisfied overall with the support they received from their sending organisation during the preparation phase. Indeed, compared to the previous year, the share of "very satisfied" responses has increased (see Figure 4).

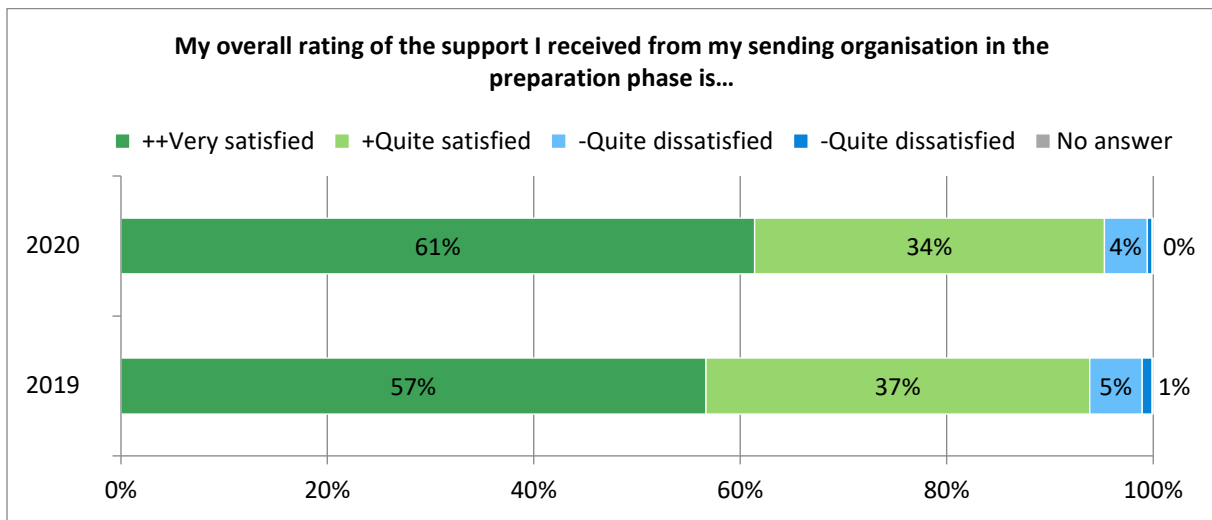


Figure 4: Satisfaction with support from the sending organisation during the preparatory phase

Overall, the ratings given in the 2020 survey were at least as good as in the last survey for all aspects of the preparation given for voluntary service (see Figure 5). In fact, in some categories, the good results achieved in previous years were actually surpassed. For instance, the share of volunteers who were very satisfied with the information on what to do in the event of an emergency or crisis in the country of assignment (55%) and the information concerning and contact data for the key contact people on the ground, e.g. the emergency cards, (74%) was higher than ever before. Generally speaking, satisfaction with the preparation given in the area of health and safety remained very high, with at least 89% of the volunteers stating they were very or quite satisfied.

Satisfaction with the support given with formal aspects of entry into and residence in the respective country (e.g. visas and residence permits) continues to be high. 92% were very or quite satisfied in this respect (see Figure 5).

