

weltwärts 

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

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Dear reader,

This report presents the findings of the second annual volunteer survey for the South-North component of the weltwärts programme. The survey, again conducted by Umfragezentrum Bonn, was aimed at all weltwärts South-North volunteers who had completed service in Germany between 16 November 2019 and 15 November 2020.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the findings of the latest survey reinforce those of the pilot survey. 94% of the respondents in the latest survey were satisfied with their voluntary service. Record figures were achieved in the areas of working relationship with the place of assignment and volunteers' social integration. The very 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 abroad implement the development volunteers' service to optimum effect.

2020 saw more than 500 volunteers from the Global South on assignment in Germany. Of them, 209 took part in this year's survey, putting the response rate at 41%. We would like to thank everyone who took part or supported the process.

The volunteer survey helps ensure the programme constantly evolves as a development learning and exchange service for the volunteers and 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 quality of the development volunteers' service is measured on the basis of the *Guideline for the development volunteers service "weltwärts"* 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

Following last year’s pilot survey, the second volunteer survey to be conducted in the South-North component of the weltwärts programme was aimed at all participants who had completed their voluntary service in Germany in the 12 months between mid-November 2019 and mid-November 2020. The 2019/2020 cohort’s voluntary service took place under extraordinary circumstances. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of South-North volunteers had to suspend their assignments in spring 2020 because their work involved contact with members of risk groups. Many of them also took advantage of the opportunity to extend their period of service in Germany since international travel was restricted for a prolonged time.

Volunteers can choose between five different languages in which to complete the survey (English, Spanish, French, Russian or German).

The respondents came from 47 countries and took part in the weltwärts programme through 55 different host organisations in Germany. As in the previous year, the countries most represented were Colombia (9%), India (7%), Mexico and Uganda (5% each). The feedback from the 209 volunteers who completed the entire survey formed the basis of the data evaluation process. The participation rate was thus 41% (see Figure 1). The participation rate was thus just as high as in the first survey last year despite the circumstances that prevailed in 2020.

The findings concerning the survey population largely correspond to those of the pilot survey, providing an even clearer picture of the target group reached by the programme. 51% of the respondents identified as female, 41% as male and 6% as “diverse” (see Figure 2). Since willingness to participate in the survey was similarly high in all gender groups, the respondent gender breakdown reflected the overall volunteer gender breakdown very well.

The volunteers surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 31 at the end of their assignment in Germany; the average age was 24. The survey population had a high level of formal education, with 58% already having completed a course of study (BA, MA or similar). A further 19% had a school-leaving qualification that allowed them to study at a university. Many of the participants were attending a course of study before their assignment in Germany (37%) or were mainly in gainful employment (34%). Post-assignment, the situation was very similar, with 32% commencing a course of study and 27% mainly in gainful employment.

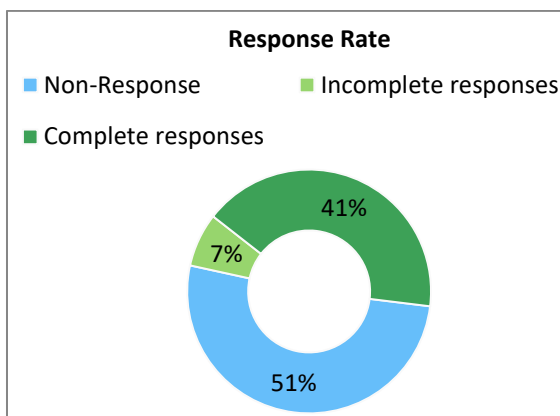


Figure 1: Response rate

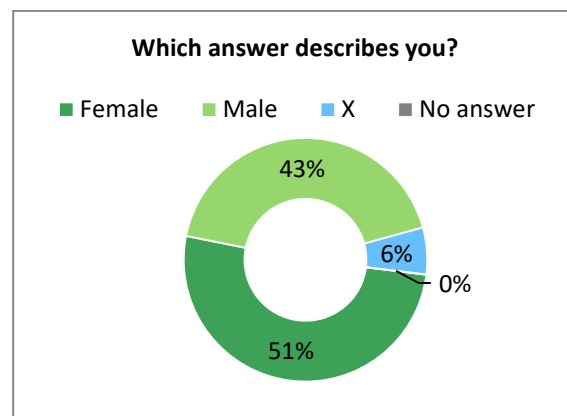


Figure 2: Gender identification

Inclusion of people with an impairment or disability and removal of barriers to access are important tasks for the weltwärts programme. In the latest survey, 2% stated that they had a disability or medical conditions, including physical and mental health.

Since equal participation is a very important topic for the weltwärts programme, the survey addresses the question of whether volunteers faced particular difficulties during their assignment directly linked to personal aspects (e.g. gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical or psychological state).<sup>1</sup> The findings were almost identical to the previous year's, with 78% saying that they did not feel there had been any specific challenges of this kind in their case (79%). However, 19% of the respondents stated that they *had* faced particular challenges of this nature.

## Satisfaction

As in the previous year, volunteers' overall satisfaction with their time on the weltwärts programme is very high. 94% of respondents from the South-North component were (very) satisfied with their voluntary service ( see Figure 3). This result indicates that the programme was successful in its efforts to provide satisfying volunteer service assignments even in the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. Willingness to recommend voluntary service with the weltwärts programme to friends also remains high, with two out of three volunteers considering it very likely that they would do so.

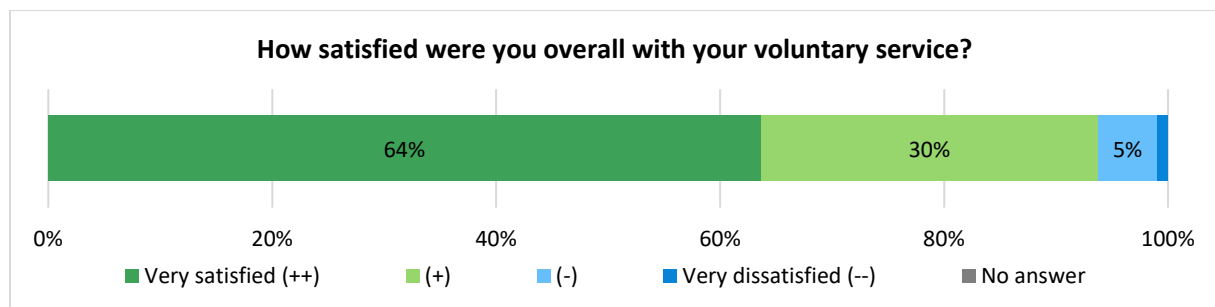


Figure 3: Overall satisfaction with time on weltwärts programme

## Preparing for voluntary service

The findings of the latest survey corroborate those of the pilot survey. They show that participants in the South-North component of the programme are given good preparation for their assignment in Germany. The results are on a similarly positive level to those of the pilot survey.

