

weltwärts 

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The results of a  
survey among South-North volunteers  
in the weltwärts programme (2021)

**uzbonn**

Richtig fragen.

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uzbonn GmbH – Gesellschaft für empirische Sozialforschung und Evaluation  
Schloßstraße 2  
53115 Bonn, Germany  
[www.uzbonn.de](http://www.uzbonn.de)

**Contact person at uzbonn regarding  
implementation of the volunteer survey:**

Tülin Engin-Stock [she/her]  
[engin@uzbonn.de](mailto:engin@uzbonn.de)

**Contact person in the weltwärts  
coordination unit at Engagement Global:**

Christian Wochele [he/him]  
[christian.wochele@engagement-global.de](mailto:christian.wochele@engagement-global.de)

Engagement Global gGmbH  
Service für Entwicklungsinitiativen – Service for Development Initiatives  
weltwärts coordination unit  
Quality management of volunteer services  
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40  
53113 Bonn, Germany  
[www.weltwaerts.de](http://www.weltwaerts.de)

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## **What is the South-North component of weltwärts?**

weltwärts stands for development engagement, global learning and equitable encounters. Its volunteer service was launched in 2008 by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Young people aged 18 and over who come from a country in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe or Oceania are given the opportunity to perform their volunteer service in Germany.

The objectives pursued by weltwärts include the promotion of equal exchange among partners from the Global South and the Global North and, associated with this, the strengthening of existing partnerships. On an individual level, the aim is to enable personal development of the volunteers in a non-formal learning process as well as a cross-cultural transfer of knowledge and experience. The multiplier effect is also intended to strengthen the volunteers' society of origin, partner organisations and personal environment, and to raise their awareness of issues relating to development policy. Last but not least, the intention is for the volunteers to also provide new impetus to internal development-related work within Germany.

More than 3,600 international volunteers have already completed their service in a place of assignment in Germany. This service includes the volunteers becoming involved in community projects or in social or ecological institutions, such as in kindergartens, on an eco-farm or in educational work. The volunteers' preparation and follow-up in their country of origin and their participation in 25 seminar days on education and mentoring are an integral part of the South-North volunteer service.

This volunteer service is organised by the German sponsors and their partner organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania and Eastern Europe. The volunteers are mostly deployed in Germany for a year and receive flight, accommodation, food, insurance and pocket money.

The weltwärts programme has comprehensive quality criteria to ensure that the volunteers receive appropriate professional support and personal mentoring during their service, and that they have intense learning experiences on which they are able to reflect. The Survey Centre in Bonn (uzbonn) conducts an anonymous annual survey of volunteers to regularly review the quality of the programme. The results indicate the volunteers' degree of satisfaction with the individual programme components and the impacts that their services exert at an individual level, in their personal environment and on a societal level.

## Who form the survey's target group?

This volunteer survey covered everyone who completed their volunteer service in Germany between mid-November 2020 and mid-December 2021.

As in the previous year, weltwärts service for the 2020/2021 volunteer cohort took place under very unusual conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic and some severe entry restrictions meant that many volunteers in this cohort could not participate in the programme as planned, or arrived with a delay of several months in some cases. Even the activities in the places of assignment and the education and mentoring were negatively impacted by the pandemic. This included many seminar days having to be held in a digital format and the inability to establish and maintain personal contacts to the same extent as before the pandemic.

The total response rate to the survey was 43 % (see Figure 1). This means that of all 350 people invited to take part in the survey, 150 people participated and fully completed the questionnaire. This year, therefore, slightly more volunteers responded to the survey than in the last two years, where the response rate was at 41 %.