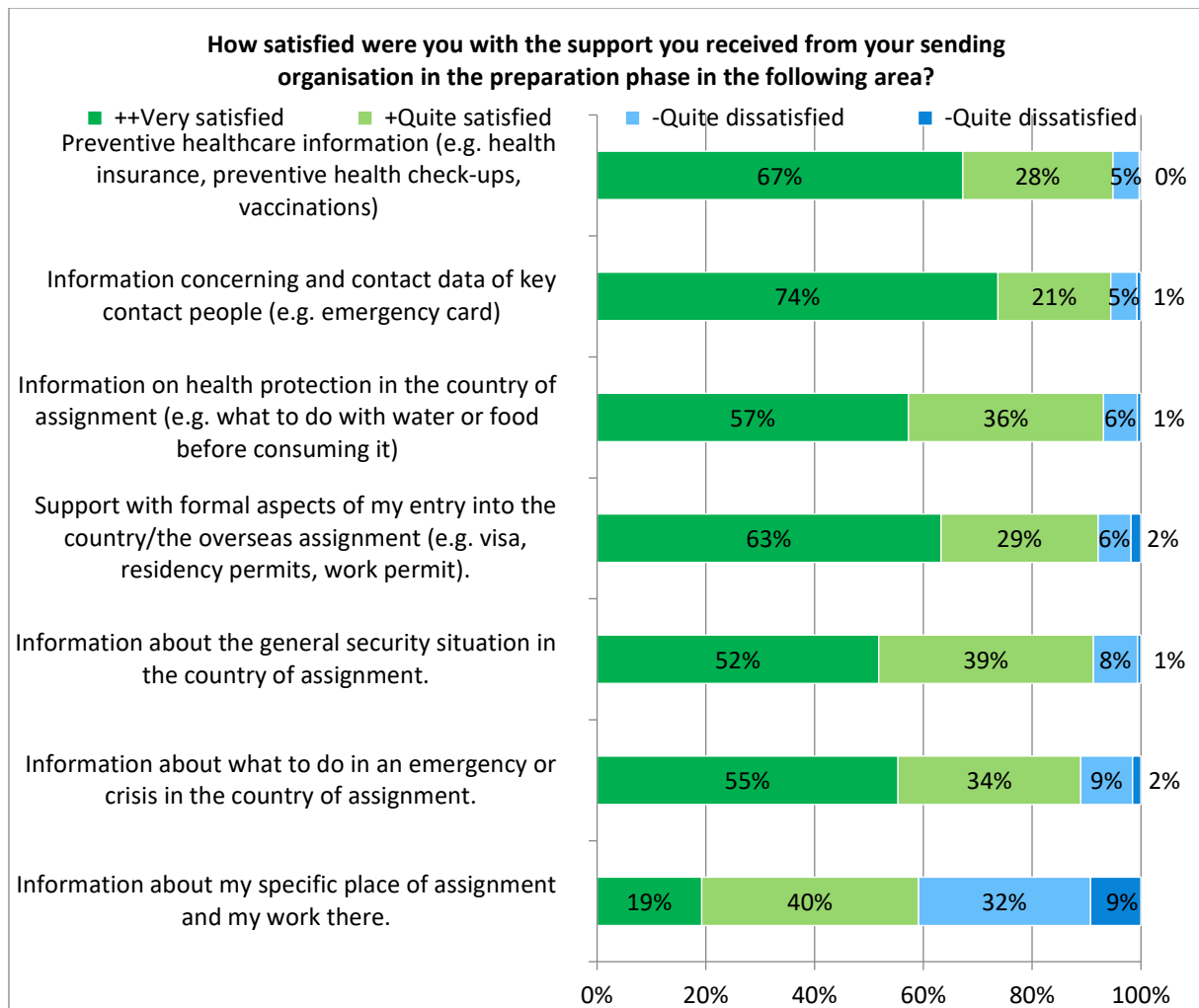


Figure 5: Volunteers' satisfaction with aspects of how they were prepared for their voluntary service

The annual surveys have shown that it is sometimes difficult during the preparatory phase in Germany to meet volunteers' need for information on their specific place of assignment and the work to be done there. In this year's survey, the respondents again gave this information category a lower rating than the other aspects of the preparation activities. Having said that, the trend in this area has been improving constantly in the past few years. The sending organisations are increasingly successful in meeting volunteers' expectations with regard to information about their place of assignment. While in the first survey in 2013 only half were very or quite satisfied, the latest findings show a significant rise to 59% (see Figure 5).

The latest survey also again revealed that almost all respondents had helped promote the work of the voluntary service in different ways before they left for their international assignment (99%). In most cases, this took the form of them drawing their friends' and families' attention to the voluntary service, their place of assignment, host country or development issues (84%). Surveys in recent years show that many volunteers take part in these pre-departure activities by collecting donations or helping to set up fundraising groups for the voluntary service. This applied to 75% of respondents in the latest survey – a decrease compared to the figures of between 78% and 81% in previous surveys.

Assignment in the host country

Satisfaction with place of assignment

The volunteers were very positive overall in their assessment of their places of assignment, with 88% very or quite satisfied. This was an increase of three percentage points on the previous year and the best result since the introduction of volunteer surveys. The volunteers were also very positive about the way in which they were socially integrated into their place of assignment and their contact with their colleagues. 82% were very or quite satisfied with this aspect. Their responses regarding opportunities for active involvement at the place of assignment were painted a similar picture, with 83% giving a rating of very or quite satisfied. Another aspect that remains unchanged is volunteers' satisfaction with their work content at their place of assignment. As in the previous year, a total of 77% were very or quite satisfied with this aspect (see Figure 6).

The latest surveys have shown that volunteers' overall impression of their place of assignment has increasingly improved. More and more volunteers feel their host organisation in the host country/their place of assignment was well prepared for their assignment. The latest survey findings in this respect are better than ever before, with 81% saying this was completely or quite true. Compared to the first volunteer surveys (2013 and 2014), this result has improved by a significant nine percentage points.

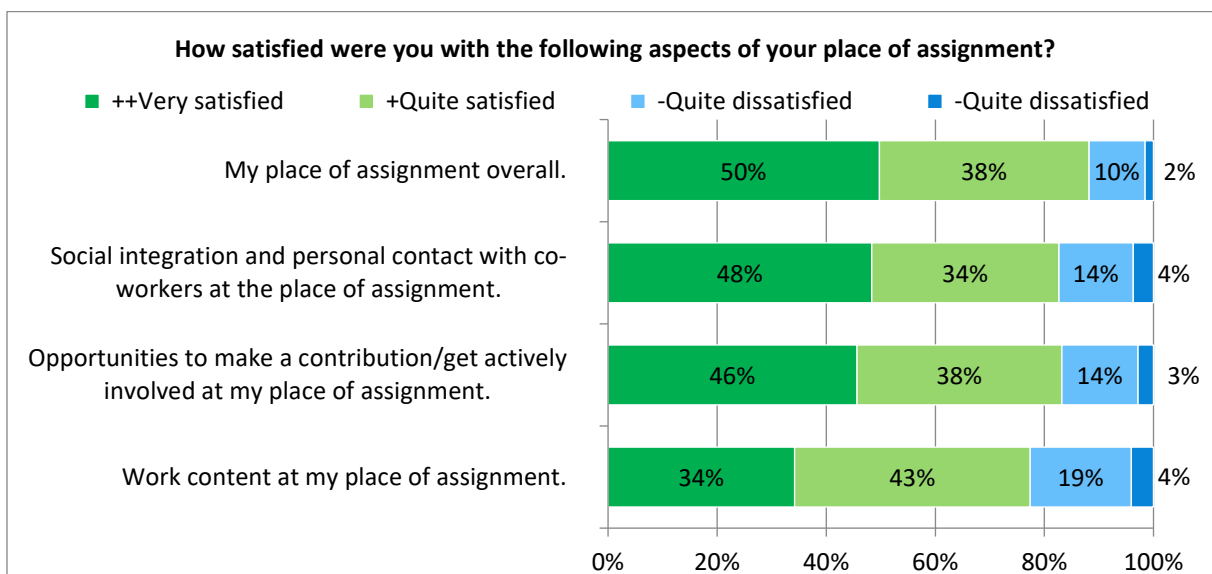


Figure 6: Volunteers' satisfaction with aspects of their place of assignment and their social integration outside of their place of assignment

