

weltwärts 



**Engaged.  
Enlightened.  
Empowered.**

The long-term impact of the  
weltwärts volunteer service

# Introduction

## Imprint

Publisher  
ENGAGEMENT GLOBAL gGmbH  
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40  
53113 Bonn, Germany  
Phone +49 228 20 717-0  
info@engagement-global.de  
www.engagement-global.de/en

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weltwärts Coordination Unit  
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 40  
53113 Bonn, Germany  
redaktion.weltwaerts@engagement-  
global.de

www.weltwaerts.de

Editorial team:  
Christian Wochele  
(weltwärts Coordination Unit)  
Tülin Engin-Stock (uzbonn GmbH)

Design:  
Natascha Podgornik  
hentschelpodgornik.de

Images:  
German federal government/Steffen Kugler  
Engagement Global gGmbH/  
michaldzikowski  
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Leander is supporting smallholders in Peru to grow their food without pesticides. Anne is supporting children in a children's home in South Africa, helping them prepare to return to their families. Dara from Costa Rica is helping migrants in Berlin to process their personal stories of adjustment, displacement and resilience.

There are so many remarkable stories of people involved in development-related projects who have travelled from Germany to our partner countries or have arrived in Germany from our partner countries as part of the weltwärts programme.

Development policy thrives on empathy, mutual support and the ability to treat others as equals. It relies on patience and resilience. This is what weltwärts embodies. And it is what the over 50,000 young people who have travelled the world with weltwärts since 2008 come to learn. Launched by the BMZ, the volunteer service works with more than 130 civil society organisations in Germany and approximately 2,000 organisations in our partner countries.

In doing so, weltwärts frequently poses itself critical questions on the programme's impact. Together with uzbonn, the BMZ has therefore conducted a longitudinal study. The study reveals that the weltwärts volunteer service has a lasting impact and shapes the attitudes, behaviours and professional decisions made by the

young people involved in the long term. It is particularly pleasing to me that, once they return, volunteers are more likely than average to be involved in voluntary work and have a global mindset. Almost 60 per cent of respondents still engage extensively with development-related issues seven years after volunteering with weltwärts.

The weltwärts programme, then, makes an important contribution to ensuring a future where the world is united through solidarity. It helps young people broaden their horizons and discover new and enduring perspectives –

a mission well worth supporting.

Reem Alabali Radovan  
Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation  
and Development



with its programme

on behalf of

# What is weltwärts?

weltwärts is one of the largest international volunteer services in the world. Approximately 2,500 volunteers take part in the weltwärts programme every year. Since it began in 2008, over 50,000 volunteers have travelled overseas as part of the programme.

weltwärts is a development-related volunteer service that provides participants with a change in perspective.

Within the so-called North-South component, volunteers from Germany spend between six and twelve months in a country in the Global South, supporting local projects of a social and charitable nature.

weltwärts covers travel in both directions. Volunteers from the Global South participate in the so-called South-North component, joining institutions in Germany that work towards the common good and helping out in a variety of areas.



The weltwärts volunteers work at places of assignment that are recognised by the Federal Volunteer Service (BFD).

This report is based on surveys completed by weltwärts volunteers from the North-South component.

The projects and places of assignment for weltwärts volunteers make up a broad spectrum, with volunteers working in sectors such as health and social care, environment and climate, agriculture, equality and inclusion, and in nurseries, orphanages, schools and many more institutions.

- weltwärts epitomises development-related engagement, global learning and the ability to treat others as equals.
- The programme brings together people in and from Germany, Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania and Eastern Europe.
- Non-formal learning and reinforcing international partnerships are at the heart of this.

The programme was established in 2008 by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to support young people in their commitment to One World. The development ministry funds up to 75 per cent of the costs, with the civil society associations that host the service shouldering the remaining portion. Engagement Global is responsible for coordinating the programme.