The volunteers' feedback shows that the partners involved manage to provide them with relevant information and support them in key areas. 94% confirmed that they received support with formal aspects of their journey/stay abroad, e.g. visa or residence permits, during the preparation phase. A total of 88% said it was true that they had been given information during the preparation phase on the requirements and their role as volunteers. The majority also confirmed that they had gained an initial idea of everyday life during the assignment in Germany (78%) and received information about their specific place of assignment and the work to be

<sup>1</sup> The question was worded to make it clear that it was not referring to general challenges faced during the assignment.

done there (81%). According to a total of 86%, it was true that the preparation had given them a good basis for further exploration of development-related issues (see Figure 4).

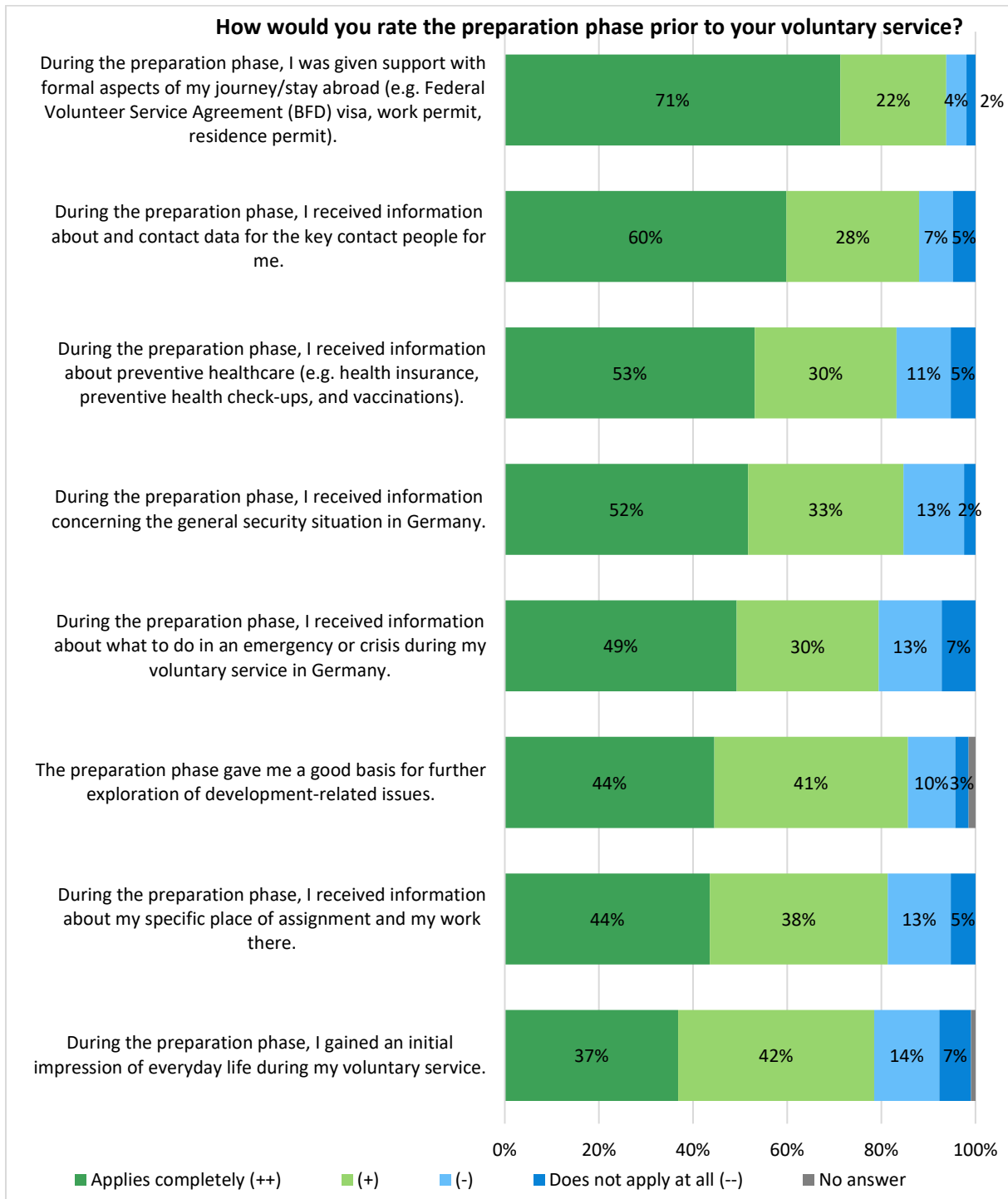


Figure 4: Assessment of information provision and support during preparation for assignment

88% of the respondents confirmed that, during the preparation phase, they received information on and contact data for the key contacts, thus providing an important basis for crisis management. 79% said it was true that they had received information in advance about what to do in the event of an emergency or crisis in Germany. This figure has not changed since the previous year’s survey, which is all the more positive considering the Covid-19 situation. 85% had received information about the general security situation in Germany and 83% information about preventive healthcare (e.g. health insurance) (see Figure 4).

The first volunteer survey in the South-North component had already shown clearly the high level of subjective satisfaction with the information, support and overall preparation given. The latest findings are equally positive, with between 86% and 92% stating that they were very or quite satisfied in this respect (see Figure 5).