Satisfaction with instruction at place of assignment and personal support

The feedback from the volunteers confirms that the introductory training and instruction given at the place of assignment has improved as the years have passed. In the latest survey, 75% (again significantly up on the previous year) confirmed that they had a contact person at their place of assignment who was there to give them instruction throughout their assignment. Since the first surveys (2014, 2015), when this was only true of 64% of respondents, the satisfaction rate has risen consistently. In the last two surveys, this positive trend is reflected in increasing satisfaction with the level of satisfaction with the instruction given. Last year's positive result of 67% has been surpassed, with 71% in this year's survey stating that they very or quite satisfied – higher than ever before (see Figure 7). As in previous surveys, where volunteers were

(quite) dissatisfied with the instruction given at the place of assignment, it was mostly because of a lack of a contact person or poor availability of the designated contact person.

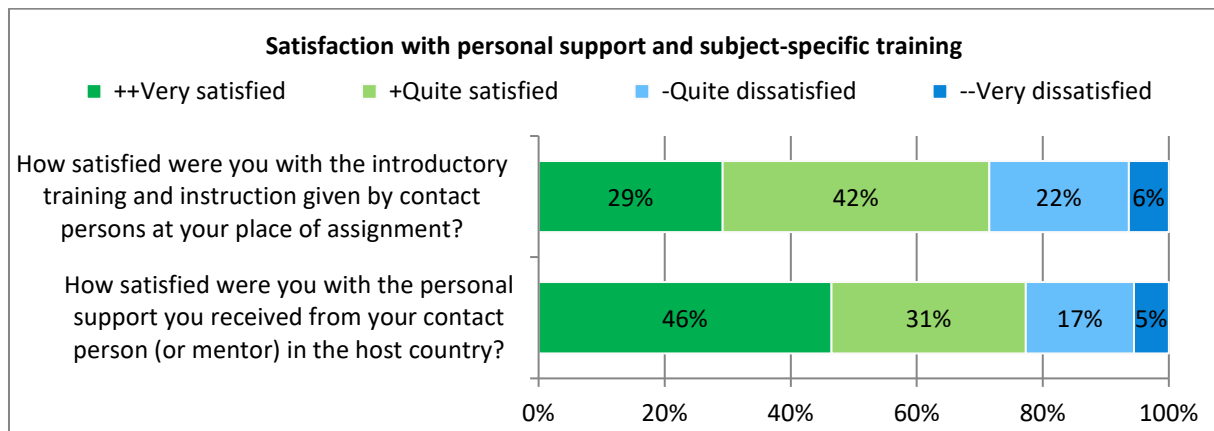


Figure 7: Satisfaction with the personal support provided during voluntary service overseas and the instruction given with regard to tasks at the place of assignment

The first volunteer surveys already made it clear that personal support (through mentors, for example) for the weltwärts volunteers during their overseas assignments was ensured in most cases. However, the findings of the latest surveys show a significant quality development in this area. Whereas three out of four (75%) of respondents in the 2014 and 2015 surveys confirmed that they had a contact person throughout their voluntary service whom they could contact for personal support, five out of six (84%) gave the same answer in the latest survey. As with the instruction given at the place of assignment, the latest survey shows that satisfaction with personal support during voluntary service was at an all-time high. 77% were very or quite satisfied with this aspect (see Figure 7). The previous year's figure was 71% and the figure in the first survey in 2013 was 68%. The volunteers who were quite or very dissatisfied gave similar reasons to previous surveys, i.e. the permanent or prolonged lack of a contact person (21%) or poor availability of the contact person in important situations (21%).

Social integration in host country

Whilst the volunteers continued to give positive assessments of their immediate working environment abroad – or even better assessments than in previous years – the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic are more visible in the level of satisfaction with social contact in the host country. In the latest survey, 75% were very or quite satisfied with their personal contact with people outside their immediate working environment. Since the figure in previous surveys was usually 80%, this shows that there has been a significant decline in this respect.

Safety and (potentially) dangerous situations

Ensuring volunteers' safety and health during their year abroad is extremely important for the weltwärts programme. Like the two previous surveys, the findings of the latest survey show that 46% did not have any negative safety-related experiences during their time abroad, i.e. they did not experience any situations they considered potentially threatening. Generally speaking, the Covid-19 pandemic did not result in more volunteers having a critical opinion of their time abroad in terms of their safety.

As in the past, when volunteers report dangerous situations, they are mostly situations that were subjectively seen as threatening without there necessarily being a real danger. In the latest survey, 44% mentioned situations of this nature. Cases of volunteers actually being threatened personally were even rarer than in previous years – 90% had not been confronted by such a situation. Cases of volunteers experiencing physical violence first hand remain rare (4%). At 21%, the share of volunteers who reported situations in which they were sexually harassed or threatened was similar to the previous year's level. Previous surveys have shown that women are confronted by this type of threat much more than men. In a similar finding to the previous year, 27% of the females stated that they experienced situations of this kind.

The feedback from the volunteers also confirms the particular importance the German sending organisations and host organisations attach to volunteers' safety when preparing them for and supporting them during their assignments. As in the previous years, most of the volunteers (92%) reported that they felt in (quite) good hands overall – despite these difficult situations – due to the support provided by their German sending organisation and the host organisation in the host country. Although men and women face different dangerous situations, their assessment of the support given in such critical situations is similarly positive. Moreover, there were no major changes in this category as compared to previous years, which would appear to show that the extraordinary circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic did not have any negative effect at all on the support provided to volunteers.