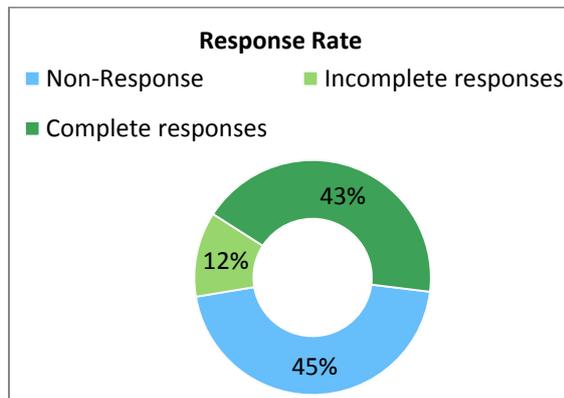


Figure 1: Participation

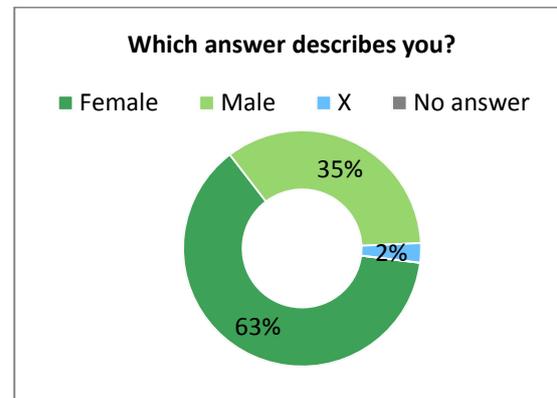


Figure 2: Indication of gender

### The surveyed volunteers...

- ▶ come from 40 countries, mostly from Colombia (11 %), Bolivia (10 %), South Africa (8 %), Peru (7 %) and Argentina (6 %).
- ▶ spent their volunteer service in Germany with 53 different host organisations.
- ▶ 63 % identify as female, 35 % as male and 2 % as diverse/non-binary (see Figure 2).
- ▶ were aged between 19 and 35. The average age was 25.
- ▶ have mostly already obtained a vocational qualification (65 %). Most have a degree (58 %), some have another form of vocational qualification, such as an apprenticeship (7 %).
- ▶ were frequently employed prior to their weltwärts volunteer service (42 %) or were studying (31 %).
- ▶ are also frequently employed after the end of their volunteer service (30 %) or in a study programme (24 %).
- ▶ 4 % reported that they have a disability or a chronic physical, medical, cognitive or mental impairment. The inclusion of people with impairments or disabilities and the removal of access barriers remain important tasks for the weltwärts programme.

## How do volunteers rate their weltwärts service?

The survey requested the volunteers to rate various aspects of their volunteer service, such as the preparation or their embedding in the place of assignment. The volunteers' overall satisfaction with their weltwärts service was also surveyed.

### What is the overall level of the participants' satisfaction with the volunteer service?

Most of the volunteers gave a very positive rating to the overall weltwärts volunteer service. Of those volunteers surveyed, 94 % reported being either very or fairly satisfied with their volunteer service. Around 2 out of 3 are very satisfied (see Figure 3). This is therefore similar to previous years in which 97 % (in 2019) and 94 % (in 2020) of those surveyed stated that they were (very) satisfied with their volunteer service. This result indicates that the various parties involved have been very successful in offering a satisfactory volunteer service for the participants – even under challenging conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

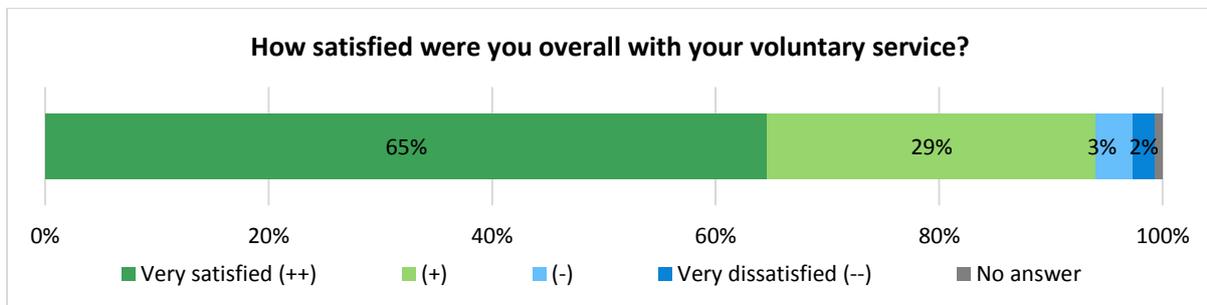


Figure 3: Overall satisfaction with weltwärts

### How successful is preparation for the volunteer service?

The preparation takes place in the country of origin and in Germany at the start of the volunteer assignment. The aim of this preparation is for the volunteers to develop a clear understanding of their assignment as a volunteer as well as the assignment and living conditions in Germany, and to address global interrelationships. The survey results indicate that the volunteers are well prepared for their volunteer service: 91 % report that they are generally (very or fairly) satisfied with their preparation.

The participating organisations in Germany and in the countries of origin almost always succeed in conveying the most important information during the preparation: 91 % report that they are (very or fairly) satisfied with this.<sup>1</sup> Most volunteers also feel well supported during the preparation by the host organisations in Germany and the sending organisations in their country of origin: in this case it is 92 % who report that they are (very or fairly) satisfied (see Figure 4).

<sup>1</sup> Discrepancies between the summarised proportions stated in the report and the individual values shown in the figures are due to rounding.