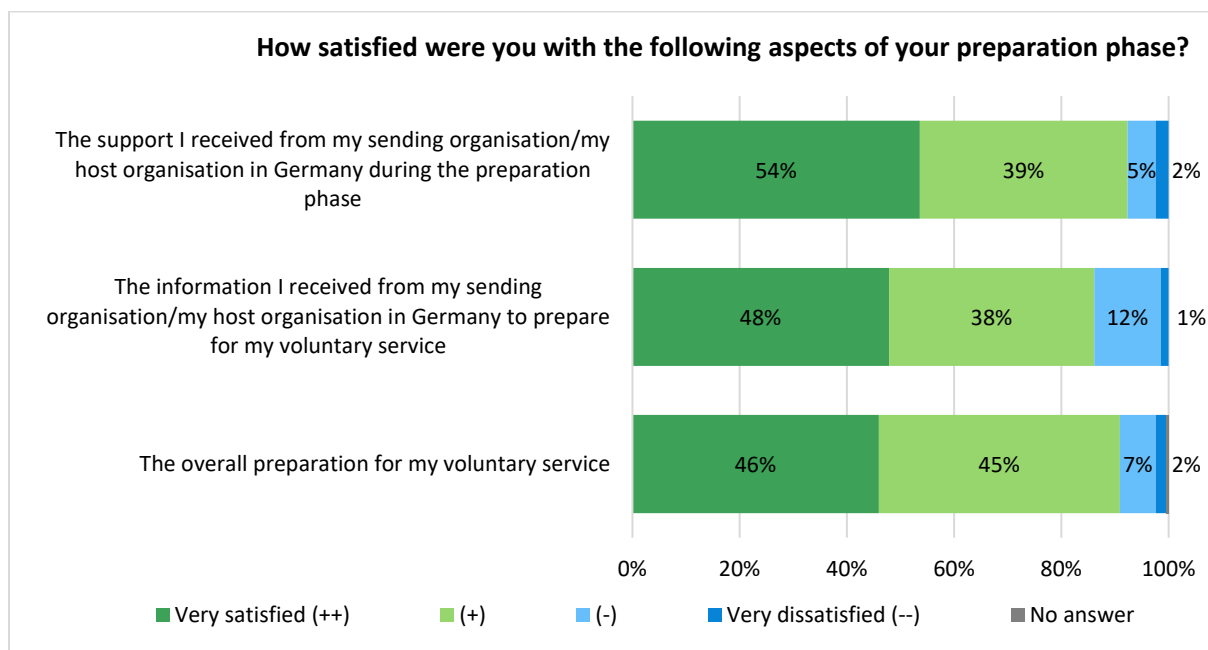


Figure 5: Satisfaction with preparation for assignment

## Time in Germany

### *Satisfaction with place of assignment*

All in all, the volunteers have a very positive impression of the places of assignment in Germany. This is confirmed in the latest survey results, which continue the positive trend. 90% were (very) satisfied with their place of assignment overall. The greater part of the survey population was also (very) satisfied with their work content at their place of assignment (86%) and with their social integration and contact with co-workers (88%) (see Figure 6).

The volunteers' feedback corroborates the very positive view of working relationships at places of assignment in Germany. The overwhelming majority confirmed that there were opportunities for active involvement at their place of assignment (89%) and that appreciation was shown for them and their work at the place of assignment (91%). A total of 86% felt that the place of assignment was well prepared for their stay/assignment and 88% said it was true that their voluntary service was appropriately supervised at their place of assignment.

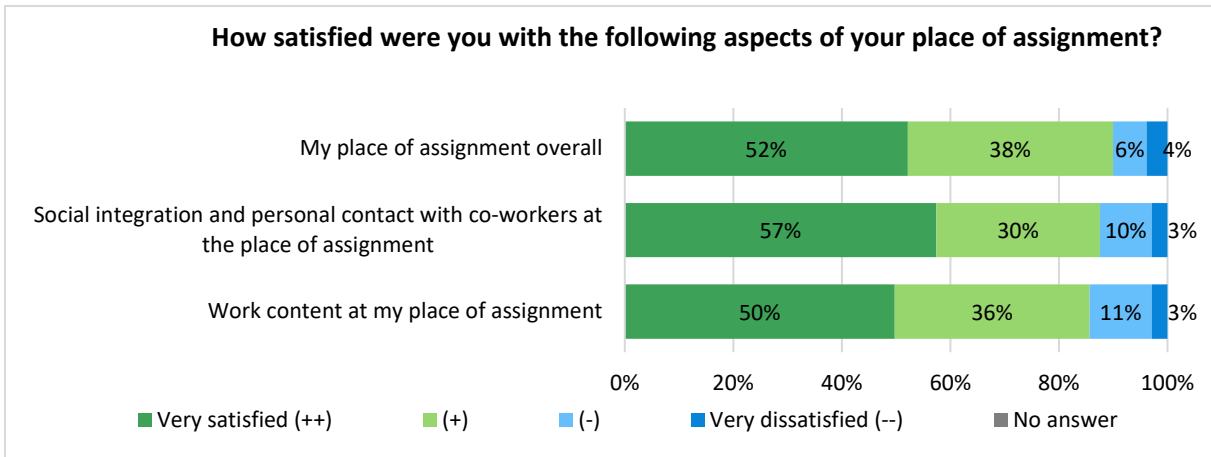


Figure 6: Satisfaction with places of assignment in Germany

*Satisfaction with instruction and personal support at place of assignment*

The first volunteer survey in the South-North component already showed that, for the most part, introductory training and instruction are ensured at the places of assignment. The latest survey confirms this, with 93% stating it was true that there were people at their place of assignment in Germany whom they could contact about questions relating to their day-to-day work. Volunteer satisfaction with the introductory training and instruction they received actually increased slightly, with 60% stating they were very satisfied (compared to 53% in 2019). At 95%, the total share of satisfied volunteers remained similarly high to the previous year (see Figure 7).