Education and mentoring

The education and mentoring activities provided for volunteers include compulsory preparatory, mid-term and returnee seminars. Whilst past surveys confirmed it was very rare for volunteers not to attend these seminars, the extraordinary implementing conditions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic led to slightly different results in some cases in the latest survey. While this was not true of the preparatory seminars (which all respondents attended), there was a substantial increase – to 5% - in the share of volunteers who did not attend a mid-term seminar. In the past, this figure was no more than 3%. On a positive note, however, 94% attended at least one mid-term seminar despite the pandemic and the fact that they returned to Germany in the middle of their period of service, which is when the mid-term seminars usually take place.

The impact on the returnee seminars was much more considerable. At the time of the survey, 84% of the volunteers had attended a returnee seminar – far less than previous years where the figure was always at least 90%. However, the reasons given by the volunteers who had not attended a returnee seminar at the time of the survey (14%) point very clearly to organisational aspects having played a role. In most cases, the seminar was yet to take place. Cases of volunteers not being offered a returnee seminar remained rare (16 volunteers out of 1,878).

The preparatory seminars were (very) useful for a combined total of 94% of volunteers (see Figure 8). At 57%, the share of volunteers who considered the preparatory seminar “very useful” was much higher than in the previous surveys where a maximum of 51% gave such a positive rating. Consequently, the overall assessment of the preparatory seminars in this year's survey was more positive than ever before.

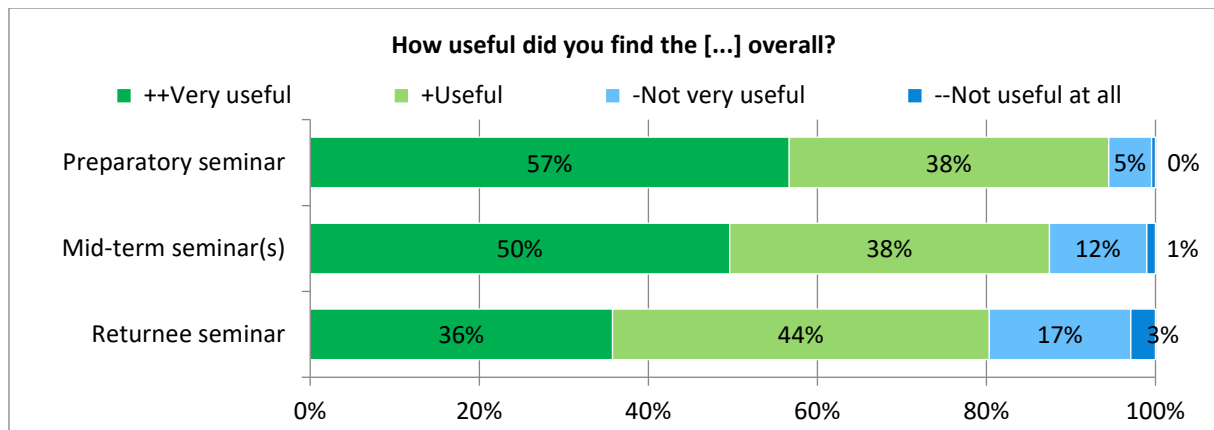


Figure 8: Assessment of the seminars on the weltwärts programme

Compared to earlier cohorts, more of the 2020 returnees considered the various aspects of the preparatory seminars (very) useful. The ratings for each aspect were better than ever before. 92% of the respondents rated the seminars as (very) useful in terms of preparation for dealing with development-related issues. The results for general requirements and the role of the volunteer (86%) and everyday life during voluntary service (71%) climbed two to three percentage points on the previous year.

The latest survey's findings for the mid-term seminars were similarly positive and also better than ever before. Overall, the mid-term seminars were (very) useful for 87% of the volunteers (see Figure 8). The previous year's figure was 83% and the result in the first survey (2013) was only 76%. Despite the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the volunteers continued to see a particular strength of the mid-term seminars in the opportunity they provide to share experiences with other volunteers. A combined total of 97% felt they were (very) useful for this purpose (compared to 96% in 2019). 91% said the seminars were (very) useful for reviewing what they had experienced so far during their voluntary service (compared to 89% in 2019). 82% (compared to 79% in 2019) felt the seminars were (very) useful as way of learning to handle challenges during their assignment. The seminars also received a higher rating to the previous year in terms of their usefulness for preparing to work with development issues: 71% (compared to 67% in 2019) considered their mid-term seminar to have been (very) useful in this respect.

Whilst the volunteers' assessment of the preparatory and mid-term seminars was even more positive than in previous years, the ratings for all aspects of the returnee seminars decreased considerably by at least five percentage points. 80% of the respondents stated that the returnee seminar was (very) useful (see Figure 8). In the past five years, the figure was always around 89%.

Like the mid-term seminars, the returnee seminars have previously received particularly positive ratings with regard to their usefulness as a way of sharing experiences with other volunteers. Most volunteers in the latest survey were equally positive, with 92% giving a "(very) useful" rating compared to the previous year's 98%. In addition, the volunteers stated that the returnee seminars were very or quite useful for...

- maintaining the contacts they made and networking with other people on the weltwärts programme (82% compared to 89% in 2019).
- reflecting on and reviewing their personal experiences during their overseas service (80% compared to 87% in 2019),

- finding out about ways to get involved in development work after returning to Germany (80% compared to 87% in 2019) and
- encouraging them to continue their active involvement in development work after their return (78% compared to 83% in 2019).

There is a particularly striking difference in the volunteers' assessment of how useful the returnee seminars were in terms of helping them re-acclimatise better in Germany upon return from assignment. 44% felt the seminar was (very) useful compared to the previous year's 63%. This may be due to the fact that, at the time of the returnee seminar, many of the volunteers had already been back in Germany for a long time having been repatriated because of the pandemic and not all returnee seminars were able to be conducted in person as they usually are.

Although most volunteers continued to be (very) satisfied with the post-assignment activities (73%), the satisfaction rate was still considerably lower than in the previous year (86%). This drop was partially due to more volunteers not being able to assess the overall post-assignment activities because they had not yet attended a returnee seminar. Of those who had, many more – in fact, the overwhelming majority – were (very) satisfied overall (82%). Nonetheless, this figure was also significantly lower than in 2019 (91%).

Global learning - weltwärts as a development learning service

The annual online survey is also intended to determine how participation in the weltwärts programme affects the volunteers. At the individual participant level, the focus is on the personal learning experiences gained from voluntary service. To this end, the survey asks volunteers to give an assessment of how they think their voluntary service has influenced various areas of their personal development.

The previous years' and the latest survey's findings reveal that voluntary service on the weltwärts programme is an enriching experience and the participants benefit personally in a variety of ways. This is true both of their personal skills and the knowledge they gain in the area of international development. The responses given in the 2020 volunteer survey with regard to how weltwärts influences various personal skills and general aspects of personal development are only moderately different to the findings of the previous surveys. The findings suggest that the volunteers were able to come away with similarly positive learning experiences and ample benefits despite the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the area of personal skills and development, the volunteers continue to see particularly positive effects on their own openness towards other cultures and people. A combined total of 95% saw a very or quite positive influence in this respect (compared to 94% in 2019). The vast majority also felt that volunteering with weltwärts had influenced their general personal development, with a total of 97% reporting a very or quite positive effect (compared to 95% in 2019). As in previous years, most volunteers saw (very) positive influences in terms of ability to think and act for oneself (94% compared to 93% in 2019). The respondents' opinions varied a little more (and were also very similar to previous years) when it came to the influence of their voluntary service with weltwärts on their general career choice. 61% considered it quite to very positive (compared to 60% in 2019) (see Figure 9).

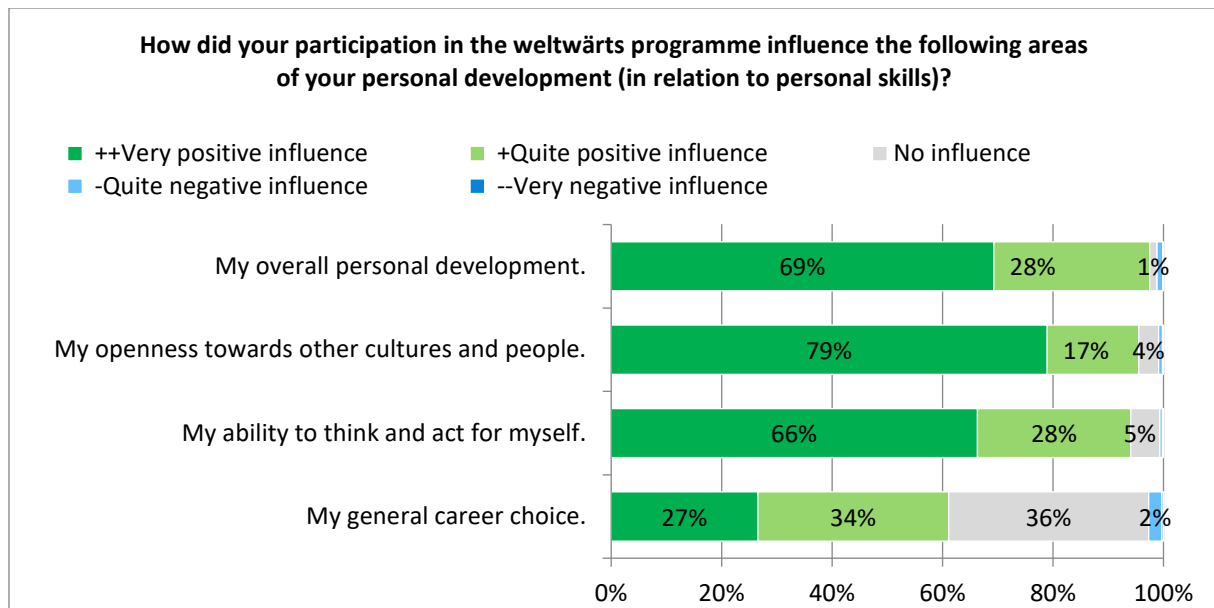


Figure 9: Volunteers' assessment of how voluntary service influenced the development of their personal skills

The volunteers in the 2020 survey also benefited at least as much as those in past years in terms of development-related aspects. In a similar result to the previous year, a total of 94% felt that their participation in the weltwärts programme had a very or quite positive influence on their global awareness (compared to 95% in 2019).

The answers given concerning the influence of voluntary service on volunteers' interest in development issues and their motivation to play an active role in society were almost unchanged on the previous year. Just over 90% observed a (very or quite) positive influence for both of these aspects. 91% also saw a (very) positive effect with regard to interest in social and political issues - higher than the already very good ratings of the past and the top result so far (up from 89% in 2019).

Past surveys had shown that a substantial share of the volunteers felt that participating in the weltwärts programme had a positive impact in terms of their specific interest in a career in development cooperation or other development areas. The feedback from the last survey indicated a slightly negative trend but this was not confirmed in the latest survey. In a similar result to the 2013-2018 surveys, 52% stated that their participation in weltwärts had had a (very) positive effect in this respect (see Figure 10).