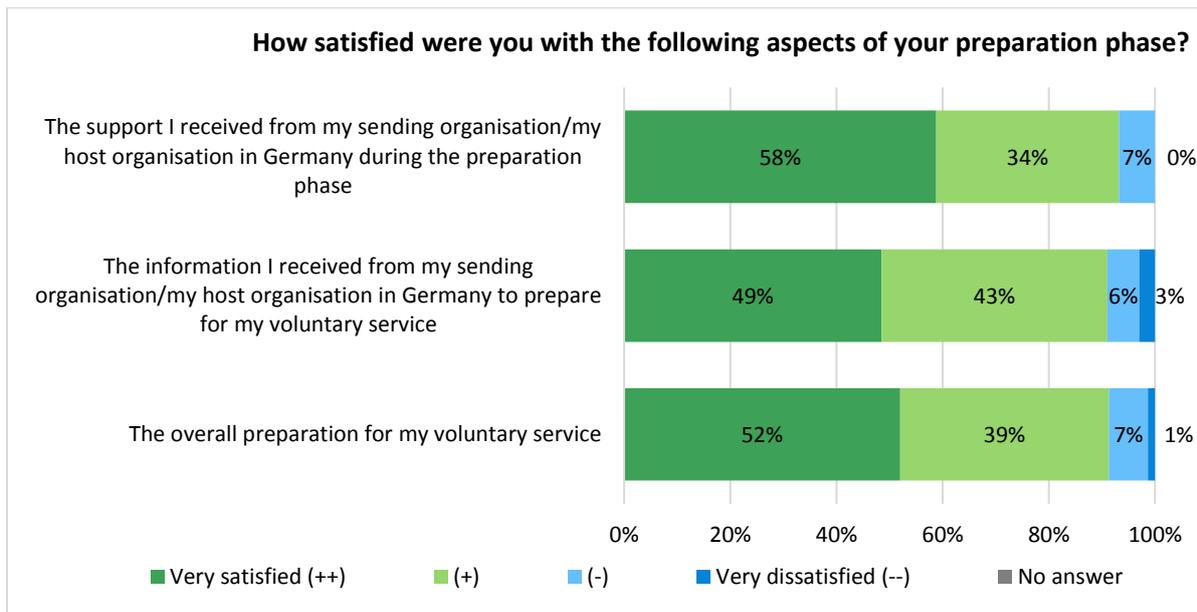


Figure 4: Satisfaction with preparation for the volunteer service

### How satisfied are the volunteers with their place of assignment and the on-site collaboration?

Most volunteers found the form of collaboration in their place of assignment to be very positive. This is clearly revealed by the survey results: 93 % report that they are (very or fairly) satisfied with their place of assignment. The content and tasks relating to activities in the places of assignment generally meet the volunteers' expectations: here it is 87 % who are (very or fairly) satisfied. High satisfaction is also evident when it comes to social inclusion and personal contact in the place of assignment. Again 87 % are (very or fairly) satisfied with this (see Figure 5). Most volunteers had the impression that their place of assignment in Germany was well prepared for their stay and assignment (87 %). A large majority of volunteers felt that there were sufficient opportunities at their place of assignment in Germany to become involved and actively participate (91 %).

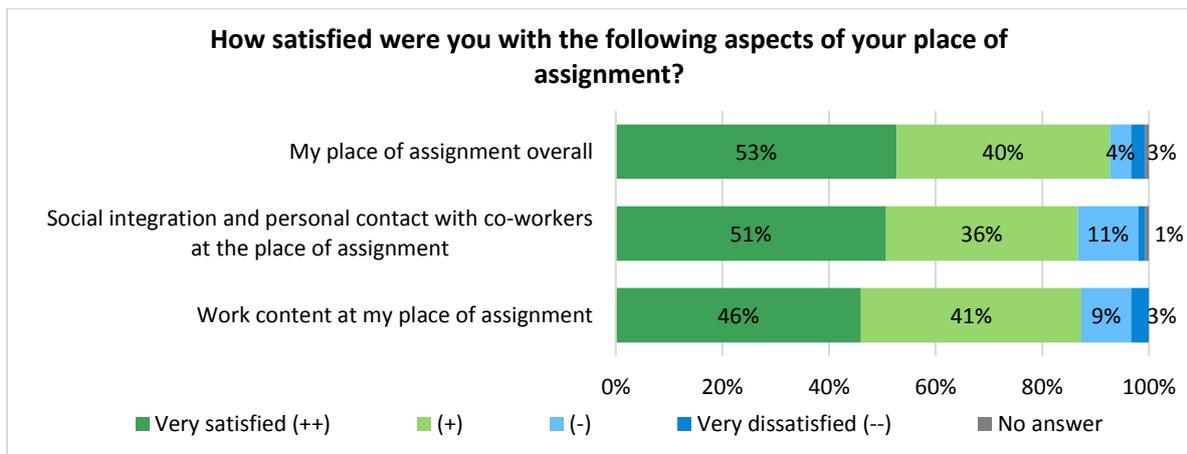


Figure 5: Satisfaction with the place of assignment in Germany

It is important for cooperation and collaboration in the places of assignment to succeed that the volunteer service is underpinned by good support and that there are individuals who the

volunteers can approach to raise questions about their daily work. The large majority of volunteers had access to such an individual in their place of assignment (92 %). Most volunteers also rate the guidance and support provided by these contacts as good: 94 % report that they are very or fairly satisfied with it (see Figure 6). Overall, therefore, it is evident that the professional and personal inclusion in the places of assignment was largely successful.

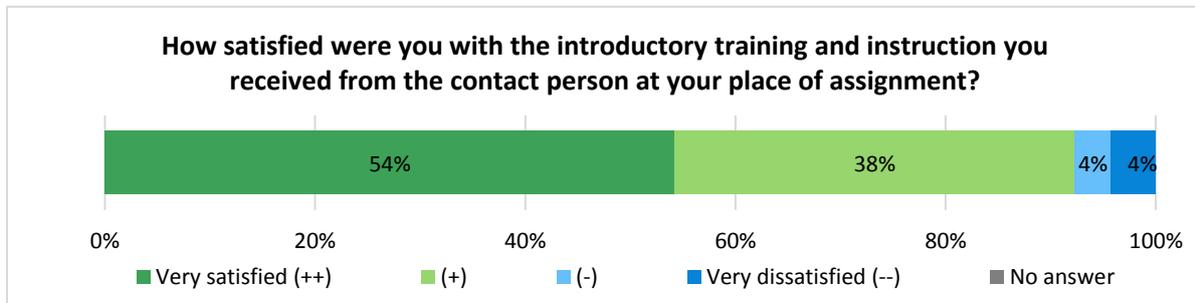


Figure 6: Satisfaction with the introductory training and instruction in the places of assignment

### How successful is personal mentoring for the volunteers?

One of the significant quality features of the weltwärts volunteer service is that, in addition to the professional support available in the places of assignment, personal mentoring of the assignment in Germany is also available (in other words assistance provided by a mentor). This mentor can for instance assist with getting used to living in Germany and can help with personal questions and issues. The results of the volunteer survey indicate that this type of personal mentoring in the volunteer service is generally assured: 97 % had access to a mentor during their volunteer service. Most volunteers also rate the mentoring and assistance provided by these individuals as being very positive: 90 % report that they are very or fairly satisfied with it (see Figure 7).

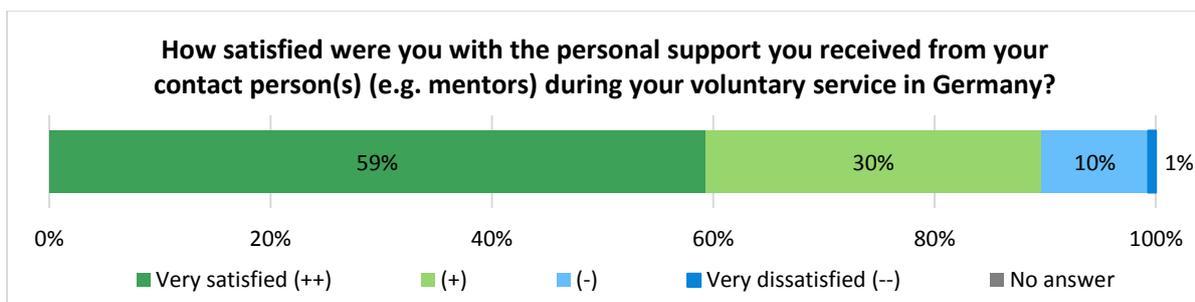


Figure 7: Satisfaction with personal mentoring

### Are there threatening and/or dangerous situations during their time in Germany and how good is the help in such cases?

The weltwärts programme considers it to be vital to ensure the safety and health of volunteers during their assignment. Most of the surveyed volunteers never felt threatened, discriminated against or sexually harassed at any point during their time in Germany (58 %).

There were nevertheless 29 % of volunteers who stated that during their time in Germany they experienced situations in which they were threatened or suffered racist discrimination. At the same time, only 16 % of all surveyed volunteers generally experienced some kind of situation (not only related to racism) that they personally perceived to be threatening or dangerous. It

is even less often that situations arise during their time in Germany where volunteers are actually threatened (8 %), sexually harassed (6 %) or directly affected by physical violence (4 %).

The feedback from those who experienced such problematic situations indicates that the weltwärts programme’s personal mentoring and assistance also functions well in critical and/or crisis situations: 89 % of volunteers who experienced one of these problematic situations nevertheless confirm that the mentoring and attentiveness of the various partners resulted in them feeling well supported during their volunteer service.

### How satisfied are the volunteers with their social inclusion in Germany?

The weltwärts programme’s volunteer service is an experience abroad that naturally extends beyond the place of assignment and the work environment. In this respect as well, most volunteers see their volunteer service as a positive experience: 91 % are very or fairly satisfied with their social inclusion and personal contact with people in Germany.

### How useful are the accompanying seminars to the volunteers?

The accompanying educational programme relating to development aspects of the volunteer service is an important component of weltwärts. Most volunteers took part in an accompanying seminar during their volunteer service in Germany (87 %). Participation in the seminars therefore remains high over recent years, despite the peculiar conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the accompanying seminars’ particular strong points is that they offer the opportunity for exchanging experiences with other volunteers. This is confirmed by 98 % of surveyed volunteers. They even enabled personal networking among volunteers despite the difficult conditions caused by the pandemic. The seminars also offer a framework for the volunteers to reflect on their experiences to date and to realise what they have achieved in the meantime (agreement: 97 %). Many of the volunteers also find that the accompanying seminars are useful for discussing ways of dealing with challenges during their volunteer service (agreement: 95 %). Moreover, the accompanying seminars provide a space for coming to terms with important aspects of the weltwärts programme, for instance 98 % of the participants confirm that they were able to deal with intercultural issues, and 95% that they were able to deal with development-related issues. A positive rating of the accompanying seminars is also indicated by the fact that 95 % of surveyed volunteers expressed that they were generally very or fairly satisfied with them (see Figure 8).

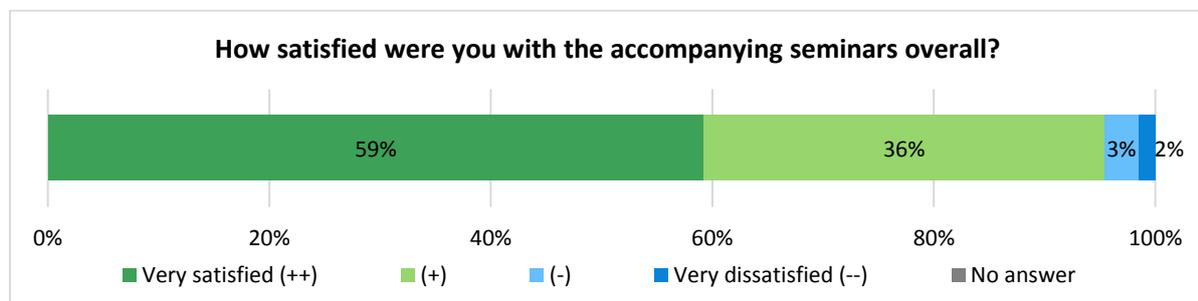


Figure 8: Satisfaction with the accompanying seminars

## How satisfied are volunteers with the follow-up activities?

The final phase of the volunteer service’s education and mentoring includes the volunteers being given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in Germany and to follow up on their volunteer service. The survey responses indicate that most volunteers had already taken part in such a final reflection at the time the survey was conducted (89 %). The majority of volunteers are either very or fairly satisfied with the post-assignment follow-up activities (79 %) (see Figure 9).

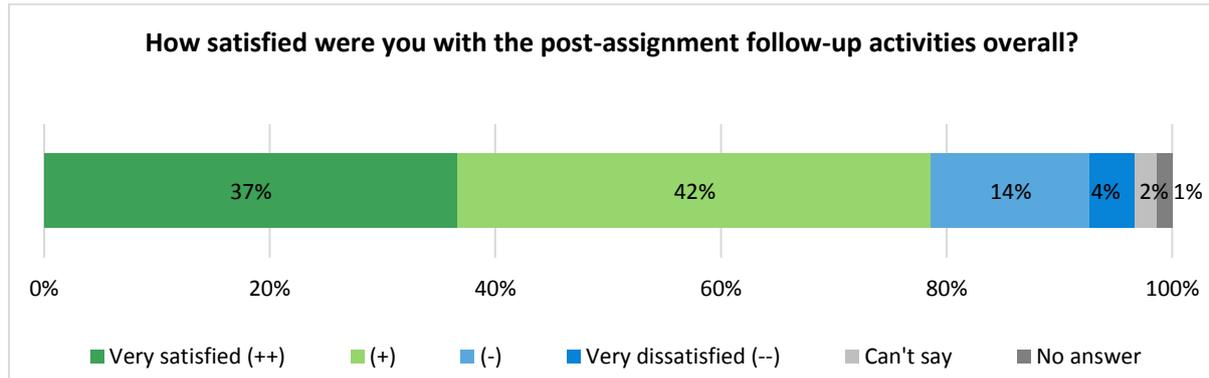


Figure 9: Satisfaction with the follow-up activities

## What is the impact of weltwärts?

### What impact does the volunteer service have on volunteers at an individual level?

Volunteering as part of the weltwärts programme offers many different learning experiences. The results of the volunteer survey clearly show that the activities in their place of assignment and contact with the people there enable the participants to gather valuable experiences for their own futures: virtually all the volunteers confirm that they benefited from their volunteer service in terms of their personal development (agreement: 99 %) (see Figure 10).

The results also indicate that their volunteer service enabled the participants get to know the world from a different perspective and to further develop their awareness of interdependencies: 97 % of them confirm that they gained a better understanding of global interrelationships; 96 % agree that the volunteer service made them more aware of the importance of international and intercultural partnership and cooperation. Their time and experiences abroad motivate the volunteers to become involved in volunteering via their career and in society. This applies in particular to aspects related to development policy and their preparedness to be actively engaged in this field even after their volunteer service: 94 % confirm that the volunteer service increased their motivation for further engagement in development-related volunteering (see Figure 10).

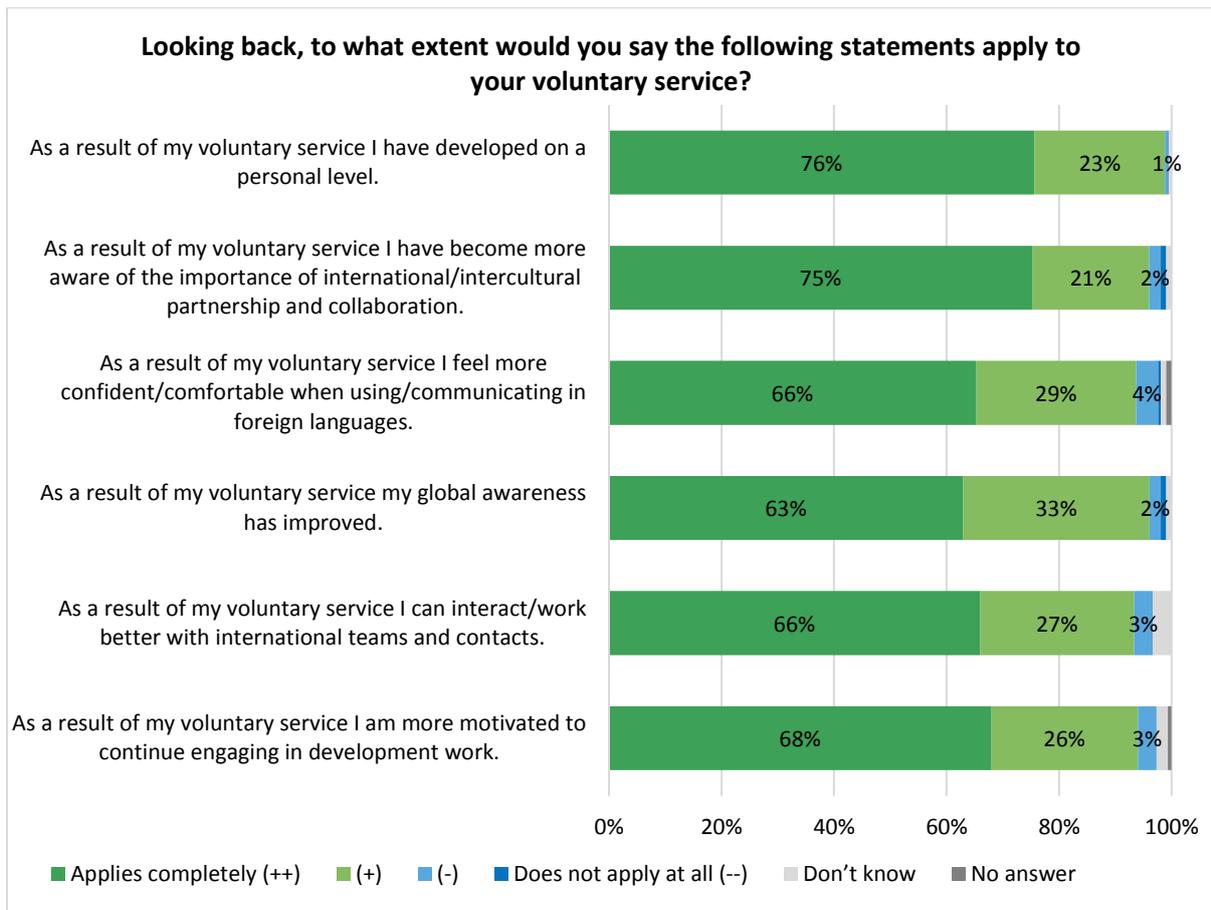


Figure 10: Global learning from the volunteer service

Experiences gained from weltwärts are not only specifically beneficial to further involvement in volunteering related to development policy, but also in terms of international and intercultural cooperation in other sectors: 93 % agree that weltwärts enables them to collaborate more effectively with international teams; 95 % confirm that the volunteer service makes them feel more confident or comfortable communicating in foreign languages (see Figure 10).

It seems as if the volunteer service had a positive impact on the personal development of almost all volunteers and on their understanding of global and development-related topics. The impact of the volunteer service is also evident in their very high motivation to continue to be involved in development-related issues and/or in international contexts in their country of origin. The aspiration of weltwärts as a development-related learning programme is therefore fully met in this respect on an individual level among volunteers.

### What impact does the volunteer service have in the volunteers' personal sphere?

The formative impacts of the volunteer service are not limited to the participants themselves. Experiences gained from the volunteer service are also shared with other people from the volunteers' personal sphere back in their countries of origin. This applies to almost everyone surveyed, because 96 % of them state that they have communicated with friends or their family about their time in Germany.

These conversations result in experiences from the volunteer service being transferred into their personal sphere in the countries of origin and thus contributing to global learning there

too. This at least is how most volunteers see it, since 94 % of them assume that their conversations about the volunteer service have given people in their personal sphere an impression of the realities of living in Germany. In each case, 85 % of the volunteers confirm that their conversations and discussions contributed to people they know having gained a greater awareness of global interdependencies and being motivated to support the volunteers in their continued engagement in volunteering after their return (see Figure 11).