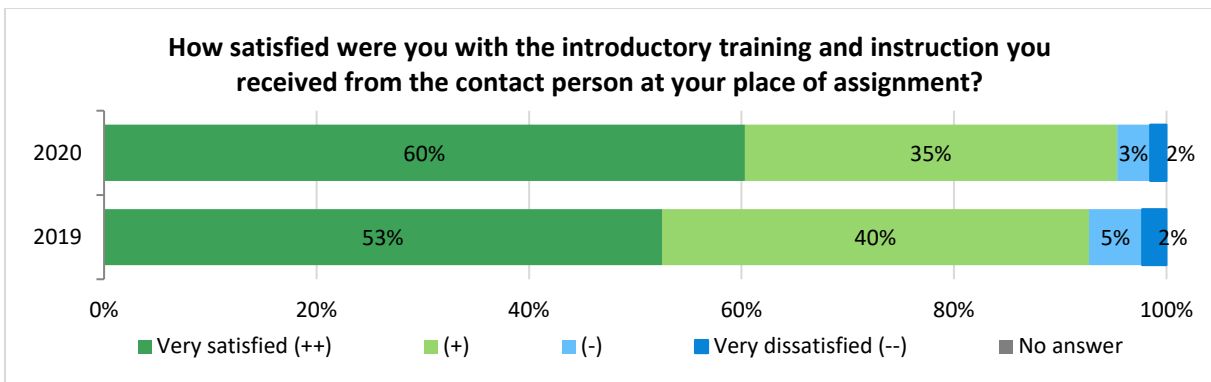


Figure 7: Satisfaction with introductory training and instruction at the place of assignment

As already shown by the pilot survey, personal support (through mentors, for example) for the weltwärts volunteers was ensured in most cases during assignment in Germany (97%). Only 6 out of 209 respondents stated that they did not have a contact person they could contact for personal support. The findings of the latest survey actually surpass the previous year’s very good satisfaction ratings in this category. Approximately one in three volunteers were very satisfied with the personal support they received (65%) and a combined total of 91% were very or quite satisfied (see Figure 8).

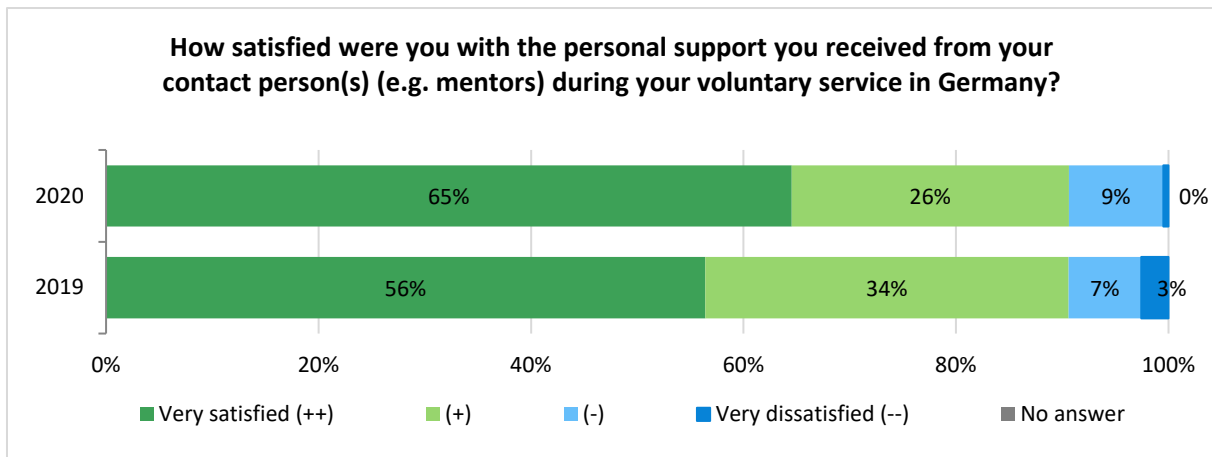


Figure 8: Satisfaction with personal support

## Communication

The first volunteer survey in the South-North component had already shown that, prior to their voluntary service in Germany, most participants had barely any knowledge of German. The latest survey again shows that around two out of three volunteers did not have any German skills or, at most, beginner skills (A1) when they commenced service. Almost all of them worked actively on improving their German before or during their assignment (98%), e.g. with the help of language courses. Volunteers' German skills improve significantly during their time in Germany, as can be seen even more clearly in the latest survey than in the previous year's. At the end of their assignment, three in four rated their German skills as at least intermediate (B1) or better (74%)<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 9). Last year this was only true of two in three (67%).<sup>3</sup> German is important as a means of communication during volunteers' assignments: it was the main language of communication at the place of assignment/in the working environment for 72% of volunteers. It was also the main language of everyday communication for 63%. One in four mainly communicated in English outside of work. Although their German skills improve considerably during their assignments, the majority of volunteers feel that communicating at their places of assignment and in everyday life in Germany is difficult. This view was held by around 60%.

<sup>2</sup> Differences compared to the chart are due to rounding.

<sup>3</sup> The reasons for this significant improvement in German-learning outcomes are unclear. The data does not indicate a link to the length of service in Germany nor to volunteers from the 2020 survey cohort having spent longer in Germany.