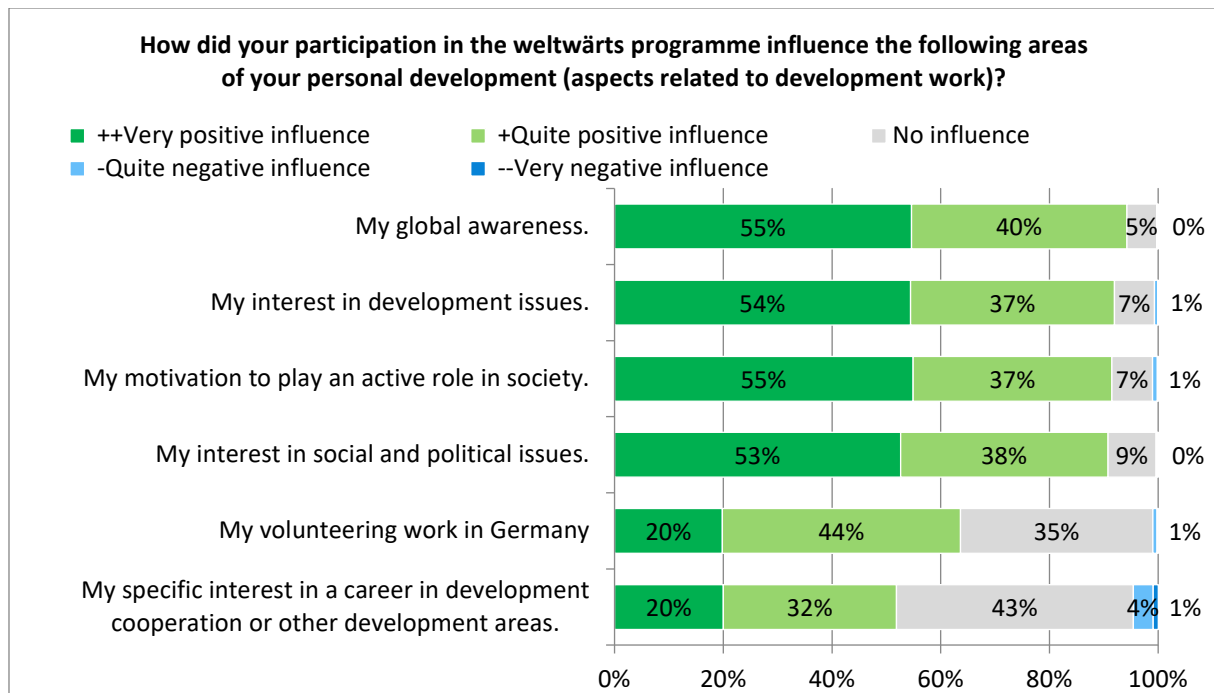


Figure 10: Volunteers' assessment of how voluntary service influenced them personally with regard to development-related aspects

In addition to the impact of voluntary service at the individual level, the survey is intended to gather information on the indirect impact on volunteers' families and friends. To this end, new questions were added for the latest survey to cover precisely this aspect. The findings show that almost all volunteers told their families and/or friends in Germany about their time abroad either during or after their voluntary service (99%). This confirms that almost all participants on the weltwärts programme share their experiences with people in Germany. A large number felt that their friends and family gained an impression of people's lives in their country of assignment as a result of them telling them about their assignment. This was completely true or quite true for 94% of respondents. Furthermore, roughly two out of three believed that they had helped their friends and family develop a higher degree of global awareness through their conversations about their voluntary service. 69% felt this was completely or quite true. The majority (59%) also stated that it was completely or quite true that their conversations about their voluntary service had an effect on their friends' and families' motivation to support their (continued) post-assignment voluntary work. However, more than a third were more sceptical about this point and assumed it was quite or completely untrue (39%) (see Figure 11).