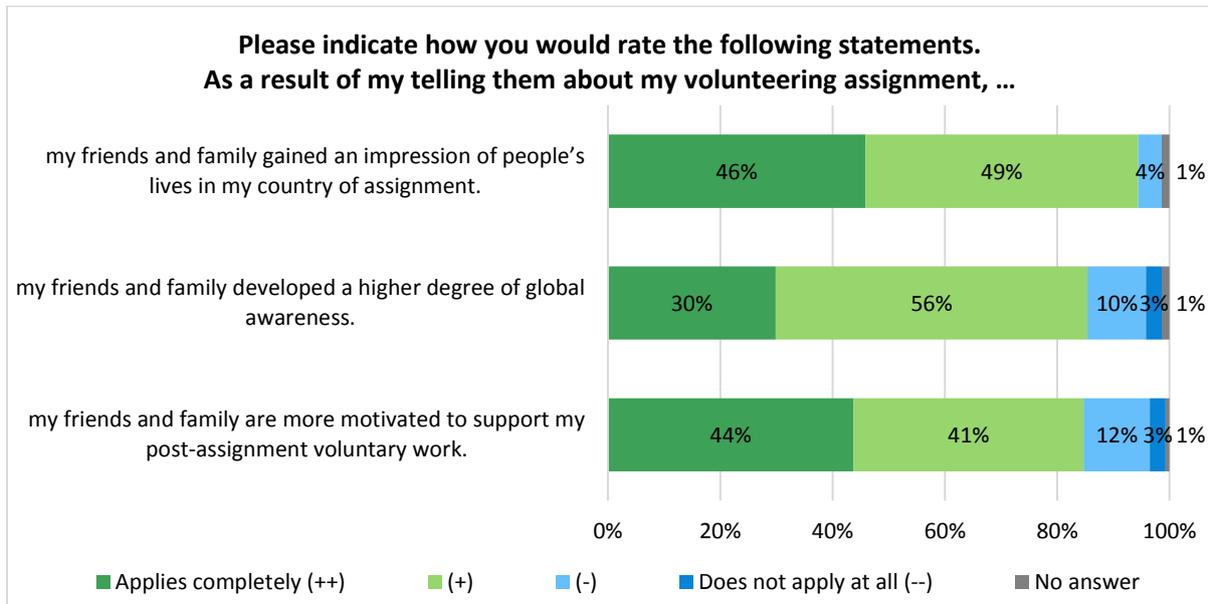


Figure 11: Indirect impact of the volunteer service in personal spheres

### What societal impact does the volunteer service have in the countries of origin?

As indicated by assessment of the impacts that conversations about the voluntary service have on participants' personal spheres, weltwärts has a multiplier effect because the returnees pass on their experiences. This is also substantiated by the fact that many participants do actually volunteer in their country of origin after their return.

At the time of the survey shortly after the volunteer service, there were already 29 % of those surveyed who were volunteering. A further 33 % were very sure that they would engage as volunteers in the future and 25 % are likely to become involved at some point. This amounts to 86 % who are either already actively volunteering or are likely to do so in the near future. Only very few weltwärts returnees state that they do not wish to volunteer in the future (5 %). Another 9 % of those surveyed were still undecided (see Figure 12).

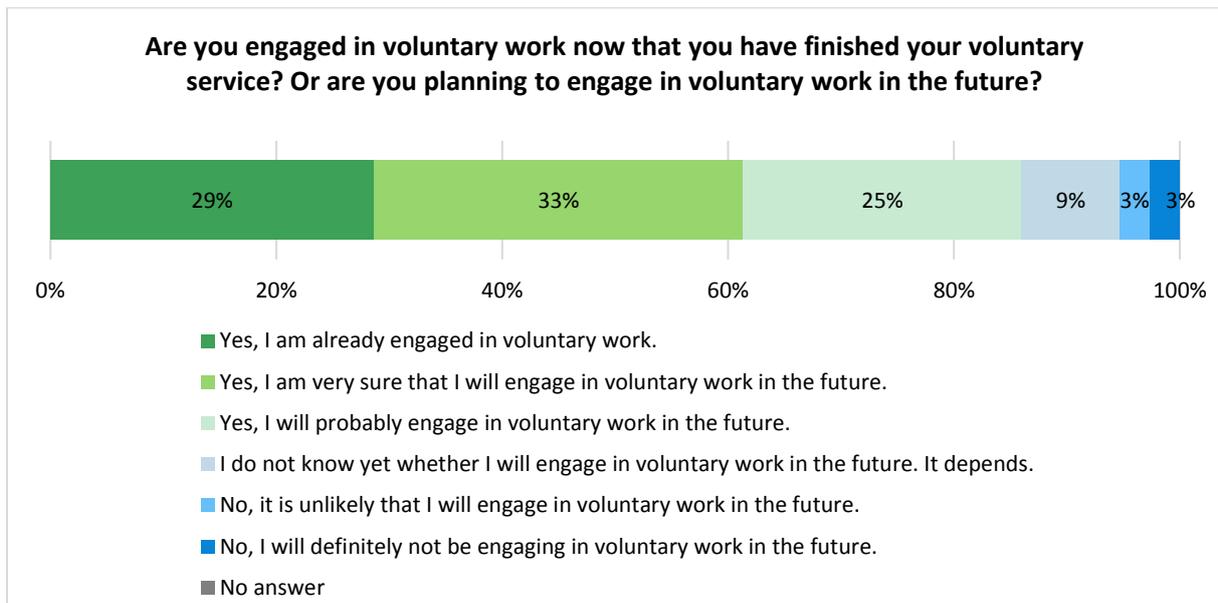


Figure 12: Engagement as volunteers after the volunteer service

People already volunteering after the end of their volunteer service were asked about the sectors in which they are active. Returnees who would like to volunteer in the future were asked about the sectors in which they would like to become involved. The answers make it clear that former weltwärts participants already volunteer or are interested in volunteering in a wide range of sectors in their countries of origin. The survey deals with 19 different sectors of volunteering. There is not a single sector in which no one is volunteering or for which there is no interest when it comes to future volunteering.