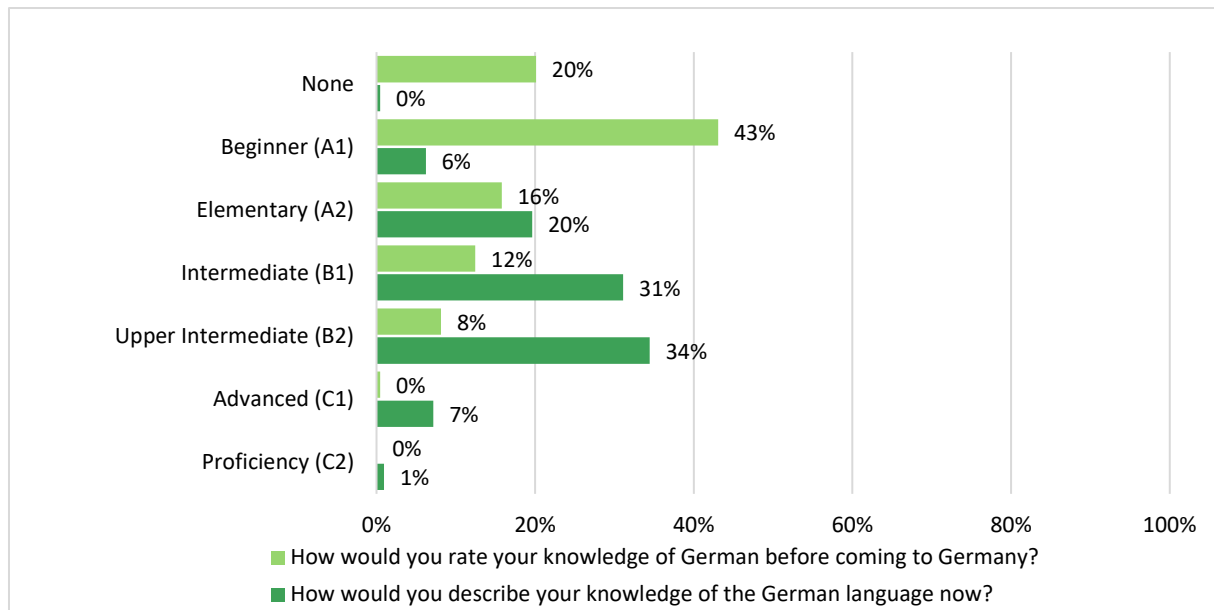


Figure 9: German skills before and after voluntary service

### *Social integration*

Despite the perceived communication difficulties, most volunteers were (very) satisfied with their social integration and personal/private contact with people in Germany (89%). This result surpassed the positive result achieved in the pilot survey, in which 84% were (very) satisfied with their social integration. The restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic were not, therefore, reflected in a lower degree of satisfaction with personal contact.

### *Safety and (potentially) dangerous situations*

Ensuring the safety and health of volunteers during their time in Germany is extremely important for the weltwärts programme. Like the pilot survey, the latest survey shows that the majority of volunteers in Germany did not have any negative safety-related experiences at all during their time in Germany, i.e. they did not experience any situations that they considered potentially threatening. The answers in the latest survey correspond largely to the findings of the previous year's survey. There are no significant changes. Generally speaking, the Covid-19 pandemic did not result in more volunteers taking a critical view of their time in Germany. Where volunteers did cite critical situations in Germany, they were mostly situations in which they experienced discrimination or threats of a racist nature. 26% reported situations of this type during their time in Germany. Men (33%) tend to experience these situations more often than women (21%) although the difference is not significant in statistical terms. In general, the number of cases in which volunteers experienced situations in Germany that they felt were threatening or dangerous was lower (12%) and that of situations in which they were actually threatened personally was lower still (5%). In total, 2% (n=5) of the survey population reported having experienced situations in which they were sexually harassed or threatened. This form of danger was only experienced by women. A few volunteers reported situations during their time in Germany in which they suffered physical violence (n=4).

As in the previous year's survey, the latest findings confirm that the preparation and support provided by the various partners involved can often be of help even in such critical situations. Again, 86% of the volunteers said it was (completely) true that they felt in good hands overall – despite the critical situations mentioned – due to the preparation and support provided by

the various partners. Moreover, the consistent results would appear to show that the extraordinary circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic did not have any negative effects on the support provided to volunteers in critical situations.

## Education and mentoring

Specific seminars on the weltwärts development volunteer service and political education seminars form part of the education and mentoring activities on the programme. The vast majority of volunteers attended these seminars despite the extraordinary circumstances triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Only 11 out of 209 did not. However, the findings of the latest survey do show that the pandemic had more of an impact on the political education seminars offered and attended (62% compared to 72% in 2019). Attendance of accompanying seminars for the weltwärts volunteer service, on the other hand, remained high at 97% (see Figure 10).

Volunteers' satisfaction with the accompanying seminars remains high, with 97% saying they were (very) satisfied. The other responses concerning the seminars also again show that the accompanying seminars can support volunteers in various ways during their assignments. Almost all respondents confirmed that these seminars gave them an opportunity to share experiences with other volunteers (98%). A similar number stated that they were an opportunity to explore intercultural issues (96%) as well as development-related issues (95%).

The volunteers' feedback also clearly indicate that the seminars play an important role by providing opportunities for reflection and for volunteers to consider their experiences so far (97%). They also gave many volunteers an opportunity to discuss ways of dealing with challenges during their assignment in Germany (95%).

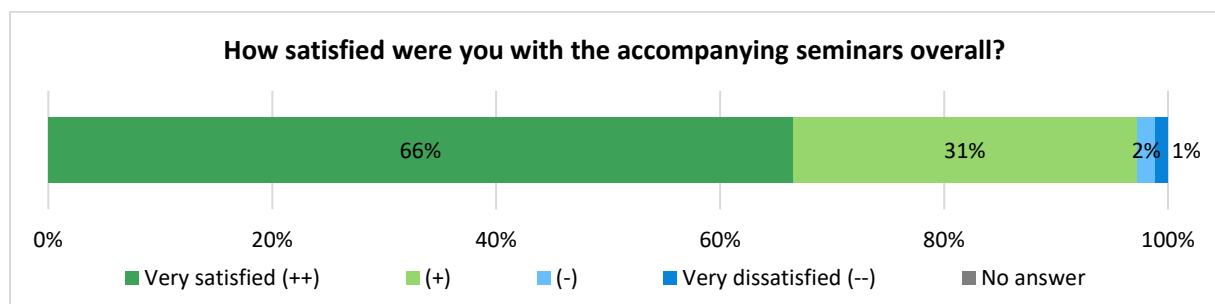


Figure 10: Satisfaction with accompanying seminars

Volunteers who had attended a political education seminar confirmed that it had been useful overall. At 93%, the total share of volunteers who said this was true was exactly as high as in the previous year. Having said that, the result was slightly less positive than in the previous year when the share who said the statement was “completely true” was 65% (see Figure 11).