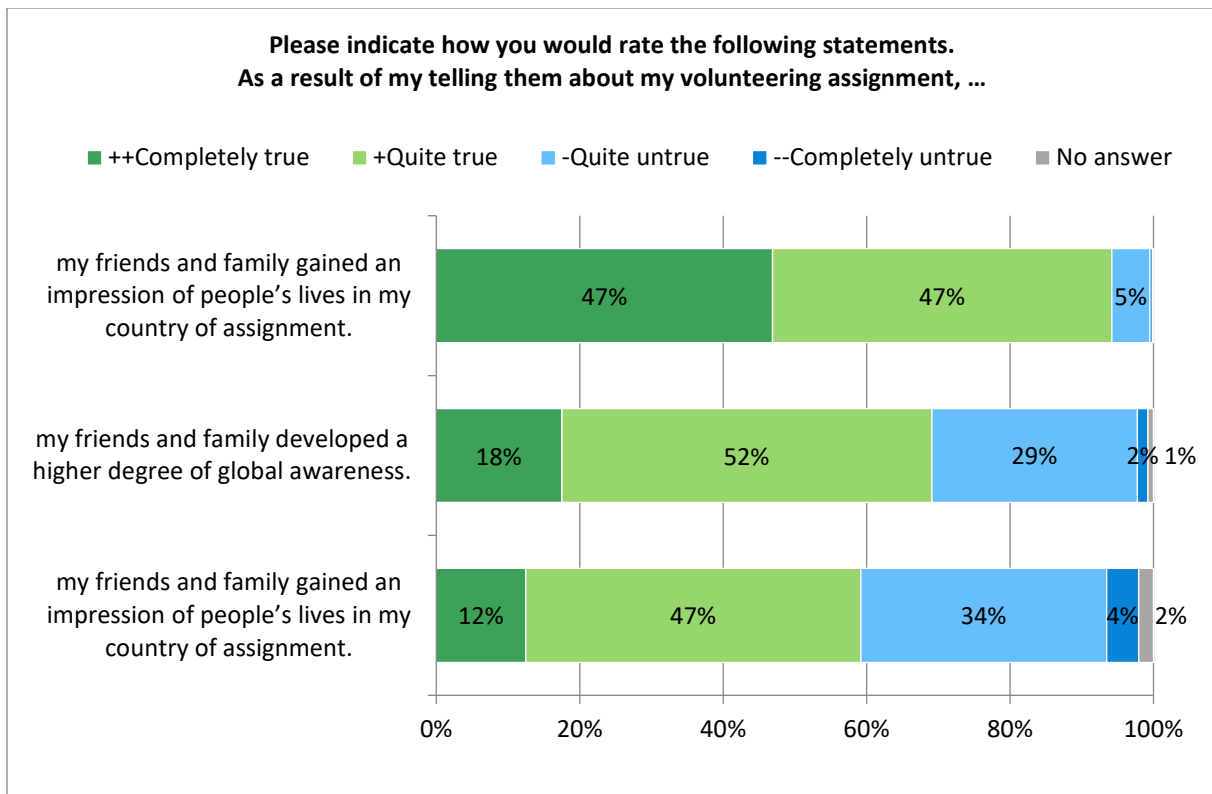


Figure 11: Indirect impact of voluntary service on family and friends

Returnee engagement in volunteering activities

For some years now, the survey has asked respondents how their voluntary service had affected their volunteering activities in Germany after their return. Unlike all the other development-related aspects of voluntary service, a slightly negative trend was observed for this area in the latest survey. 64% felt weltwärts had a very or quite positive influence on their willingness to continue volunteering (compared to 70% and 68% respectively in 2018 and 2019) (see Figure 10).

The latest survey again shows a high level of returnee willingness to volunteer and actual volunteering activity²: 37% were engaged in volunteer work (again) at the time of the survey. 27% were very certain that they would engage in voluntary work in the future and a further 21% felt it was at least probable. This means that both the share of returnees who were engaged in volunteering activities and the share that very probably would be at some time in the future (84% in total) were just as high as in 2019. This is all the more remarkable in view of the Covid restrictions. There were still only very few who said that they would probably or definitely not engage in voluntary work in the future (2%) (see Figure 12).

² For this question, "voluntary work" was defined as any unpaid activity for the common good – not only in the area of development.

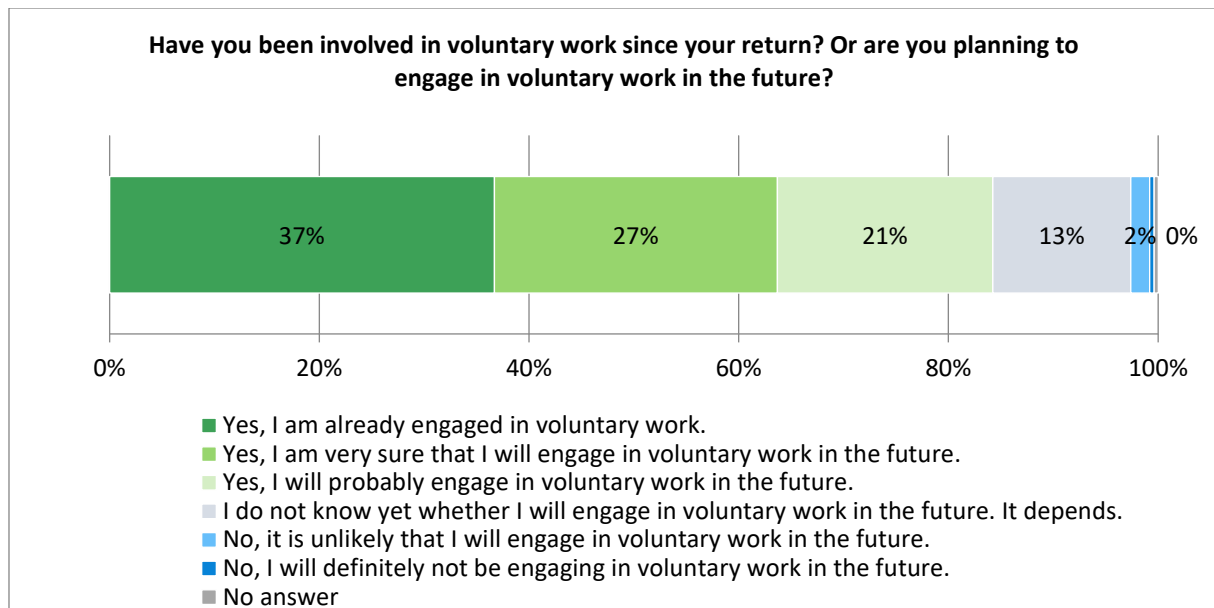


Figure 12: Post-assignment voluntary work

The fields in which returnees were already engaged in voluntary work or showed an interest in volunteering in the future are very diverse. Generally speaking, the most common ones are very similar to those reported in previous years. The key areas of returnee volunteering continue to be work with children and young people, for sending organisations, in the church/religious sector, environmental protection/conservation/climate protection/animal welfare and anti-racism/asylum/migration-related work.

The latest survey shows a significant difference in the number of fields in which returnees volunteer. In 2018 and 2019, returnees typically volunteered in at least three different areas but the latest survey result was two areas. It can be assumed that the current Covid-related situation does not necessarily have an impact on whether returnees engage in volunteering or not but it does have a negative effect on the number of areas in which they can volunteer.