The (planned) volunteering by the volunteers is therefore very broadly diversified and, for example, includes the following sectors: active returnees are most frequently volunteering in child and youth development (28 %), development education work (23 %), cooperation with their sending organisation (23 %) or the environmental, nature, animal and climate protection sector (23 %). The topics that are of particular interest for future volunteering are international exchange and understanding (50 %), child and youth development (50 %), cooperation with host organisations in Germany (50 %) and development education work (40 %).

The data evaluation combines the different sectors of volunteering into one overarching thematic field of “Global citizenship”<sup>2</sup> to provide an even clearer overview of this. The results of this summary very clearly show the thematic focus of weltwärts returnees: 79 % of those already volunteering are active in at least one of these fields that is particularly relevant to the programme. Of those volunteers interested in future volunteering, almost all would like to volunteer in a field that is aligned with “Global citizenship” (91 %) (see Figure 13). This highlights that a majority of returnees want to volunteer in fields that are important to cooperative partnership in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also very evident that the impacts of the volunteer service are not limited to the volunteers and their personal spheres,

<sup>2</sup> This thematic field covers the sectors of development cooperation, development education work, cooperation with the sending organisation, cooperation with the host organisation in Germany, international exchange/international relations, human rights, environmental protection/nature conservation/climate protection/animal welfare, anti-racism/asylum/migration, inclusion/people with disabilities, gender/gender justice, and poverty reduction/rough sleeping/homelessness. Engagement Global was responsible for selecting the fields relating to the concept of “Global citizenship”.

but that weltwärts has a broader societal impact in the countries of origin given the (future and current) volunteering by its participants.

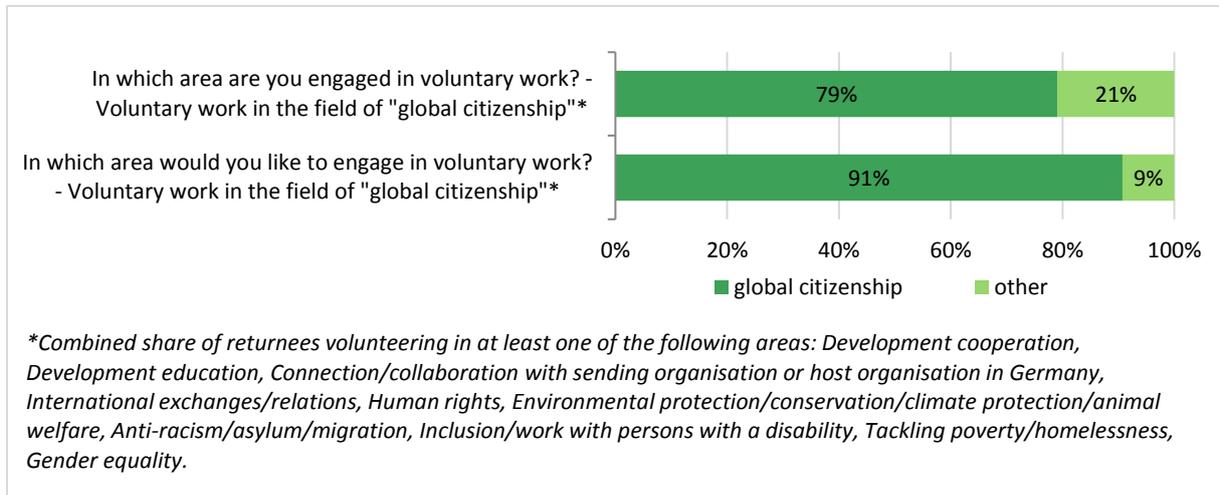


Figure 13: Existing volunteering in the field of “Global citizenship” and interest in volunteering in this thematic field

## Conclusion: volunteers as learners and multipliers

The survey results indicate that the vast majority of weltwärts South-North volunteers rate their overall service and the individual segments of it as being positive. A large proportion of those surveyed rate the preparation phase, the activities in their place of assignment, the professional and personal support, the education and mentoring and the follow-up activities as being good to very good.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the diverse impacts of weltwärts that are clearly demonstrated by the survey results: their participation in weltwärts enabled virtually all volunteers to experience personal development and reflection, and to engage in discussion regarding global and development-related topics. In parallel with this, the multiplier effect continues to operate in the volunteers’ personal spheres and in the societies of their countries of origin. In addition to their personal conversations, a particular contributing factor here is the volunteers’ (planned) engagement in volunteering in a wide variety of sectors, but above all in those relating to “Global citizenship”.