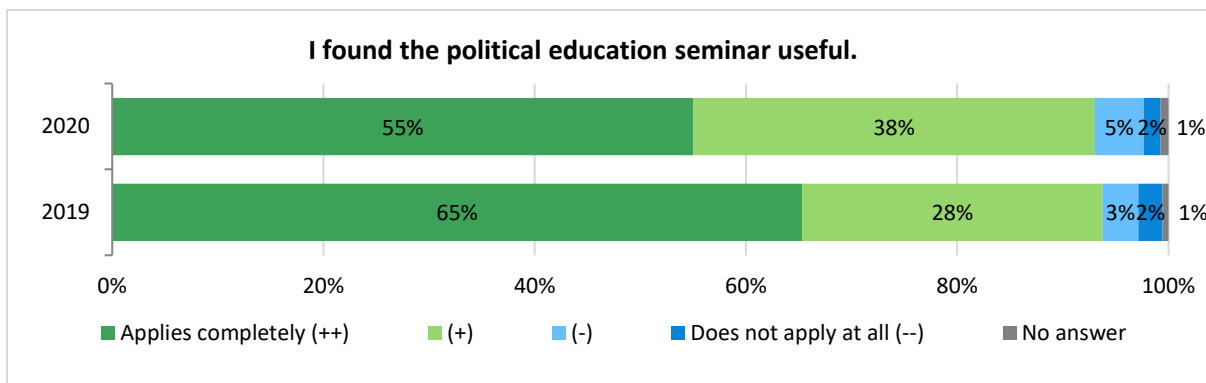


Figure 11: Usefulness of the political education seminar

As part of the education and mentoring activities on the programme, volunteers are given an opportunity during the final phase of their assignment to reflect on their experiences in Germany and conduct a follow-up review of their assignment. Although the latest survey also shows that most had been offered an opportunity for end-of-service reflection (86%), the figure is much lower than the previous year’s 93%. Consequently, the share of volunteers who had already taken part in a form of end-of-service reflection at the time of the survey (81%) was also lower than in the previous year (90%). As a consequence of there being fewer opportunities for follow-up reviews, volunteers’ assessment of various aspects of the follow-up process tended to be lower than in the previous year’s survey although the majority of the feedback was very positive overall. There is a particularly striking drop in the number of respondents stating that it was true that they had opportunities in the follow-up phase to share experiences with other volunteers (85% compared to the previous year’s 94%). 80% confirmed that there were opportunities to review their personal experiences concerning the assignment (the 2019 figure was 86%). In a similar result to the previous year, three out of four volunteers stated that information was provided and knowledge shared on how to re-acclimatise better upon return from assignment in Germany. Roughly two in three felt it was true that information was provided in the follow-up phase on maintaining contacts made and networking with other weltwärts volunteers and on ways of continuing to be involved in social and/or development action after the assignment.

Despite the slightly weaker assessment of the follow-up activities in the latest survey, there has not been a major decrease in overall satisfaction with these activities. 82% were (very) satisfied overall compared to the 2019 figure of 87% (see Figure 12).

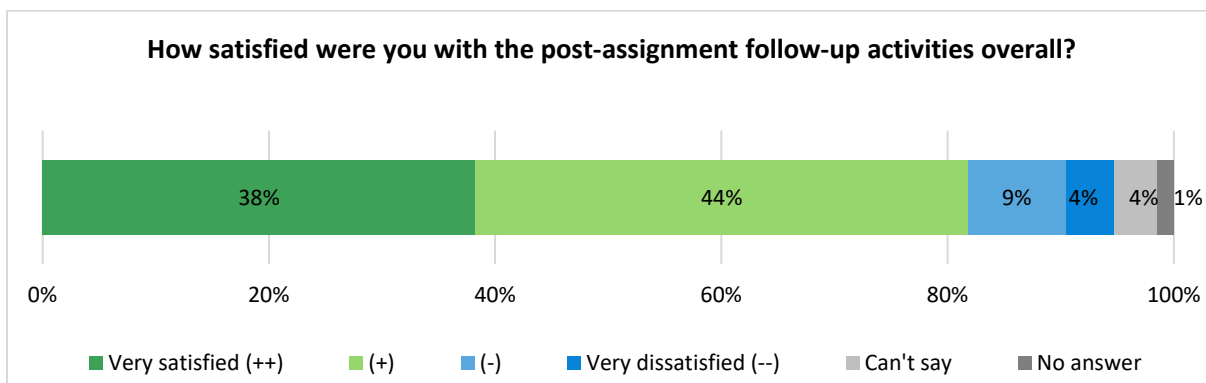


Figure 12: Satisfaction with follow-up activities

## Global learning - the role of weltwärts as a development learning service

The annual online surveys are also intended to gather information about volunteers’ learning experiences during voluntary service on the weltwärts programme. The pilot survey had already shown that volunteers in the South-North component draw a range of benefits from participating in the programme. In the latest survey, all of the statements concerning individual global learning were again supported by the vast majority of the survey population. The “true” rates are similarly high to the previous year’s survey. The fact that there have not been any declines indicates that the assignments in Germany provided opportunities for valuable learning experiences even in the extraordinary circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

By participating in the weltwärts programme, the respondents

- developed on a personal level (“true”=987);
- became more aware of the importance of international/intercultural partnership and collaboration (“true”=97%);
- improved their global awareness (“true”=97%);
- learnt how to interact/work better with international teams and contacts (“true”=94%);
- felt more confident/comfortable when using/communicating in foreign languages (“true”=94%); and
- were more motivated to continue engaging in development work (“true”=92%).

(see Figure 13).

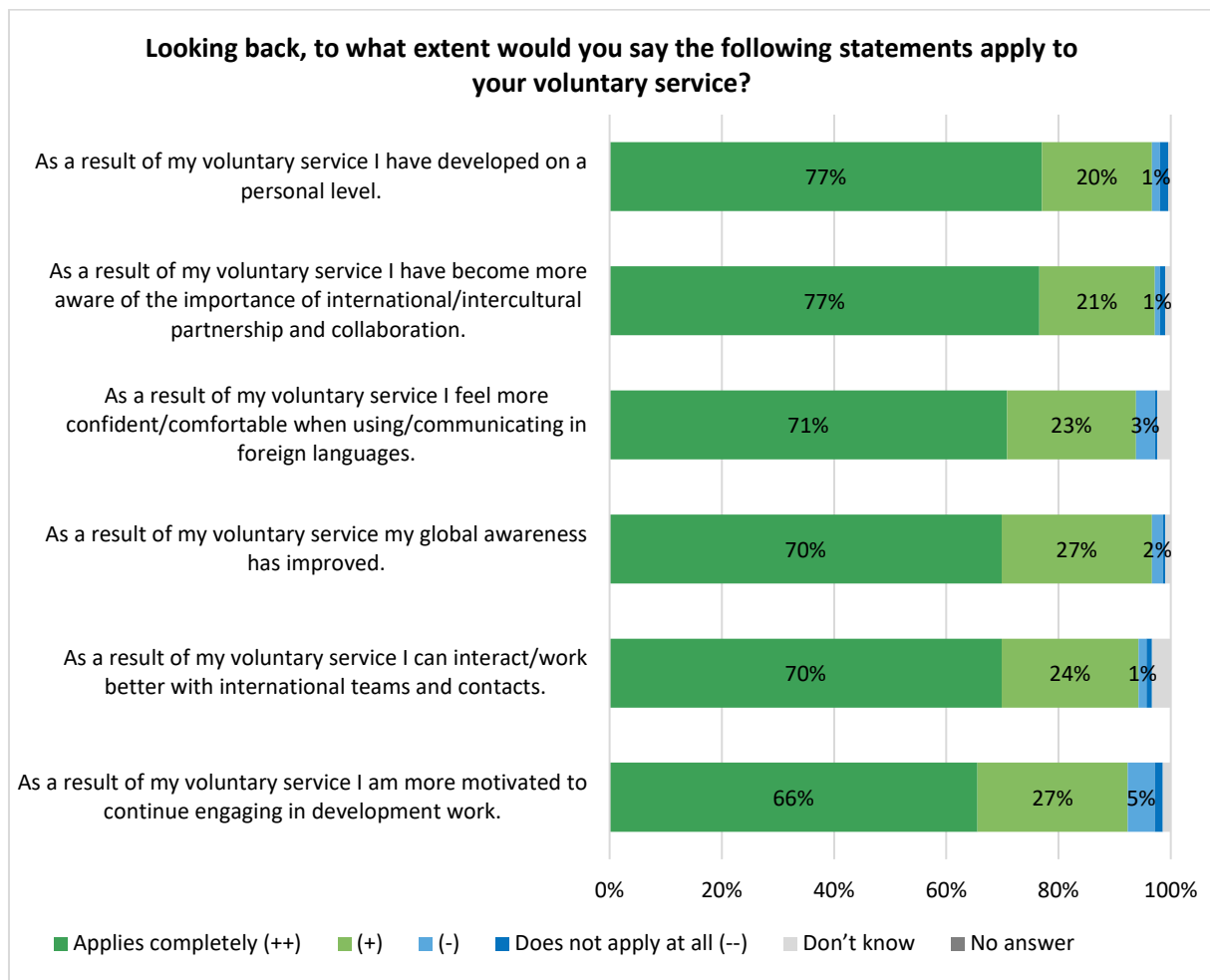


Figure 133: Global learning through voluntary service

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 their home country about their time in Germany either during or after their voluntary service (97%). It is therefore clear that participants on the weltwärts programme very often share their experiences in Germany with people in their home country. A large number felt that their friends and family gained an impression of people’s lives in Germany as a result of them telling them about their assignment. This was completely true or quite true for 94% of respondents. Furthermore, 83% believed it was completely true or quite true that they had helped their friends and family in their home country develop a higher degree of global awareness through their conversations about their voluntary service. The same figure (83%) stated that it was completely or quite true that these conversations had an effect on their friends’ and families’ motivation to support their post-assignment voluntary work (see Figure 14).

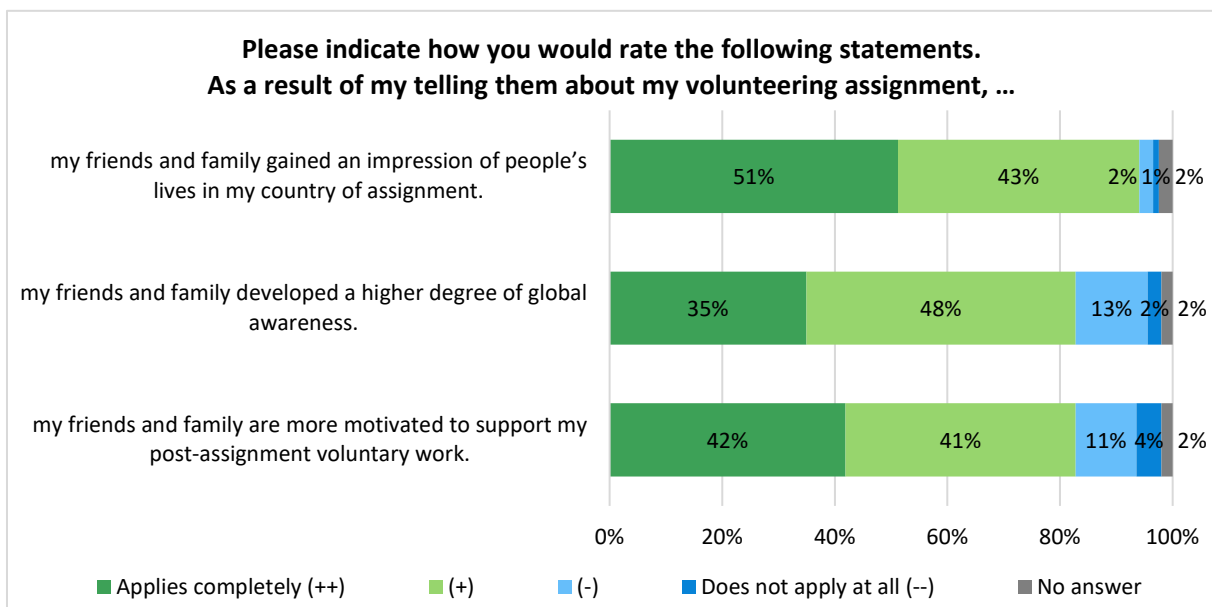


Figure 14: Indirect impact of voluntary service on family and friends

### Returnee engagement in volunteering activities

In addition to volunteers’ assessment of how their assignment has influenced their motivation to continue engaging in development work, the survey also asks about general post-assignment volunteering and/or the volunteer’s interest in engaging in such volunteering at a future date. The first survey in the South-North component in 2019 indicated a high level of returnee engagement in/willingness to engage in voluntary work. This result is corroborated by the latest feedback. At the time of the survey, around one third were (again) involved in voluntary work (30%). 25% were very sure they would engage in voluntary work in the future and a further 25% felt it was at least likely they would do so (making 50% in total). The share of returnees who were volunteering again or were very likely to do so in the future (80% in total) was thus not significantly changed compared to the previous year (when the figure was 84%). This is all the more remarkable in view of the Covid restrictions. As in the previous year, there were only very few who said they would probably or definitely not engage in voluntary work in the future (2%) (see Figure 15).