This influences the share of volunteers who are active in at least one area that can be subsumed under the heading “Global citizenship”³ – a category of topics that are of particular relevance to the weltwärts programme. The latest survey findings again point to a clear thematic focus in weltwärts returnees’ engagement in voluntary activities but the share who were active in at least one of these fields was 77% as compared to 81% in the past two years (see Figure 13).

Returnees who were not yet engaged in voluntary work displayed a particularly high level of interest in the areas of environmental protection/conservation/climate protection/animal welfare, the anti-racism/asylum/migration-related work, human rights, work with children and young people, work for their sending organisation, gender/gender equality work, development education and development cooperation. At least 30% of the returnees potentially willing to engage in voluntary work in the future are interested in doing so in these areas, indicating

³ This category included development cooperation, development education, work for the sending organisation, work for the host organisation overseas, international exchanges/relations, human rights, environmental protection/conservation/animal welfare/climate protection, anti-racism/asylum/migration, inclusion/work with persons with a disability, gender/gender equality and poverty/rooflessness/homelessness. The areas considered relevant for the concept of global citizenship were chosen by Engagement Global.

similar interests as in past surveys. However, the range of interests and number of topics chosen are also smaller. In 2018 and 2019, most returnees were interested in six areas but the number in the latest survey was five. This decrease also caused a slight drop to 94% (compared to 97% in the previous two years) in the interest displayed in a topic from the global citizenship category (see Figure 13).

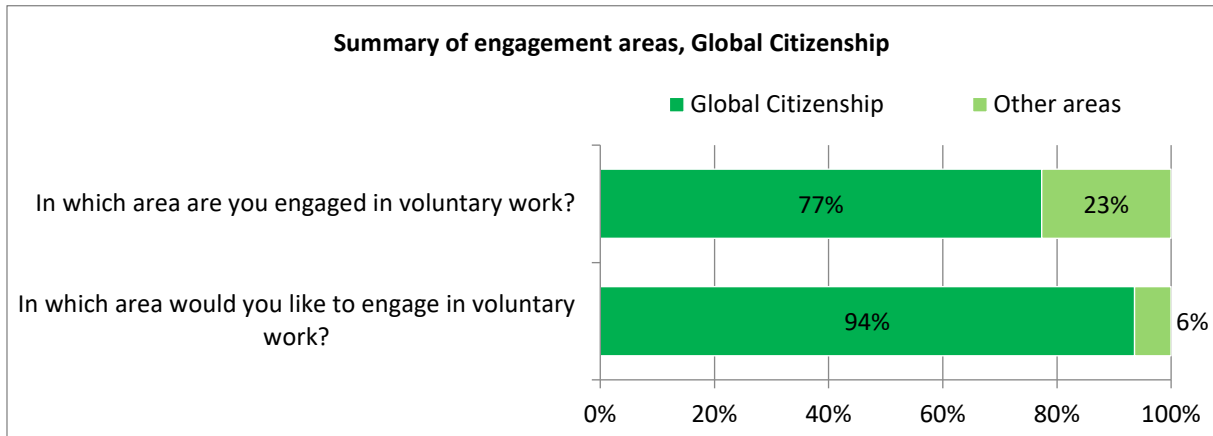


Figure 13: Current volunteering activity and interest in volunteering in the global citizenship category

The latest survey again shows a continued high level of interest among weltwärts returnees in a career in development cooperation. Only 16% were not interested in this field of work. By contrast, a total of 81% *were* interested in a career in development cooperation abroad and/or in Germany (see Figure 14).

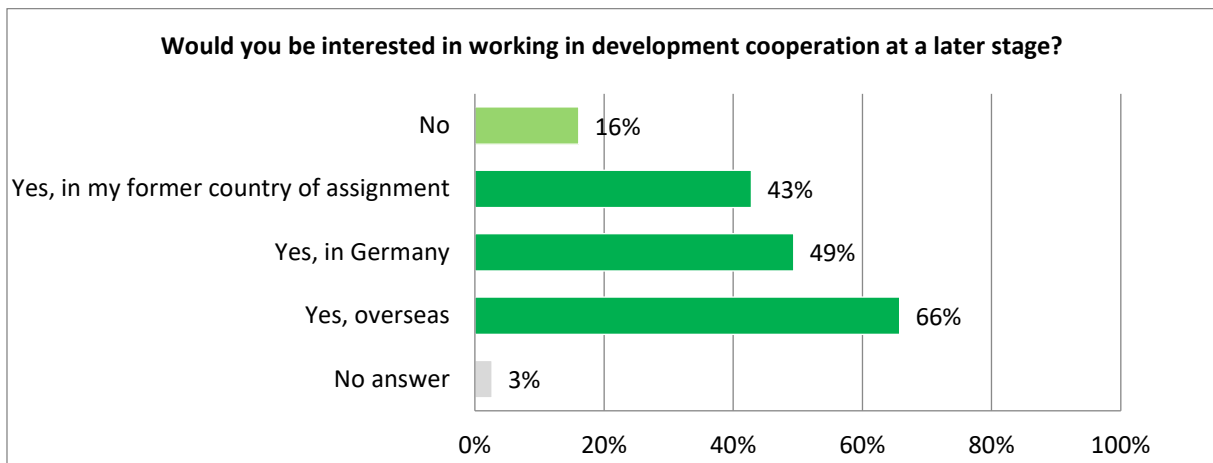


Figure 14: Interest in working in development cooperation in the future⁴

⁴ Apart from the “No answer” option, multiple answers were possible.