## weltwärts works!

- Interactions and experiences with weltwärts provide participants with knowledge on global interrelations and demonstrate to them the personal skills and possibilities for action they can pursue for a more just coexistence.
- Young people gain an understanding of development cooperation thanks to the local collaborative framework and educational mentoring on these experiences. They come to realise that each individual can make a difference.
- Countless former participants in the programme go on to be active in social issues in the long term. weltwärts empowers the participating organisations in their day-to-day work and gives them the skills needed to come together in joint action.
- In this way, the weltwärts volunteer service contributes to the implementation of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

In total, there are currently 120 sending organisations active in the North-South component. Together with the partner organisations abroad, these form the weltwärts network and provide a range of possibilities for completing a volunteer service abroad. Information on the organisations can be found on the weltwärts search and application platform on [weltwaerts.de](https://weltwaerts.de).



To the weltwärts search and application platform

# The long-term study on the impact of weltwärts

The German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) evaluated the North-South component of weltwärts from January 2016 to December 2017. This evaluation focused on the short-term impacts and effectiveness of weltwärts following the volunteer service. Using a quasi-experimental evaluation design, the study surveyed volunteers who travelled abroad in 2017 and were at the beginning of their volunteer service, as well as volunteers who completed their service in 2017 and had returned home. A representative reference group was also surveyed.

The realisation of these surveys was supported by uzbonn GmbH, a social sciences institute which has been conducting weltwärts' annual volunteer survey for quality assurance since 2013.

The results of DEval's evaluation show that weltwärts is effective in terms of its objectives. For example, the evaluation reveals that returning volunteers had more knowledge of their countries of assignment and better skills in appreciating the perspectives of people in their countries of assignment than those at the beginning of their volunteer service. Even at the time of the evaluation, both the evaluators and programme coordinators expressed a keen interest in monitoring the impact of weltwärts in the long term and gaining insights into its long-term effects. For this reason,

uzbonn supplemented the DEval evaluation design with a longitudinal study over the subsequent years. As part of this, those who were surveyed in 2016 for the DEval evaluation were once again surveyed in 2017 upon their return. This longitudinal study was supplemented by a third survey in 2024, around seven years following the volunteers' return. A similar longitudinal study with three surveys in 2016, 2017 and 2024 was conducted on a reference group.

In this summary report, we only present the results relating to the individual development of the weltwärts volunteers. The key questions include:

- How has the volunteer service impacted the lives of volunteers?
- How have the volunteers' careers developed since they completed their service?
- What traits characterise weltwärts volunteers in the long term?

**Extensive report on the results of the weltwärts longitudinal study** (the results from the reference group are also considered here). This report is available only in German. →



**Results of the annual volunteer survey for programme quality assurance.** The results will be available in translated form starting in the fall of 2026. →



**2016 departure survey**

Shortly before or shortly after the start of the volunteer service

**2017 return survey**

At least three months after the end of the volunteer service

**437 of 537** former volunteers took part in all three online surveys.

**2024 follow-up survey**

Around seven years after the end of the volunteer service

# weltwärts promotes long-term engagement

weltwärts volunteers have a vested interest in the common good. Even after completing their volunteer service, many returning volunteers remain active in social projects, both professionally and during their free time.

In the long term, this is reflected in the careers that returning weltwärts volunteers choose: in the 2024 follow-up survey, the majority of those employed stated that they worked in sectors serving the common good or that are related to development policy.

The follow-up survey also revealed that more than a quarter of former volunteers specifically worked in a development-related field. For many, then, the insights into development-related cooperation gained while participating in the weltwärts programme have a lasting influence.

- weltwärts volunteers exhibit a level of willingness to engage in charitable work, including on a long-term basis following the end of the volunteer service.
- Around seven years after returning, the vast majority of former volunteers continue to actively volunteer in their spare time, or take up volunteering again at some point.
- The opportunity to play a small role in shaping society is the main motivation for participating in volunteering for returnees, alongside taking joy in the work.

**60%**  
work in an industry that serves the common good or that is related to development policy.



## Seven years after the volunteer service ...

**59%**  
volunteer in their spare time.



**28%**  
work in a development-related field specifically.

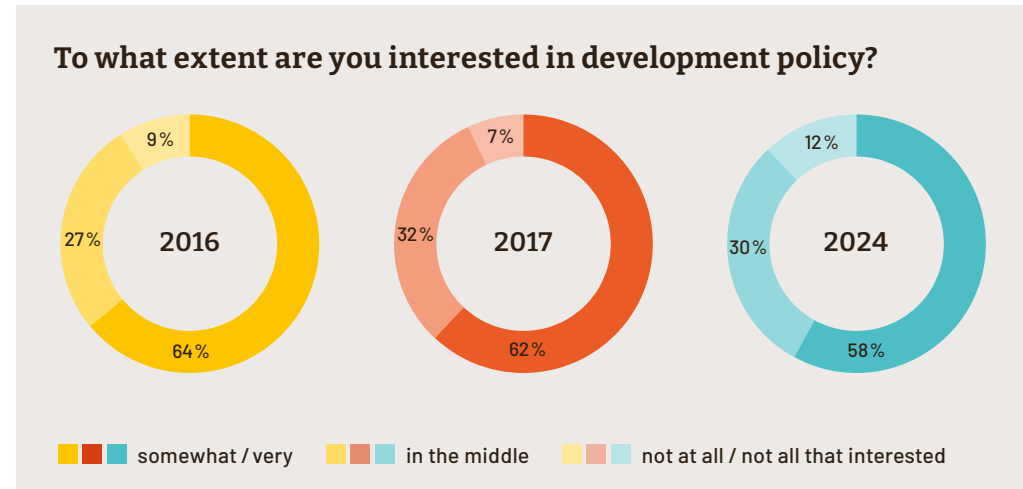


»The entire year abroad with weltwärts increased my awareness of volunteer work. I was already involved in volunteering, and I'll definitely do volunteer work again in the future, in a political or social context, so that I can help people. Without weltwärts, I don't think I would have ever developed this awareness.«



»The volunteer service has definitely influenced my world view, my choice of subject to study and ultimately my choice of career.«

# Interest in development policy remains high



How does the interest weltwärts volunteers have in development policy change?

→ The majority of weltwärts volunteers reported a keen interest in this issue, and not just in the time before and after their volunteer service, but in the long term too.

The persistently high level of interest in development-relevant issues is also revealed in the choice of study courses and careers made by returning volunteers.

→ Most of those returning volunteers in employment or education are involved to a moderate or significant extent with all the topics covered in the survey. The only exceptions to this are the areas of food security and peace building.

»This year, I completed my degree in human medicine (...) I also worked in a hospital during my year abroad. The dedication the staff showed towards their patients despite limited resources really left an impression on me. They always did their very best to help everyone. This is something I'd really like to transfer into my own day-to-day work.«

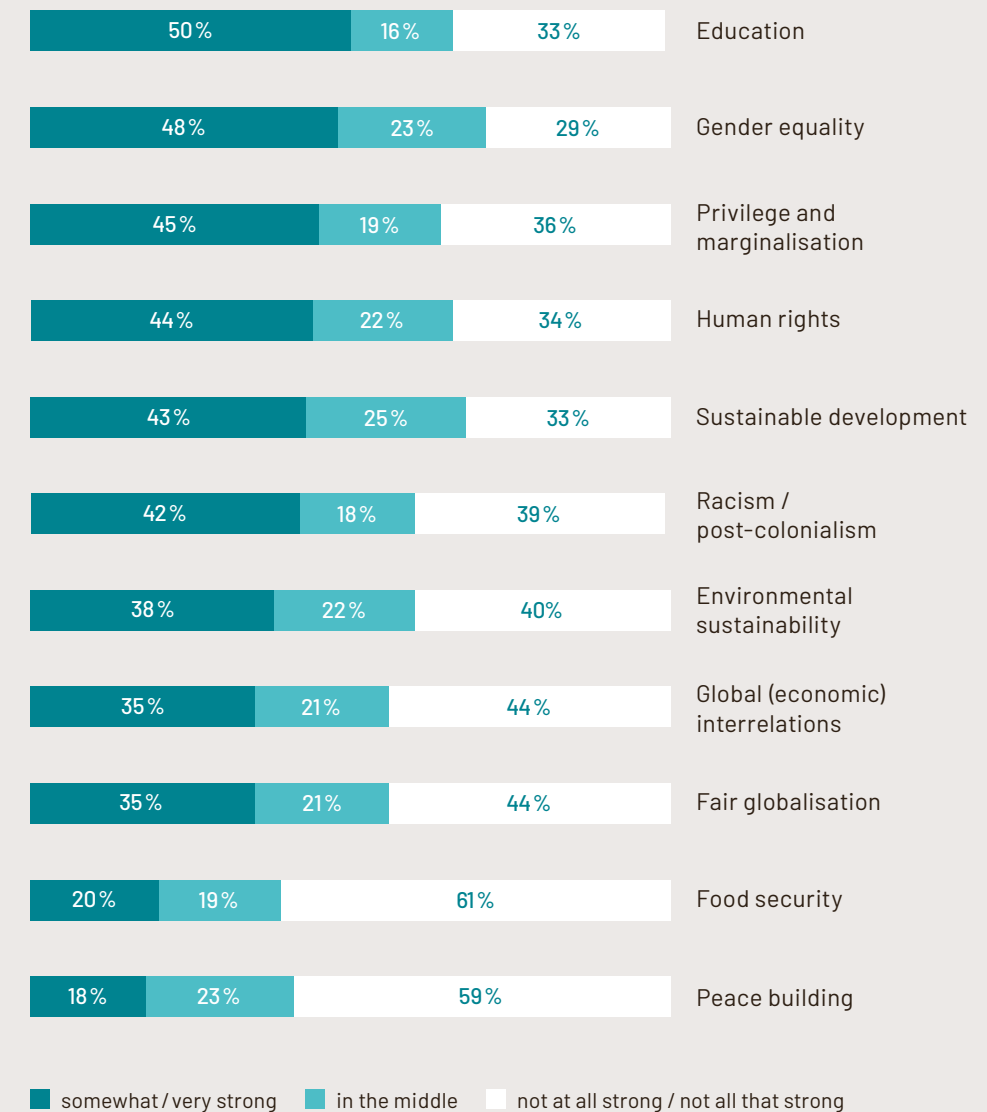
\* Direct quotes from the 2024 follow-up survey



»weltwärts is a unique opportunity to travel the world, broaden your horizons and come to understand peace as a global effort.«



How strong is the connection to development-related topics in your studies and career?



# Awareness of global interdependencies is high

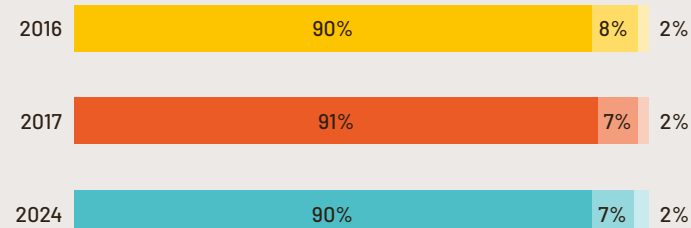
What attitudes do returning volunteers adopt?

→ Almost all weltwärts volunteers see it as their duty to ensure that their personal actions do not inflict any harm on people in other parts of the world. This desire distinguishes returning weltwärts volunteers permanently, even seven years after participating in the programme.

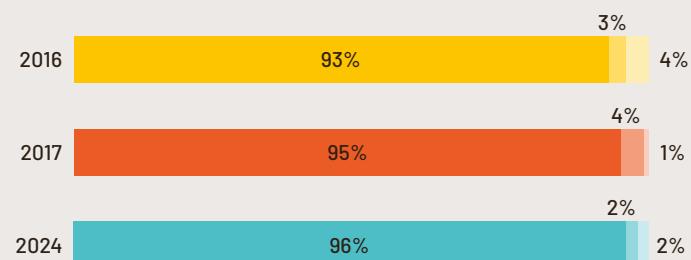
Returning weltwärts volunteers take a very critical stance on global injustices and reflect on the potential global consequences of their own decisions.

→ This critical mindset is not a short-term effect of the volunteer service, but rather a defining stance which sets the returning volunteers apart in the long term, even seven years after participating in weltwärts.

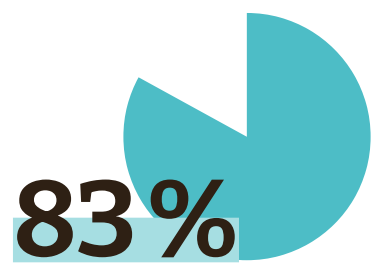
**It is my duty to ensure that my actions do not inflict any harm on people in other parts of the world.**



**The global injustices between people in developed countries and people in developing countries are unfair.**

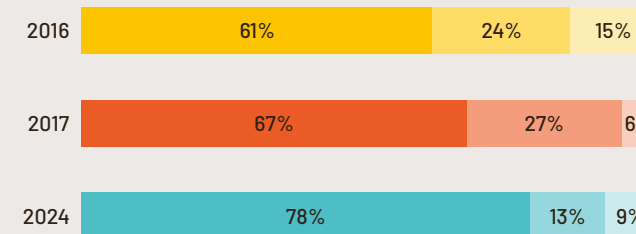


Agreement: ■ ■ ■ fully ■ ■ ■ in the middle ■ ■ ■ not at all / not really

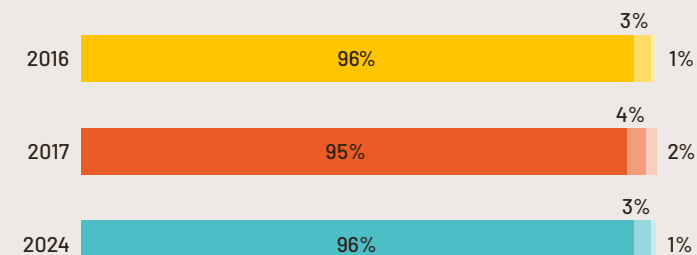


of returning volunteers confirm that weltwärts had a (very) positive impact on their understanding of global interrelations (2024 follow-up survey).

**My decisions impact people in other parts of the world.**



**The ever-increasing gap between the world's rich and poor is of concern to me.**

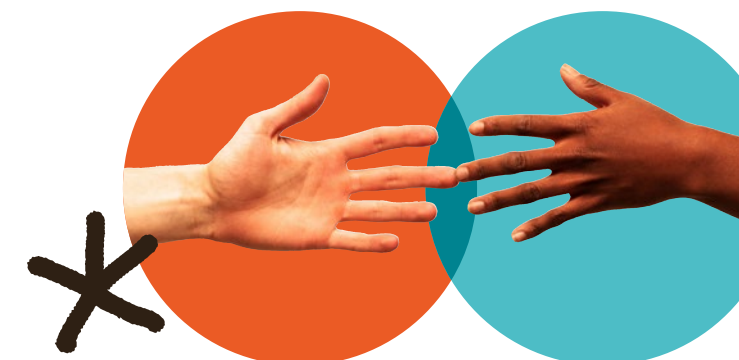


Even in the departure survey in 2016, weltwärts volunteers exhibited a high level of awareness for global injustices and expressed a desire to see a fairer world – these views endured until the follow-up survey in 2024.

→ During their volunteer service and in the following years, the volunteers demonstrate an awareness of the fact that their own decisions can have an impact on people in other parts of the world. In this sense, experiences gained from the weltwärts programme shape the volunteers over a long period.

**77%**

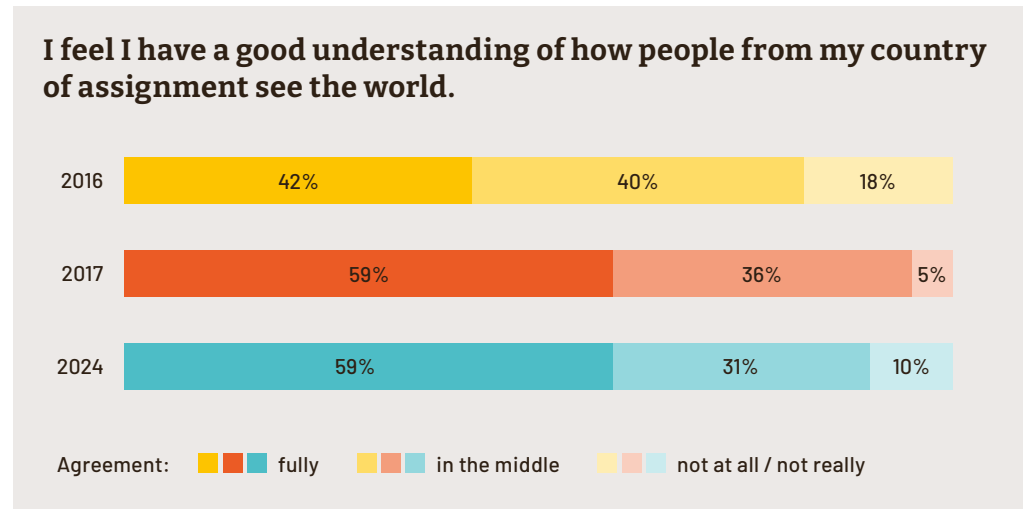
of returning volunteers believe that weltwärts has had a (very) positive impact on their interest in social and political issues (2024 follow-up survey).



**»The experiences you have during weltwärts are truly unique, and if you get stuck in, you also gain a better understanding of global injustices.«**

\* Direct quotes from the 2024 follow-up survey

# Former volunteers recognise the perspectives of people in their country of assignment in the long term



How lasting is weltwärts' impact on volunteers' ability to see things from a different perspective?

- weltwärts is committed to changing perspectives. This is clearly shown in a comparison of the departure and return surveys: during their time abroad with weltwärts, the volunteers develop a better understanding of the perspectives of people in their country of assignment.
- In this regard, weltwärts leaves a lasting impression on volunteers, as even seven years after participating in weltwärts, their ability to shift perspectives is highly developed.

»weltwärts is a wonderful opportunity to encounter different realities. However, to avoid reproducing post-colonial patterns of behaviour, it's essential to build awareness of key issues.«

\*Direct quotes from the 2024 follow-up survey



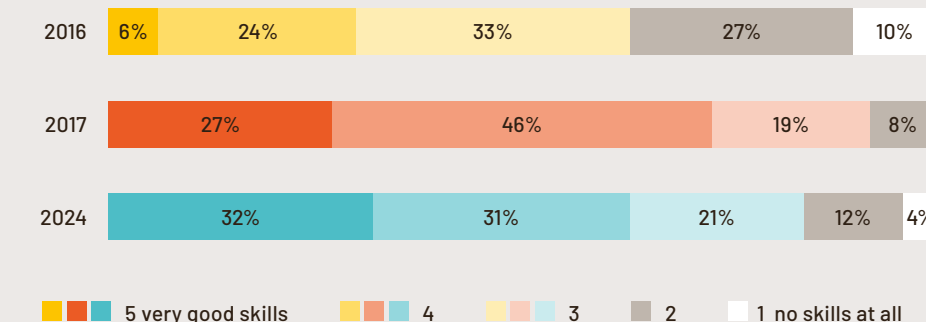
»I learnt to speak fluent Spanish [during my volunteer service], which is why I chose to study Spanish as part of my teacher training.«

## Volunteers boost their language skills significantly and in the long term

What impact does weltwärts have on foreign language skills?

- Before starting their volunteer service, most volunteers have no or at the most moderate skills in the language of their country of assignment.
- During their time abroad with weltwärts, the majority of volunteers develop good to very good language skills.
- This acquisition of foreign language skills through weltwärts endures until the 2024 follow-up survey, even if a slight decline is discernible. What is also interesting is that a portion of returning volunteers have continued to develop their foreign language skills even after participating in weltwärts. The percentage of those who categorise their language skills as very good is higher in 2024 than it is in 2017 for the return survey.

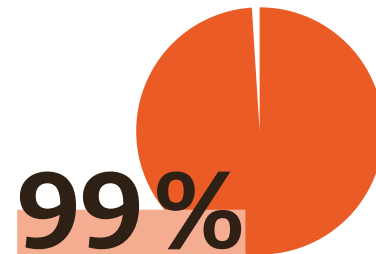
How would you assess your current language skills in the national or common language spoken in your country of assignment?



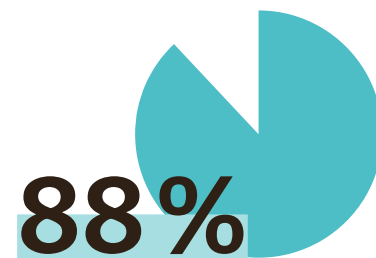
# weltwärts establishes lasting connections

How long do volunteers' connections to people in their country of assignment last?

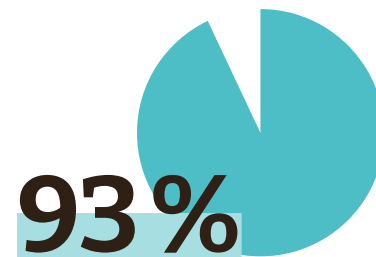
- Almost all volunteers establish contacts with people in their country of assignment during their time abroad.
- These contacts endure over a long period, as, even around seven years after the end of their volunteer service, the majority of returning volunteers report that they are still in contact with people who they met in their country of assignment while participating in weltwärts.
- weltwärts promotes openness and togetherness.



stated in 2017 that they are still in contact with people in their country of assignment.



have maintained contact around seven years later with people who they met in their country of assignment while participating in weltwärts.



of returning volunteers feel that weltwärts still has a (very) positive impact on their openness to other cultures and people even in 2024.

# Enthusiasm for further stays abroad is high

How strongly do the experiences from weltwärts shape the returning volunteers' enthusiasm for further international experiences in the long term, specifically in countries of the Global South?

- During their time abroad with weltwärts, volunteers learn about places and the everyday realities of local people, all in regions with which they probably never would have come into contact otherwise (e.g. through school exchanges, study abroad or travelling).
- These experiences are defining, and the majority of returning volunteers travel abroad again even after participating in weltwärts (94 per cent), frequently in countries of the Global South (67 per cent).
- For returning volunteers, the commitment to development cooperation does not end with the volunteer service. They continue to be involved in development cooperation in countries of the Global South even after their participation in weltwärts has ended.



**1 in 4**

returning volunteers have lived abroad for more than one year during the roughly seven years after the end of their volunteer service.



**2 in 3**

returning volunteers have been to a country of the Global South at least once during the roughly seven years after the end of their volunteer service.



**1 in 5**

returning volunteers have lived in a country of the Global South for at least six months during the roughly seven years after the end of their volunteer service.



**1 in 4**

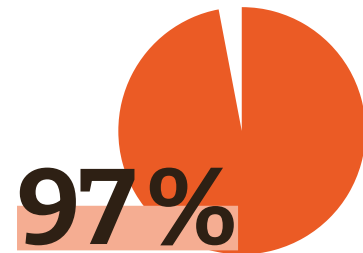
of those returning volunteers who have lived abroad in countries of the Global South were involved in development cooperation during their stay (15 per cent of all returning volunteers).



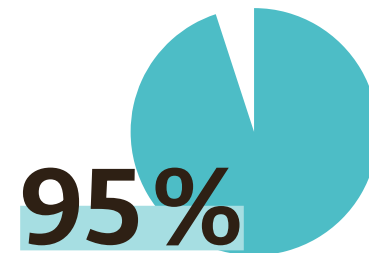
»Through weltwärts, I've been able to learn so much about a culture I knew nothing about before, which has definitely broadened my horizons.«



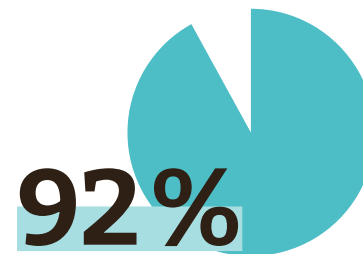
# Volunteers benefit greatly from a personal perspective in the short and long term



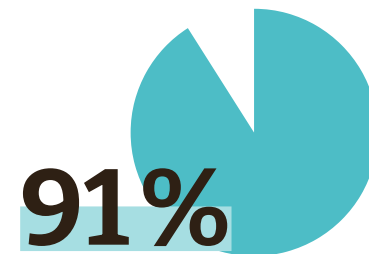
97% stated that they were (very) satisfied in the 2017 return survey shortly after completing their volunteer service.



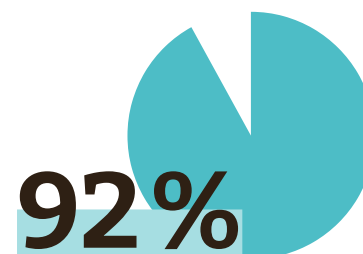
95% believe that weltwärts has had a (very) positive influence on their personal development seven years after their return.



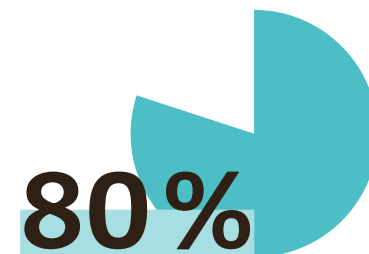
92% stated that they were (very) satisfied in the 2024 follow-up survey seven years after their return.



91% believe that weltwärts has had a (very) positive influence on their sense of personal responsibility and independence seven years after their return.



92% stated that they would recommend participating in weltwärts to other young people in the 2024 follow-up survey seven years after their return.



80% feel, seven years after their return, that weltwärts has given them a clear boost in their motivation to assume social and societal responsibility.

How do the returning volunteers remember their experiences from the weltwärts volunteer service? How high are participation satisfaction levels?

- Satisfaction with the volunteer service is high: this is true both upon the volunteers' return and, to almost the same extent, seven years later.

- Looking back on their own experiences with the volunteer service, the majority of returning volunteers rate their time with weltwärts so highly in the long term that they would recommend the programme to other young people.
- On an individual level, volunteers benefit from participating in weltwärts in a variety of ways. This positive view on the effects of the volunteer service on the volunteers' own development remains in place in the long term.



»I would recommend doing a volunteer service, as it gives you experiences that otherwise wouldn't be possible. I also find engaging with global political issues very rewarding, and I have the feeling that I've been able to develop my personal values and attitudes to a great extent during this time.«

\* Direct quotes from the 2024 follow-up survey

with its programme

on behalf of



[weltwaerts.de/en](http://weltwaerts.de/en)