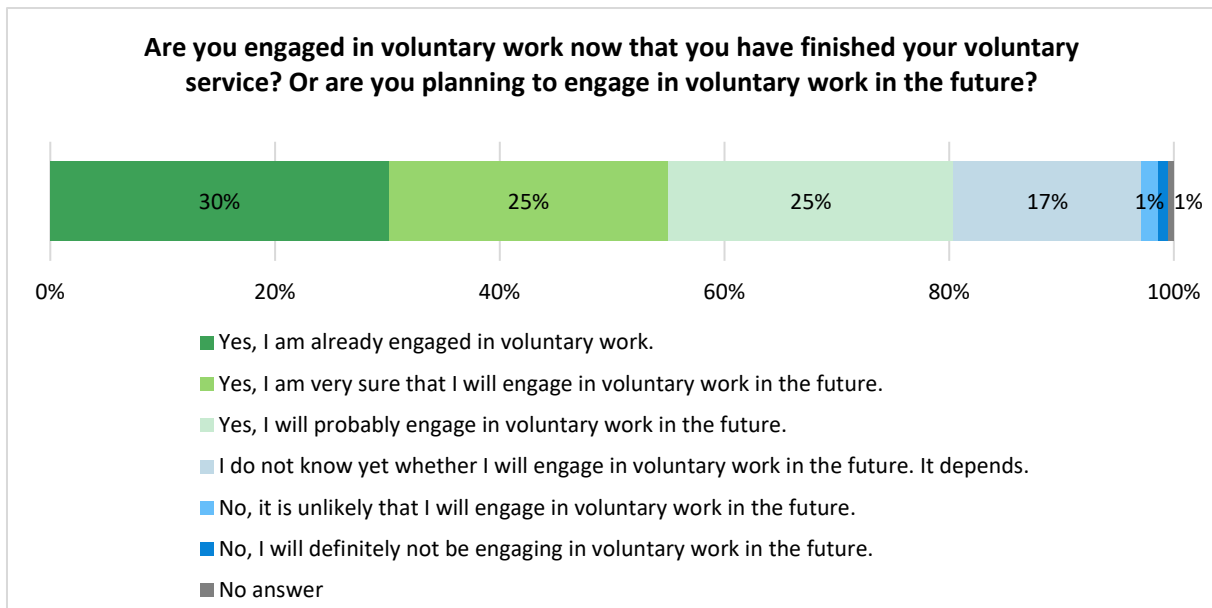


Figure 15: Post-assignment volunteering

Generally speaking, the fields in which returnees were already engaged in voluntary work or showed an interest in volunteering in the future are very diverse. The survey listed 18 different fields of voluntary work; there were weltwärts returnees engaged in or interested in engaging in each of them. The results for this section of the survey have generally not changed much. As in the previous year, most of the returnees who were already active were engaged in development education (42%), work for sending organisations (40%) and work with children and young people (40%). With regard to future voluntary work, international exchanges and relations (60%), work with host organisations in Germany (51%) or with sending organisations in the home countries (40%), development education (43%) and work with children and young people (39%) are particularly relevant.

In the data evaluation for the volunteer survey, the areas of volunteering activity are subsumed under the heading “Global citizenship”<sup>4</sup> to cover the topics that are of particular relevance to the weltwärts programme. As in the previous year, the results of this grouping point very clearly to a thematic focus in weltwärts returnees’ engagement in volunteering activities. 89% of those who are already volunteering again are active in at least one of these topic areas. Of the returnees interested in volunteering again in the future, 94% would like to do so in one of the areas belonging to the global citizenship category (see Figure 16).

<sup>4</sup> 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/rootlessness/homelessness. The areas considered relevant for the concept of global citizenship were chosen by Engagement Global.

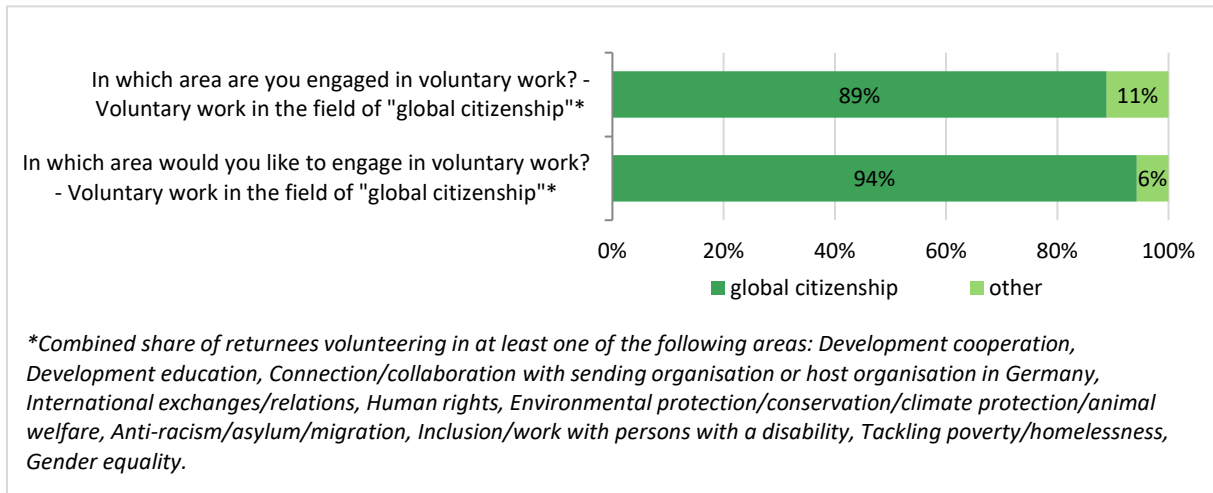


Figure 16: Current volunteering activity and interest in volunteering in the global citizenship category