

Volunteering in Germany

**according to: 3rd Survey on Volunteering 2009: Results of the Representative Survey on Volunteering and Civic Engagement*

The “Survey on Volunteering” is the biggest survey in Germany on volunteering and civic engagement on Germany. Since 1999 it is conducted on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. It is published every five years to provide the public with comprehensive and detailed data regarding the voluntary activities (honorary office, volunteer work, civic engagement) of Germany’s citizens. The latest survey in 2009 reveals that civil-society participation in Germany is a stable and sustainable quantity.

Main information

71% of the population are actively involved in associations and organisations (in the tertiary sector respectively in the infrastructure of the civil society). The more people have access to the infrastructure of the civil society, the more they are engaged in voluntary activities.

The percentage of the voluntary engaged people has risen in the years of 1999 to 2009 from 34% to 36%- these are more than **23 million** people in Germany. 50% of these 23 million, who were officially active in 2009, cover certain tasks in society (e.g. in the fields of sport, culture, church, emergency services). These voluntary activities are carried out for 10 years on average; a third commits itself even longer, the majority (90%) of them being active at least once a month. For most citizens their commitment is an important part of their life.

Volunteering in selected population groups

The commitment is mostly carried out by men, the working population, young people and people with higher qualifications.

The rate of committed has risen in families with children and teenagers. On the one hand parents get involved in voluntary activities with their children, especially in kindergartens and school, but also in the fields of culture and music, church and youth employment. On the other hand children and teenagers, too, find possibilities to participate in volunteering themselves.

A remarkable and persistent increase of **elder people’s commitment** is clearly visible. In the age of 65 and older the rate has risen from 23% (1999) and 26% (2004) to 28% (2009). Because of their increasing fitness and higher education elder volunteers are more open-minded and are constantly looking for areas to commit themselves.

In contrast, the voluntary **engagement of the young** has decreased slightly (1999: 37%, 2009: 35%). Especially the increasing mobility and, as a result, the loss of social rooting constrain volunteering work. Nevertheless, there still exists a high potential in this age group and also in reference to teenagers, who are already

engaged. Very important for young people is the requirement for professional qualification.

Unemployed people, people with lower social and educational status and migrants carry out less volunteering activities.

Local differences

The **public participation is higher in the Western part of Germany** than in the Eastern part, (west 73 %, east 64 %). However, the percentage in the Eastern part has steadily increased during the last years. On the countryside, volunteering is more common than in big cities and this phenomenon has been increasing since 1999. Because of the absence of institutional offers on the countryside, social commitment assures an important part of the quality of life.

Subject areas of volunteering

10% of the population were engaged in **sports** in 2009, most of them in associations and clubs. Sports is therefore still is the biggest area of engagement, followed by voluntary engagement in kindergartens, schools, and church. Other areas are culture, art and music (5%). What concerns the other areas (youth work, civic engagement, health, crime problems and nature conversation), only voluntary fire brigade and emergency rescue services reach a higher percentage than 3%.

This distribution is an effect of the different interests of volunteers as well as the offers of the civil society. You can see that women and men, teenagers and seniors participate in some areas more than in others. Since 1999 social and ecological engagement as well as children and youth care and also cultural and environmental volunteering have increased.

Commitment in sports and leisure activities has slightly decreased.

Willingness to commitment

In the last 10 years the percentage of people, who are willing to commit themselves, has risen from 26% to 37%. This trend shows that the **population is more and more open-minded** about volunteering but the actual commitment is decreasing. There is not only a big potential in the not-engaged population, but also in the group of already engaged, who are willing to expand their commitment.

Local Mobility

There are only few people who still live in their birthplace. Often they have to move to new cities, get used to a new environment and make new social contacts. Young people are very mobile for a short time during their education. Especially families see an opportunity in public working and volunteering engagement to improve their integration. For young people the stay in a new city is only an intermediate station and connected with a reduction of engagement.

The period of time and the duration of the commitment

According to the current citizenship survey, only 57% of the working population is able to plan their free time during the week properly; for 20% this is possible to some extent and for 23% it is not possible at all. These differences in the planning possibilities result in severe consequences for the voluntary engagement. Those, who can really plan securely their free time, are committed far above average (45%). **Still about a third of the volunteers spend up to two hours a week**, respectively three to five hours a week for their commitment. 17% of the volunteers spent six to ten hours per week in 2009 for their voluntary activities. Almost every tenth volunteer spent even more than ten hours a week. Men are still able to use more free time for their commitment, 41% of them even more than five hours per week (31% of the woman). Woman often suffer under a double burden, consisting of work and family, which results both in a lower participation in commitments and the time that they can spend on it.

Motivation for voluntary work

Despite the wide spread political apathy most people commit themselves because they want to form society. The number has decreased only a bit in recent years. Still the majority wishes to find a community, which is understandable in respect of the cultural change from private to public. Furthermore, there is a pronounced wish for a **commitment that is satisfactory** regarding the contents and pleases the volunteers. This also applies to activities that are linked to stressful and exhausting experiences. An important part of voluntary commitment is also the opportunity to develop one's knowledge and abilities.

Requirements for volunteers

As varied as the activities themselves are, the requirements for volunteers are, too. The fact that the content of the volunteer's activities has become more and more diversified, but the level of the **requirements decreased** at the same time, is remarkable. This also indicates the higher level of elder volunteers, who are not able to fulfil the same requirements as the younger ones. **Social and emotional competences dominate** especially youth and adult education, health and social affairs. Abilities that are often required are creativity and imagination, as well as time management. Related to male committed, a talent for organization, leadership qualities and expertise still play a big role.

Target groups

Voluntary commitment can address certain groups of persons, but is not bound necessarily to a specific target group. In 2009 the majority (59%) of volunteer's activities **did not address a certain target audience**. Primarily this can be explained with gender differences, because men rather get involved for a certain subject, while women prefer persons. Especially commitment for voluntary fire brigade and rescue services, environmental protection and politics is rarely bound to target groups. Volunteers still prefer children and adolescents (2009: 35%). More and more elder people get in the focus of voluntary activities (1999: 8%; 2004: 9%; 2009: 10%). In

2009 4% of the activities were addressed to families and 2% to women as well as disabled. About 1% was directed at foreigners, respectively immigrants in 2009.

Needs for improvement with regard to the commitment's general framework

In 2004 almost as much employees were supported by their employer (2004: 29%, 2009: 30%) as in 2009 and the number of volunteers, that are not to **supported by their employer** decreased from 53% to 43%. Most employees were supported in the form of flexible working time (72%) and releases (68%) as well as the use of corporate infrastructure (65%). Employers still do not tend to award voluntary activities in the form of commendations or even promotions.

In 2009 volunteers thought similarly about the question, **how organizations and institutions could improve** themselves as in the previous survey from 1999. The most urgent issue is a better funding of the projects. Better equipment and premises seem to be far less important as the situation has improved. About a third of the volunteers demanded better possibilities for continuing education. Monetary aspects like refund of expenses and payment do not seem to be a serious problem.

While the committed demanded fewer improvements with regards to the **general public and governmental framework** in 2004, they became more critical in 2009. The demand for tax reduction increased. Volunteers engaged in social affairs and representation of interests wished better tax deductibility of costs. In 2009, more people criticized lacking insurance coverage. In reference to this point, mainly youth workers and volunteers concerned with representation of interests criticized the situation. The main criticism, besides the better information and consulting about possibilities of voluntary commitment, remains lacking recognition of press and media.

For further information see:

<http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Monitor-Engagement-Nr-2-englisch,property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf>