



Bundeskanzleramt

# Volunteering in Germany

Key findings of the Sixth German Survey on Volunteering (FWS 2024)

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# Key Findings

**In 2024, 36.7 per cent of the population aged 14 and over in Germany are involved in voluntary work, which corresponds to around 26.97 million people.** This means that volunteering remains at a high level, although there was a slight decline compared to the volunteering rate of 39.7 per cent in 2019.

**In terms of the intensity with which volunteering is carried out, the opposite trend is emerging. In 2024, volunteers once again invest slightly more time in their voluntary work.** In the 2014 and 2019 surveys, there was a slight shift towards less time being spent on voluntary work; this trend has now reversed. Around a quarter of volunteers (24 per cent) state that they spend three to five hours a week on the most time-consuming activity and almost one in five volunteers (19 per cent) even spent six or more hours. In 2019, these percentages were 22 per cent and 16 per cent respectively.

**However, it is not only the time spent on these activities that has increased compared to 2019, but also the frequency with which they are carried out:** In 2024, 48 per cent of volunteers state that they carried out the activity once a week or more frequently, compared with 42 per cent in 2019.

**Volunteers show a pronounced consistency in their work:** 70 per cent of them intended to continue their volunteering activities unchanged over the next twelve months. The percentage of those who want to increase the amount of time they spend volunteering (10 per cent) and those who want to invest slightly less time (10 per cent) are roughly equal. Only 6 per cent intend to stop volunteering altogether.

**A look at age clearly shows that volunteering is highest in the younger age groups:** 39.9 per cent of 14- to 29-year-olds and 40.4 per cent of 30- to 49-year-olds are involved in voluntary work. The percentage of 50- to 64-year-olds is 37.6 per cent and 65- to 75-year-olds is 36.9 per cent. Participation in volunteering only decreases with increasing age, with 21.1 per cent of those aged 75 and over being involved.

**Women and men are equally likely to volunteer.** As in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, there is no statistically significant difference between the volunteering rates of women and men. However, there are differences in certain phases of life: women in the 30 to 49 age group volunteer proportionately more than men, while men in the 75+ age group volunteer more than women.

**There are also differences in volunteering when analysed by level of school education:** In 2024, 24.6 per cent of people with a low level of school education, 35.9 per cent of people with a medium level of school education and 45.5 per cent of people with a high level of school education were involved in volunteering. The rate of volunteering among school pupils is the highest at 48.4 per cent. Compared to 2019, the slight decline in volunteering in 2024 only occurred among those volunteers with a high level of school education; there was no statistically significant decline among people with a low or medium level of school education compared to 2019.

**In 2024, 28.4 per cent of people with a migration background are volunteers.** While the rate of volunteering of people without a migration background has fallen slightly compared to 2019, it has bucked the trend and remained stable among people with a migration background. Among people with a migration background and personal experience of immigration, the rate of volunteering has actually risen compared to 2019.

**Among non-volunteers, 41 per cent are open to getting involved in volunteering in the next 12 months:** 7 per cent can definitely imagine doing so and 34 per cent would maybe be open to it. This willingness to volunteer is particularly pronounced among younger people; two thirds (66 per cent) of 14- to 29-year-old non-volunteers are willing to take on a voluntary activity.

**Volunteers most frequently (62 per cent) cite time factors as the reason for possibly limiting or ending their involvement.** Other reasons were health reasons (32 per cent) and the desire to no longer have any

obligations (31 per cent). Professional and family reasons (27 per cent each) are also frequently cited. Financial aspects (10 per cent) and lack of recognition (9 per cent) play a lesser role. For school pupils, apprentices and students, the demands of school and training are among the most common reasons (80 per cent) for wanting to limit or end their voluntary work.

**Volunteers often carry out more than one voluntary activity—they are involved in multiple activities. On average, volunteers carry out 1.8 different activities:** 53 per cent mention one activity, 26 per cent report two voluntary activities and 21 per cent have three or more different voluntary commitments. The average number of activities taken on has fallen slightly in recent years: in 2014 and 2019, the average number of activities was 2.0 in both years.

**The majority of volunteering takes place – as in all previous waves of the Survey on Volunteering – in the area of sport and exercise.** 13 per cent of all people aged 14 and over categorise their voluntary work in this area. Volunteering in the social area “for people who need support” follows in second place with 8 per cent. 6 per cent are active in each of the areas of culture and music, schools and nurseries, and the church or religious sector. Women volunteer disproportionately in the social sector and in schools or nurseries, while men are more active in sport and in the accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management. There are also differences according to age and level of school education.

**Clubs remain the established structure for voluntary work.** Almost half (49 per cent) of volunteers carry out their work in a club. 13 per cent are involved in individually organised groups, such as neighbourhood support, self-help groups, initiatives or project work. Between 2004 and 2019, a proportionate increase in volunteering in individually organised groups was observed; this trend does not continue in 2024. Churches or other religious institutions are in third place among the various forms of organisation with 11 per cent.

**In 2024, a quarter (26 per cent) of volunteers hold a management or board position as part of their work – this percentage has remained stable for ten years.** Men take on such roles in their voluntary work more frequently (31 per cent) than women (21 per cent). The proportion of people in management or board positions increases with the age and higher level of school education of the volunteers.

**Almost nine out of ten volunteers (86 per cent) use digital applications as part of their work.** The possible uses range from arranging appointments (75 per cent) to soliciting donations or recruiting volunteers (20 per cent). **Digital applications predominantly support analogue-based, practical volunteering.** 16 per cent of all volunteers state that they volunteer mainly or even exclusively with the aid of digital tools. The intensity of use is higher among men, younger people and volunteers with a higher level of school education.

**In 2024, people in rural areas continue to volunteer slightly more often (38.4 per cent) than people in urban areas (35.8 per cent).** At the same time, the rate of volunteering in the western federal states (37.3 per cent) is still slightly higher than in the eastern federal states (34.0 per cent). While the difference between east and west narrowed increasingly between 1999 and 2019, the ratios have not converged any further since 2019. **In all federal states, more than 30 per cent of the population are involved in voluntary work.**

# 1. Introduction

The German Survey on Volunteering has been reporting on the development of volunteering in Germany for over 25 years. This short report presents the key findings of the Sixth German Survey on Volunteering 2024. Together with the results from the previous five surveys, developments in volunteering since 1999 can be described.

## The concept of volunteering

In the Survey on Volunteering, volunteering is understood as an activity that is carried out voluntarily and collectively in leisure time outside of family and work, that is not aimed at material gain, and takes place in the public sphere. In addition, voluntary work is orientated towards the common good; it is geared towards a common social purpose or towards helping other people (Simonson et al. 2022, p. 14). Volunteering can thus be distinguished from other forms of support and assistance, for example, purely private work in the family environment or among friends and acquaintances.

Volunteering is extremely diverse and can take many different forms: from “traditional” voluntary work, especially in clubs, to short-term volunteering, for example in environmental disasters, in voluntary service or as self-organised volunteering in self-help. Volunteers take on honorary positions in community or city councils, they teach children to swim in sports clubs, they prepare religious events, organise concerts, help in crisis situations or in the event of a disaster, they are active in a neighbourhood group, or volunteer in environmental protection or with refugees.

The experiences that volunteers gain in their work are just as varied as their tasks. These activities often require certain resources or skills that not all people have in equal measure. Depending on their age, school education or family commitments, people have very different opportunities to take up volunteering. Visualising such differences between population groups helps to facilitate access to volunteering for all those who wish to do so through targeted steps.

## Further development of the Survey on Volunteering

Key survey characteristics were retained in the 2024 Survey on Volunteering to ensure comparability with the previous survey waves. The survey is based on a representative telephone survey of the resident population aged 14 and over in Germany, which has been conducted every five years since 1999. The current survey includes 27,542 interviews with randomly selected people aged 14 and over from private households in Germany. The sample consists of a landline portion and a mobile phone portion (for further information, see the Appendix on Methods).

The core element of the volunteering survey, the questions to determine the rate of volunteering, was left almost unchanged, so there is direct comparability with the 2019 Survey on Volunteering. Volunteering is recorded on the basis of self-reporting by the respondents also in the form of open-ended questions, i.e. without fixed answers. These open-ended responses must be checked individually to determine whether these activities are voluntary or not. Assessment is based on a catalogue of criteria that has already been used in previous surveys and was expanded to include the criterion of public benefit orientation in the 2024 Survey on Volunteering.

Voluntary activities that violate one of the criteria are no longer categorised as voluntary activities by the checking process. This could lead to people who initially described themselves as volunteers ultimately being assigned to the “not volunteers” group. This method was used consistently in 2024. As such, a proportion of 4.4 per cent of all those who initially assessed themselves as volunteers in the interview as part of the volunteering survey were assessed as “not volunteers”. This percentage was 1.6 per cent in the 2014 Survey on Volunteering and 2.6 per cent in the 2019 survey. The scope of corrections has therefore increased slightly since 2014, but remains in the low single-digit range.

The results were analysed taking statistical significance into account, with a threshold value of  $p < 0.05$  being used. The significance method was used to determine whether the differences found in the sample also exist with a high probability (at least 95 per cent) in the respective population, i.e. whether they are statistically significant, or whether they only occur randomly in the data and are therefore not statistically significant.

### Outlook

This summary report presents the key findings of the 2024 Survey on Volunteering. An in-depth analysis of the survey data on other aspects of volunteering in Germany will be provided in the main report on the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, which will be published in the course of 2026. The survey data is made available in the form of a “Scientific Use File” for further scientific use.

## 2. Volunteering Over the Years

Volunteering plays a key role in social cohesion and in a vibrant democracy. People volunteer in very different areas. They organise sports activities, campaign for environmental and climate protection, support refugees, or get involved in social projects and neighbourhood support. They take on responsibility, contribute their experience and ideas, and play an active role in solving social challenges. In addition, many volunteers make new social contacts, acquire new skills and develop personally while carrying out their activities.

However, volunteering is not unconditional. On the one hand, it requires an individual's willingness to take on voluntary work and the availability of free time. Secondly, the desired involvement or the volunteering organisation must offer open-access opportunities. Depending on the type of voluntary activity, special knowledge or skills may be required, which volunteers must bring with them or which are learnt and acquired in the course of volunteering. The personal prerequisites and resources for volunteering may differ in different population groups and vary depending on the individual's life situation and age.

### **Volunteering is holding its own despite the challenges of recent years – 36.7 per cent of the population volunteer**

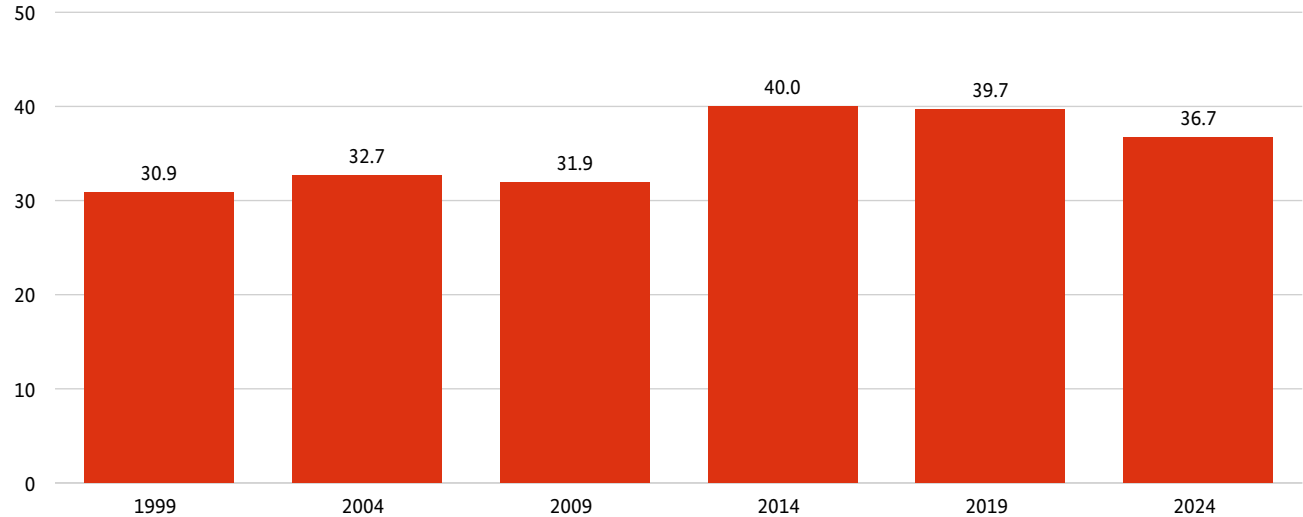
In 2024, 36.7 per cent of the population aged 14 and over in Germany are involved in voluntary work – that equates to around 26.97 million people. This means that volunteering remains at a high level, even though there is a slight decline compared to the rate of volunteering of 39.7 per cent in 2019 (Figure 2–1). In view of the

challenges of recent years, it is clear that volunteering in Germany remains stable and viable. Although the restrictions on public life to combat the coronavirus pandemic also temporarily interrupted the practice of volunteering, particularly in the years 2020 to 2022, and greater economic uncertainty in subsequent years may contribute to people finding less time or opportunities for volunteering, it continues to play a major role in many people's everyday lives.

A look at volunteering rate trends since the start of the surveys shows: in the first three surveys from 1999 to 2009, the rate of volunteering was between 30.9 per cent and 32.7 per cent. Significantly higher values were measured from 2014 onwards, with 40.0 per cent in 2014 and 39.7 per cent in 2019. A change to the volunteering survey from 2014 onwards, with a specified time window for being involved “in the last 12 months”, meant that longer-term or spontaneous volunteering could also be better recorded than in the first three waves of the survey. This led to a more precise recording of volunteering and to higher volunteering rates. Until 2009, the volunteering survey asked about “current” involvement (Simonson et al. 2022, page 34). The 2024 Survey on Volunteering is based on the methodology used in the survey since 2014 in key respects, meaning that the current results are easily comparable with the data from the last 15 years (see the Appendix on Methods). Only a small part of the decline in the rate of volunteering in 2024 can be attributed to the fact that the catalogue of criteria was applied somewhat more consistently this time when examining the open-ended responses on volunteering.

Figure 2-1: Percentage of volunteers compared over time 1999–2024

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,690), FWS 2019 (n=27,762), FWS 2024 (n=27,542). Source: FWS 1999–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian)

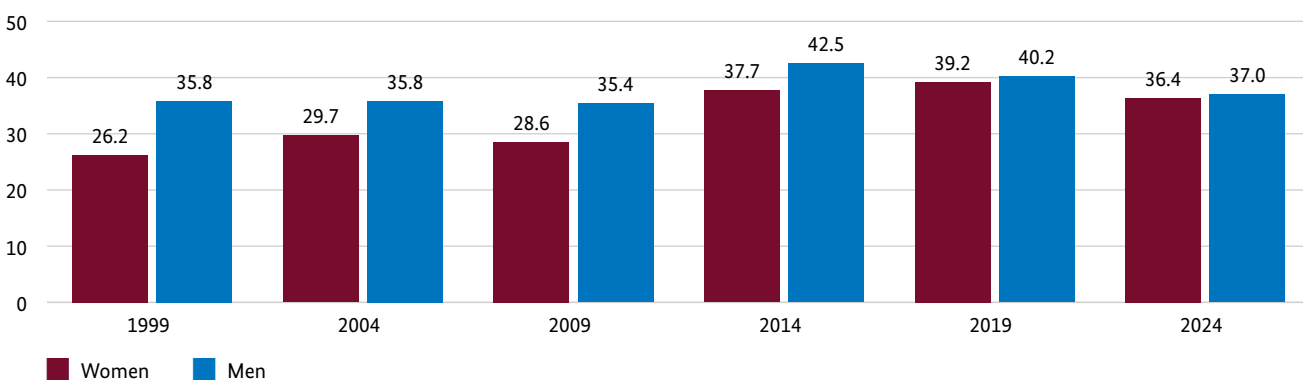
Women and men volunteer equally often

In 2024, there are no statistically significant differences in the volunteering of women (36.4 per cent) and men (37.0 per cent), meaning that men and women volunteer equally often. Statistically “not significant” means that the numerical difference of 0.6 percentage points is not statistically significant, i.e. this difference is within the

statistical margin of error. In 1999, participation was still very different: The rate of volunteering of men was 9.6 percentage points higher than that of women. This gap narrowed continuously in the following years. In the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, women and men volunteered equally often for the first time, and even then no significant differences in the participation of women and men could be measured (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2: Percentage of volunteers by gender compared over time 1999–2024

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,690), FWS 2019 (n=27,762), FWS 2024 (n=27,542). Source: FWS 1999–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

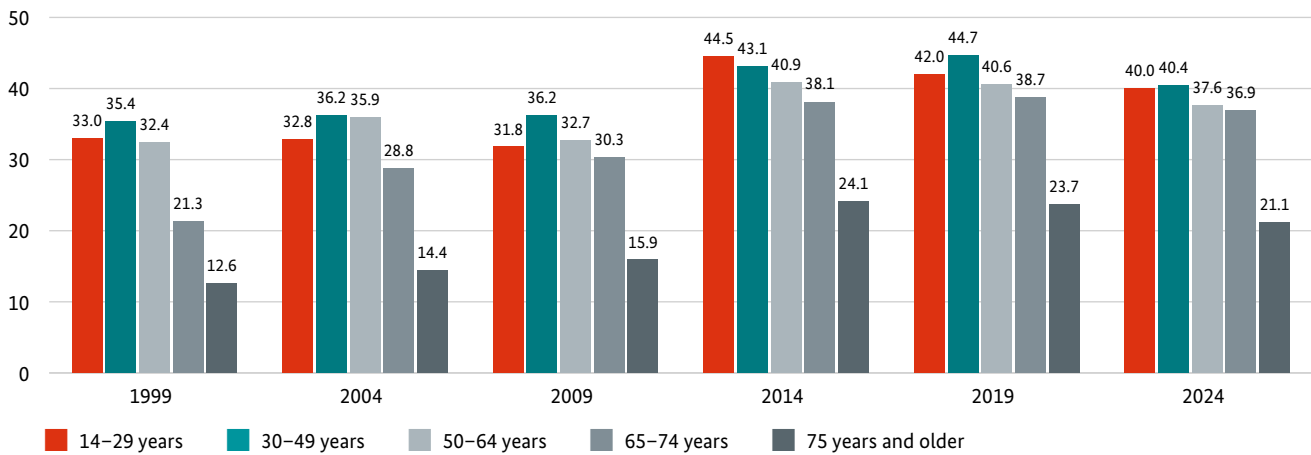
Rate of volunteering highest in the younger age groups

Participation in volunteering varies depending on the age of the volunteers. It is highest in the 30 to 49 age group at 40.4 per cent and in the 14 to 29 age group at 40.0 per cent. Involvement also remains at a high level in the older age groups: 37.6 per cent of 50- to 64-year-olds and 36.9 per cent of 65- to 74-year-olds are in-

involved in voluntary work. Participation declines in the 75+ age group, but even in this age group 21.1 per cent of the population still volunteer. The slight decline in the level of volunteering compared to the 2019 Survey on Volunteering can be seen in all age groups. The strongest decline can be seen in the 30 to 49 age group, from 44.7 per cent in 2019 to 40.4 per cent in 2024 (Figure 2-3).

Figure 2-3: Percentage of volunteers by age compared over time 1999–2024

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis; all respondents with information on age. FWS 1999 (n=14,901), FWS 2004 (n=14,974), FWS 2009 (n=19,945), FWS 2014 (n=28,690), FWS 2019 (n=27,762), FWS 2024 (n=27,542).  
Source: FWS 1999–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

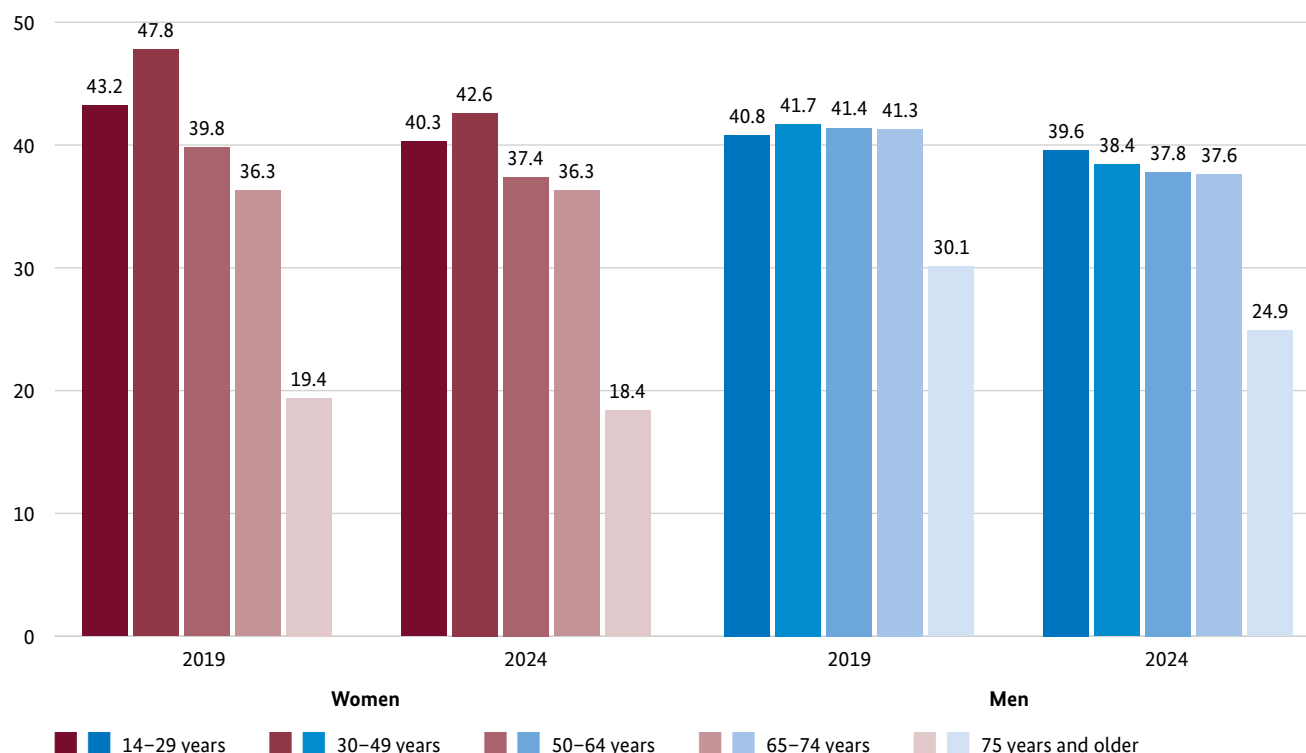
Differences in volunteering by age and gender

Even though women and men are equally likely to volunteer in 2024, there are differences in individual age groups: in the age group 75 years and older, men are proportionately more involved (24.9 per cent) than women (18.4 per cent) (men: 6.5 percentage points higher). The opposite is true for 30- to 49-year-olds: at 42.6 per cent, the rate of volunteering for women is

higher than that of men at 38.4 per cent (women: 4.2 percentage points higher). These differences are even more pronounced in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, with 47.8 per cent of women and 41.7 per cent of men in the 30 to 49 age group volunteering (women: 6.1 percentage points higher). In 2024, the rate of volunteering in the group 30- to 49-year-old women fell slightly more strongly than among men of the same age compared to 2019 (Figure 2-4).

**Figure 2–4: Percentage of volunteers by gender and age compared over time 2019–2024**

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all respondents. FWS 2019 (n=27,762), FWS 2024 (n=27,542).

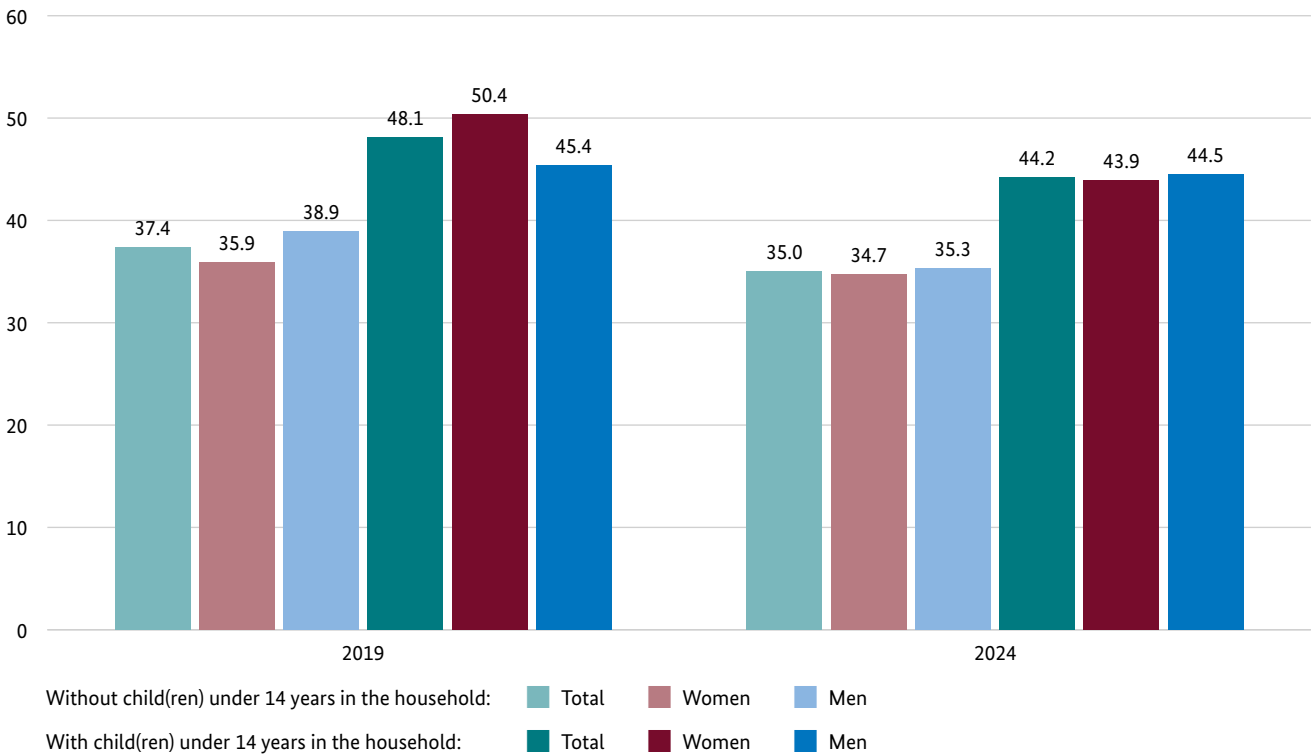
Source: FWS 2019–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

## Disproportionate decline of volunteering rate among women with children

In order to shed more light on the disproportionate decline in volunteering among women aged 30 to 49, an additional analysis was carried out according to other characteristics. If labour force participation is included in the analysis, the rate of volunteering for people in part-time or marginal employment decreases from 50.8 per cent in 2019 to 44.4 per cent in 2024 (not shown). In addition, volunteering among people living with children under the age of 14 was slightly lower in 2024 than five years earlier: in 2019, the rate of volunteering in this group was 48.1 per cent and 44.2 per cent in 2024. Figure 2–5 clearly shows that this decline is primarily due to the trend among women with children of this age in the household: among them, the rate of volunteering fell from 50.4 per cent to 43.9 per cent.

Figure 2–5: Percentage of volunteers by gender and children under 14 in the household compared over time 2019–2024

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all respondents with information on the number of children up to the age of 14 in the household. FWS 2019 (n=27,743), FWS 2024 (n=27,512). Source: FWS 2019–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Differences in volunteering by school education remain large

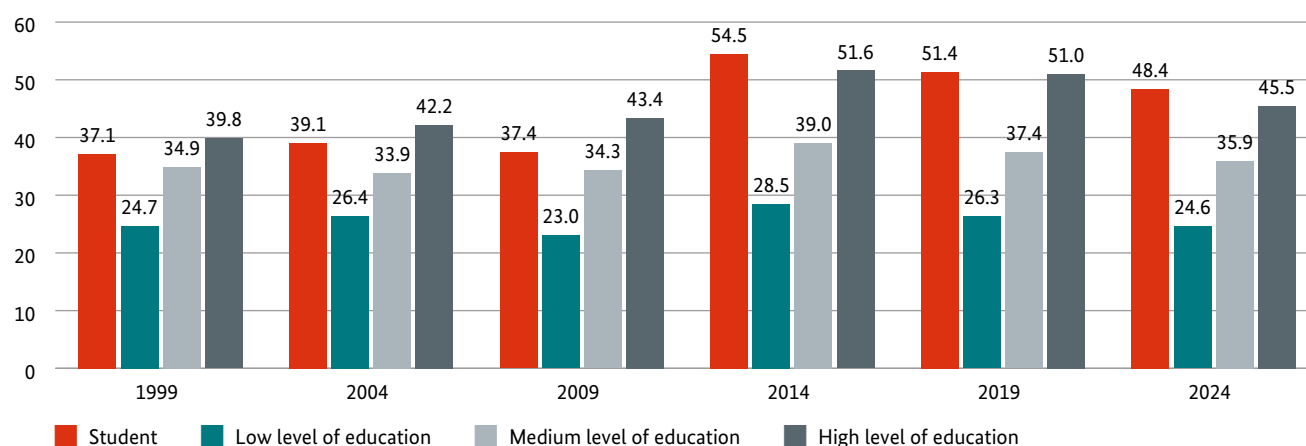
In 2024, the rate of volunteering is 24.6 per cent for people with a low level of school education, 35.9 per cent for people with a medium level of school education, and 45.5 per cent for people with a high level of school education. The percentage is highest among schoolchildren at 48.4 per cent. Although the differences between the school education groups remain clear, they have narrowed slightly compared to 2019.

In the population group with a high level of school education, there was a decline in volunteering from 51.0 per cent in 2019 to 45.5 per cent in 2024 (–5.5 percentage points; Figure 2–6). Compared to the

other school education groups, this decline is disproportionately high. It should be noted here that people with a high level of school education make up the largest group of volunteers (46 per cent of all volunteers have a high level of school education, which is higher than the percentage of people with a high level of school education in the population as a whole). However, the decline in volunteering between 2019 and 2024 among people with a low level of school education (–1.7 percentage points) and with a medium level of school education (–1.5 percentage points) is not statistically significant.

**Figure 2–6: Percentage of volunteers by school education compared over time 1999–2024**

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent..



Unweighted basis: all respondents with information on school education. FWS 1999 (n=14,840), FWS 2004 (n=14,983), FWS 2009 (n=19,940), FWS 2014 (n=28,682), FWS 2019 (n=27,756), FWS 2024 (n=27,535).

Source: FWS 1999–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### Volunteering rate of people with a migration background remains stable

In 2024, 28.4 per cent of people with a migration background aged 14 and over are volunteers. As in the previous survey waves, people without a migration background are significantly more likely to be volunteers, with a rate of 40.1 per cent. However, the difference between the two groups has narrowed slightly compared to 2019: while the rate of volunteering among people with a migration background has remained stable (at 27.0 per cent in 2019 and 28.4 per cent in 2024), it has fallen slightly among people without a migration background, from 44.4 per cent in 2019 to 40.1 per cent in 2024 (Figure 2–7).

Within the group of people with a migration background, differences in volunteering can be recognised: people with a migrant background but without personal experience of immigration are volunteers at a rate of 36.3 per cent – almost on a par with the overall population (36.7 per cent). 25.8 per cent of people with personal experience of immigration are volunteers. There are differences according to nationality: 37.4 per cent of people with a migrant background without personal experience of immigration and German citizenship are volunteers, compared to 31.7 per cent of those without German citizenship. 32.5 per cent of people with

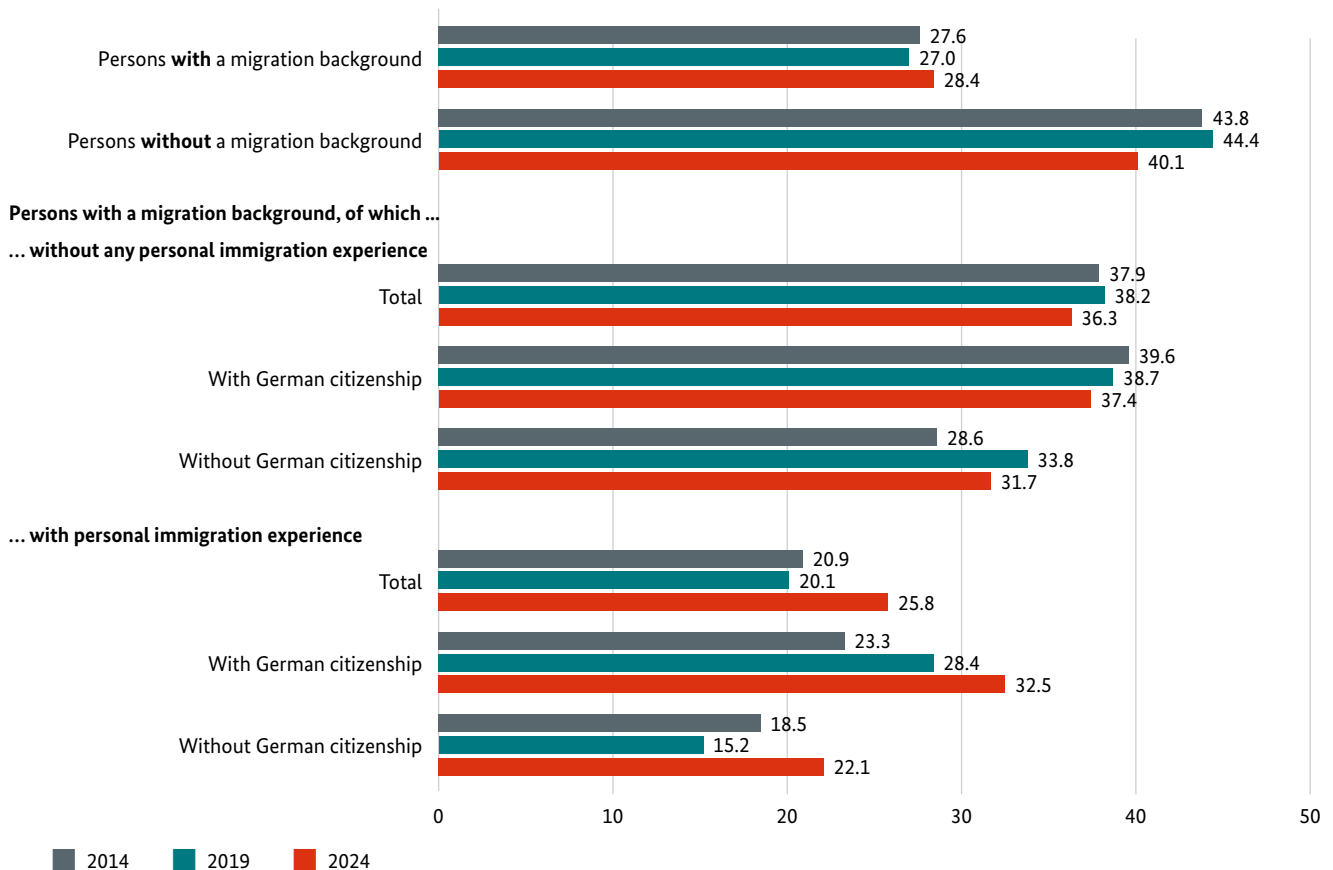
personal experience of immigration and with German citizenship volunteer, compared to 22.1 per cent of those without German citizenship.

It is worth noting that the rate of volunteering among people with a migrant background and with personal immigration experience has risen against the general trend compared to 2019 – from 20.1 per cent in 2019 to 25.8 per cent in 2024. In this group, there is an increase in both persons with German citizenship and persons without German citizenship.

Volunteering for refugees has increased compared to the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, and disproportionately among people with their own immigration experience (not shown): of all volunteers, 28 per cent have volunteered for refugees in the last five years, compared to 24 per cent in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering. For people without a migrant background, this percentage rose from 23 per cent (2019) to 26 per cent, while for people with a migrant background and with personal experience of immigration, it rose very significantly from 26 per cent (2019) to 37 per cent. People with their own immigration experience thus play a special role in supporting refugees.

**Figure 2–7: Percentage of volunteers by migrant background compared over time 2014–2024**

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all respondents with information on migrant background. FWS 2014 (n=28,358), FWS 2019 (n=27,564), FWS 2024 (n=27,239). Composition of case numbers (unweighted): 83 per cent without a migrant background, 16 per cent with a migrant background, no information on migrant background available for 1 per cent of respondents. The 16 per cent of respondents with a migrant background break down into 9 per cent with no experience of immigration (8.5 per cent Germans and 0.5 per cent non-Germans) and 7 per cent with experience of immigration (4 per cent Germans and 3 per cent non-Germans). Source: FWS 2014–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### Conclusion

The results of the 2024 Survey on Volunteering show that, with a rate of volunteering of 36.7 per cent, a high proportion of the population aged 14 and over in Germany is involved in voluntary work. Participation in volunteering varies depending on age, school education and migrant background. At 40.4 per cent, a particularly large number of people aged between 30 and 49 are volunteers. The rate of volunteering of women in this age group is higher than that of men of the same age. Conversely, the rate of volunteering among men aged 75 and over is higher than that of women of the same age. People with a lower level of school education are still less likely to be volunteers than those with a higher level of school education. While the rate of volunteer-

ing has fallen slightly overall and among people without a migrant background, it has remained stable among people with a migrant background.

These differences in volunteering can be attributed to unequal access opportunities to volunteering, as the Fourth Volunteering Report found. The report identifies access barriers and thresholds that make it difficult for certain groups of people to take up and carry out voluntary work. These hurdles contribute to the fact that social inequalities are also reproduced in volunteering (Deutscher Bundestag 2024). There is thus still a need for action to improve access opportunities for volunteering and to remove barriers and obstacles to volunteering.

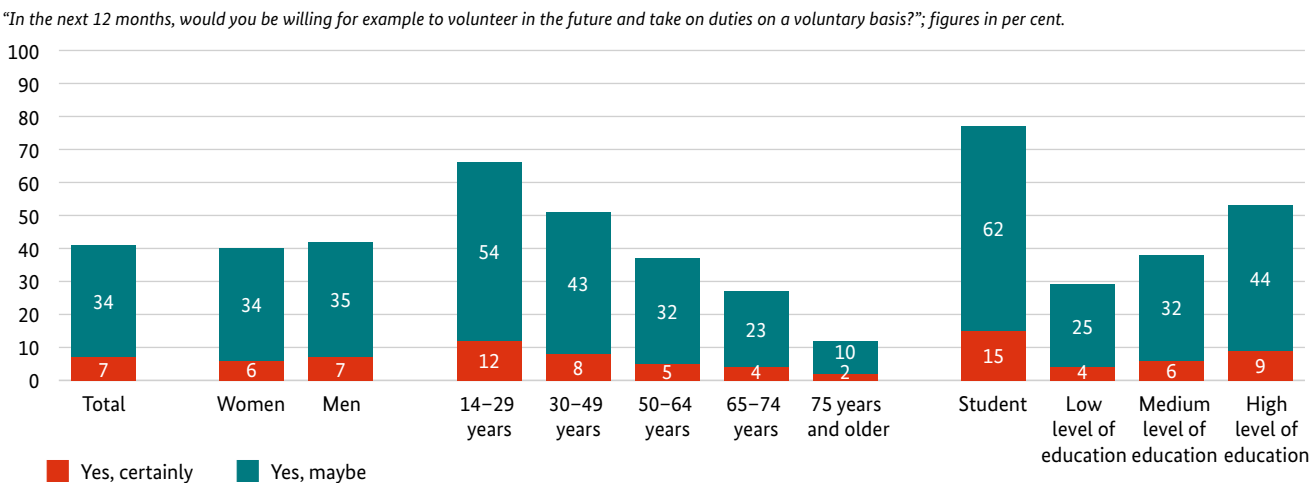
### 3. Volunteering Potential

The Survey on Volunteering also surveys people who are not volunteers. What is of interest here is their potential willingness to volunteer, i.e. whether these people would be willing to volunteer in the future. The result describes the potential for volunteering in the population.<sup>1</sup> There are also volunteers who are thinking about reducing the amount of time they spend volunteering in the near future, or ending it altogether. In the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, volunteers were asked for the first time whether they planned to continue their volunteering activity in the next 12 months as before, extend or reduce it in terms of time, end it completely, or whether they had already ended this activity.

**A high proportion of non-volunteers are open to volunteering**

Among non-volunteers, 41 per cent can imagine volunteering in the next 12 months. 7 per cent of non-volunteers would “definitely” and a further 34 per cent would “maybe” be prepared to volunteer (Figure 3–1). The group of non-volunteers includes both people who have never volunteered and people who have volunteered in the past.

Figure 3–1: Willingness to volunteer in the next 12 months by gender, age and school education



Unweighted basis: all non-volunteers. FWS 2024 (n= 15,256).  
Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

**Higher willingness, especially in younger age groups and among people with a high level of school education**

There are no differences between women and men in terms of whether they are considering volunteering in the future. However, the willingness to volunteer varies depending on age, and decreases slightly with increasing age: the potential for volunteering is particularly

high among young people in the 14 to 29 age group, in which two thirds of non-volunteers are open to volunteering. 12 per cent can “definitely” imagine volunteering in the future and a further 54 per cent can “maybe” imagine it. Half of 30- to 49-year-olds (51 per cent) are open to the idea, compared with 37 per cent of 50- to 64-year-olds. In the older age groups, 27 per cent of those aged 65 to 74 and 12 per cent of those aged

1 In the 2024 survey, the question about potential future involvement was changed compared to 2014 and 2019. Instead of the wording “in the future”, the period “in the next 12 months” was used (analogous to the query on current involvement). The results can thus not be compared in a time series with the data from 2014 and 2019.

75 and over can imagine volunteering in the next 12 months. This shows that there is considerable potential for volunteering in these age groups too.

At 53 per cent, people with a high level of school education are particularly willing to volunteer in the next 12 months. However, people with a medium (38 per cent) and low level of school education (29 per cent) are also remarkably willing to volunteer in the future.

### 80 per cent of volunteers want to continue their volunteering activities as before or extend them in terms of time

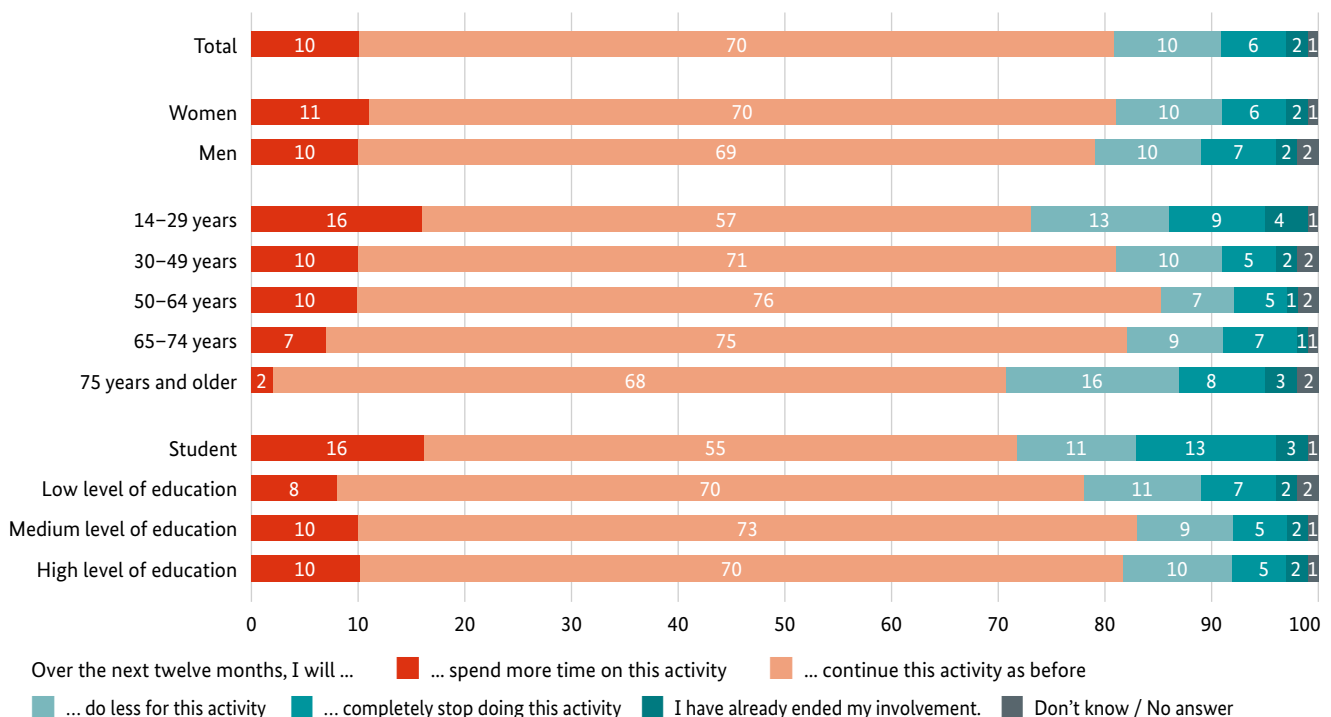
70 per cent of volunteers intend to continue their voluntary work over the next twelve months as before. The percentages of those who would like to extend this

activity (10 per cent) and those who would like to do less (also 10 per cent) are roughly equal. However, 6 per cent of volunteers report that they want to stop volunteering altogether. 2 per cent state that they had already ended this involvement (which they had carried out in the last 12 months) at the time of the interview. This means that just under a fifth of volunteers (18 per cent) want to reduce or end their involvement or have already ended it recently. On the other hand, 80 per cent of volunteers would like to maintain or extend their activities (Figure 3–2). For people with several voluntary activities, this information refers to the most time-consuming voluntary activity.

In this question, too, there are no differences between the intentions expressed by women and men. However, there are certainly differences between age groups.

Figure 3–2: Intention to continue the activity by gender, age and school education

"If you think about the next 12 months: will you do this [most time-consuming] activity..."; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2024 (n= 11,557).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

### **Volunteers: youngest age cohort with the strongest desire for change**

Stability of involvement is particularly pronounced in the 30 to 74 age group, where the percentage of people who would like to remain or even increase their commitment to voluntary work is above average. Among 50- to 64-year-olds, 86 per cent intend to continue or extend their volunteering. The willingness to change is strongest in the youngest age group: the 14- to 29-year-olds state particularly frequently that they want to extend their volunteering activities in the next 12 months (16 per cent). At the same time, 22 per cent of this age group report that they want to invest less time in the future or stop doing so altogether. This may be due to biographical factors: at a young age, people often move house, for example to train, study or start a career. There is also a great willingness to try something new. Among volunteers aged 75 and over, 68 per cent plan to continue their volunteering as before. 16 per cent of the volunteers in this age group are considering reducing the amount of time they volunteer. But even in this age group, only 8 per cent would like to end their volunteering activities completely.

Looking at the volunteers' school education, there are hardly any differences in terms of their plans to continue or change their voluntary work. 7 per cent of those with a lower level of school education want to stop working altogether, which is slightly higher than those with an intermediate or higher level of school education (5 per cent each).

### **Volunteers: reasons for possible time restriction or termination of their work**

Of all volunteers, 16 per cent state that they intend to do less of their most time-intensive voluntary activity in the next 12 months or to end it completely (Figure 3-2). These volunteers were asked about the reasons for their intention (Figure 3-3). At 62 per cent, time-related motives are in first place: 16 per cent state that they would like to devote more time to another voluntary activity and 56 per cent cite "other time-related reasons" (10 per cent state both time-related reasons). Younger volunteers in particular cite time

resources as a reason, but this factor becomes less important as volunteers get older: 71 per cent of 14- to 29-year-olds, but only 30 per cent of those aged 75 and over, cite "other time-related reasons". For a possible time restriction or termination of volunteering, 32 per cent cite health reasons and 31 per cent state that they no longer wish to make any commitments. Both motives are most frequently cited by those aged 65 and over, while health reasons dominate at 72 per cent of those aged 75 and over.

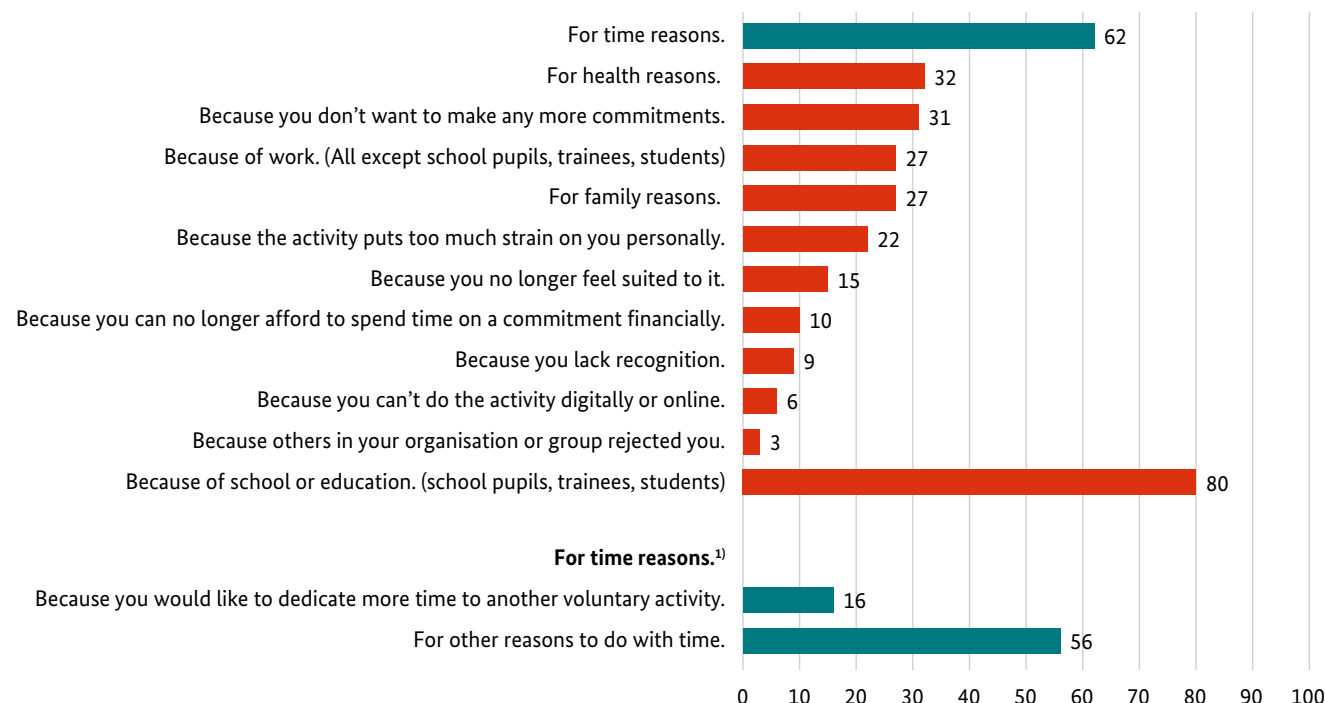
Of all volunteers who want to reduce or end their most time-intensive activity in the future and who are not in training, 27 per cent say that this intention is based on professional reasons. Among volunteers in training, at school or at university, 80 per cent state that they want to limit or even end their volunteering activities because of school or training. 27 per cent of volunteers justify their intention with family reasons, and this motive is mentioned particularly frequently in the 30 to 49 age group (44 per cent).

For other volunteers who want to reduce or end their volunteering in the future, the requirements of the volunteering activity play a role: 22 per cent feel that their commitment is too much of a burden on them personally and 15 per cent no longer feel suitable for it. Both factors are mentioned more frequently as the age of those involved increases. In addition, 10 per cent state that they can no longer afford financially to spend time on volunteering, and 15 per cent of those aged between 30 and 49 say the same. Activity-related reasons are rarely cited: 9 per cent of those who want to limit or end their most time-intensive activity lack recognition and 6 per cent justify their intention by saying that they cannot carry out the activity digitally or online – no significant differences by age group can be seen here. 3 per cent explain their decision by the fact that others in the organisation or group have rejected them.

Accordingly, it is primarily a person's life situation that leads to their intention to reduce or end their volunteering, whereas the circumstances or the specific framework conditions of the activities carried out play a much rarer role.

**Figure 3–3: Reasons for a planned restriction or termination of the voluntary activity**

“For which reasons do you want to restrict / end the [most time-consuming] activity? Is it...”; multiple answers possible; figures in per cent.



<sup>1)</sup> The total value “due to time constraints” (above) is 62 per cent and is lower than the sum of these two individual statements (72 per cent), as some respondents agreed with both statements.

Basis: Volunteers who want to limit or end their most time-intensive activity in the future FWS 2024 (n=1,678)

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian)..

### People who were volunteers previously: why they ended their involvement

In 2024, people who are not currently volunteers – i.e. in the last 12 months – but who were volunteers at some point in the past were also surveyed. These people were asked – and thus in retrospect – about the reasons why they stopped volunteering at the time (Figure 3–4). These reasons for termination do not allow any direct correlation to be made with the decline in the rate of volunteering between 2024 and 2019: it is not known whether the sub-group of people who were previously involved have only recently ended their volunteering, whether they ended it within the last five years or whether it was a long time ago.

The aspect of time expenditure is also at the top of the list of reasons for quitting: 38 per cent of those who had previously volunteered ended their involvement because the time commitment was too great. With increasing age, the time required for voluntary work is cited less frequently as a reason for termination. Of all previous volunteers who are no longer in training,

34 per cent cite professional reasons for their decision at the time. 57 per cent of school pupils, apprentices or students give school or training as the reason for leaving.

For a third (33 per cent) of those who were previously volunteers, the activity was limited in time. Furthermore, various circumstances related to the course of life are cited for the termination of their involvement: 28 per cent no longer wanted to have any obligations. 24 per cent of former volunteers ended their voluntary activity(ies) for family reasons – women mention this aspect significantly more often (30 per cent) than men (17 per cent). Health reasons are cited by 23 per cent, a motive that is mentioned more frequently with increasing age: of those previously involved aged 75 or older, 41 per cent ended their volunteering for this reason.

19 per cent felt that they were no longer suitable for volunteering and 18 per cent had reached the age limit for the activity and therefore had to end it. 16 per cent felt that the work was too much of a personal burden.

All of these aspects also become more relevant for respondents as they get older.

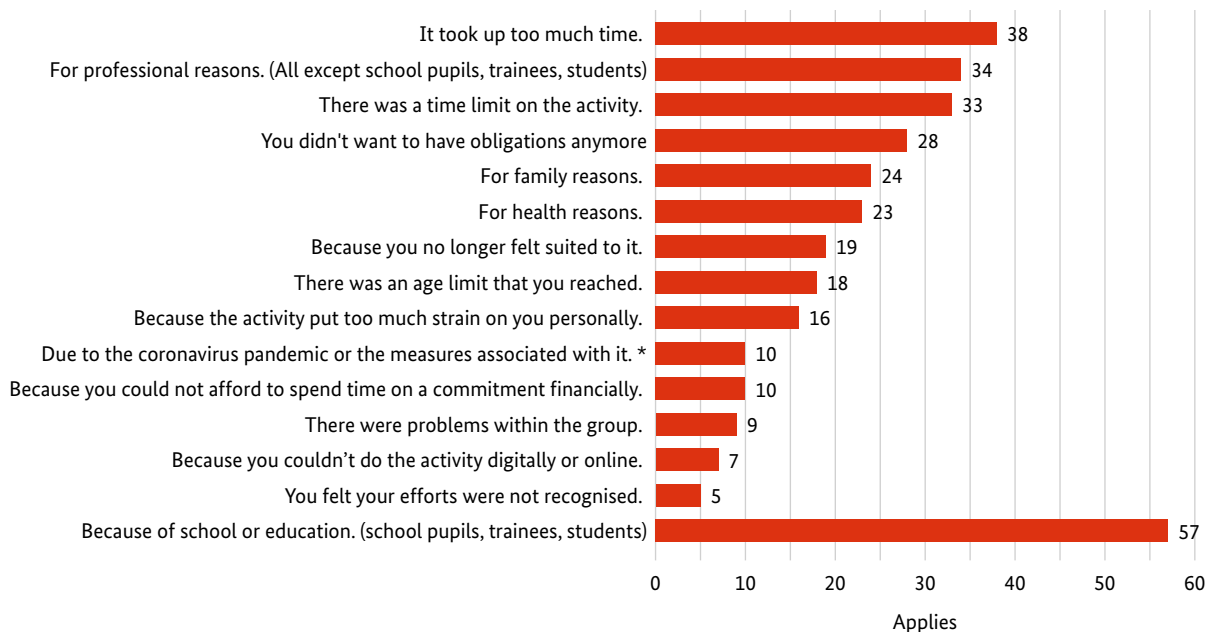
The coronavirus pandemic and the associated measures are the reason given by 10 per cent for ending their volunteering. In the youngest age group, 14- to 29-year-olds, as many as 17 per cent cite this reason for leaving. However, a numerical effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the development of the rate of volunteering cannot be quantified with this survey. The reference point and basis for calculation is the group of people who were volunteers previously as a whole, regardless of the specific date or year of termination. The end of volunteering could thus be two years or five years ago, but also significantly longer. This means that the reason for termination “due to the coronavirus pandemic” is calculated in relation to the entire group of commitments, which may have been terminated before the pandemic. Consequently, the results on the reasons for termination only allow statements to be made with regard to the reasons for termination of people as a whole who were previously volunteers. The percentage attributable to the answer “Due to the coronavirus pandemic” would of course be significantly higher if

only the period from the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic and those who ended their volunteering during this time were considered. However, this does not actually answer the question of the quantitative impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the rate of volunteering. This is because, in addition to the coronavirus-related termination of volunteering, the other side must also be taken into account: in addition to the resumption of volunteering after the end of the pandemic, these can also be catch-up effects among those who have started volunteering (during or) after the pandemic.

Another 10 per cent say that they could no longer afford to spend time on volunteering. This aspect is mentioned less frequently with increasing age. In 9 per cent of cases, difficulties within the group led to the decision. 7 per cent of those who were previously involved in volunteering ended their involvement because it was not possible to carry out the activity digitally or online – remarkably, there are no significant differences between age groups here. A lack of recognition led 5 per cent to end their voluntary work.

**Figure 3–4: Reasons for ending a previous voluntary activity**

“Why did you end your work back then?” (multiple answers possible); figures in per cent.



\* The figures in per cent refer to the total group of previous volunteers, without a time reference (for example the year) being known as to when these individuals ended their involvement; multiple answers were also possible.

Unweighted basis: Former volunteers FWS 2024 (n=7,353).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### Conclusion

The stability of volunteering in Germany is very high: 70 per cent of those involved intend to continue their (most time-consuming) activity in the next twelve months in the same form. The willingness to extend the amount of time spent volunteering and the willingness to change or reduce the amount of time spent volunteering are roughly equal. In addition, a considerable proportion of non-volunteers are open to volunteering: 41 per cent of them can imagine taking up voluntary work again in the next twelve months. 7 per cent of non-volunteers are “definitely” and a further 34 per cent are “maybe” prepared to do so. This willingness to get involved is particularly pronounced among young people who are not volunteers: two thirds of 14- to 29-year-olds can imagine getting involved in voluntary work. These results show that civil society organisations can attract people of all ages to get involved and that it can be worthwhile approaching them at an early stage to get involved.

The possible reasons for the intention of people who are (still) volunteers to end their involvement or to limit it in terms of time, as well as for those who have actually ended their involvement, are manifold: time-related reasons are the most frequently cited, followed by work-related reasons or because of school or training. Family and health reasons are also frequently cited as reasons for limiting or ending involvement. Personal motives are mentioned somewhat less frequently, for example because a person no longer felt suitable for the work or because the work was too much of a personal burden. Reasons directly related to the specific voluntary activity and the framework conditions of the respective activities rarely play a decisive role.

## 4. Amount of Time and Frequency of Volunteering

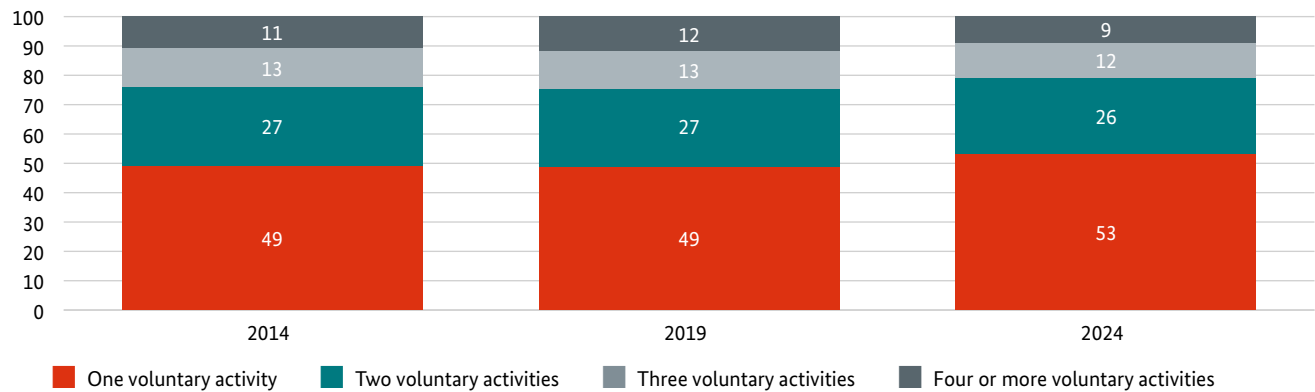
Volunteering requires time resources. The time available can vary greatly depending on the phase of life and the associated requirements. At a young age, school education or starting a career can limit the time available for leisure, friendships and voluntary work. In the middle phase of life, many people have to organise their time efficiently in order to meet the demands of working life and to reconcile family and career. Older people, on the other hand, are often more flexible in terms of time if they are already retired, but they are also more frequently affected by health restrictions as they get older. The questions of how often people volunteer, how much time they spend on their volunteering, and whether they are involved in one or more volunteering activities are an important part of the Survey on Volunteering in order to describe the development of volunteering in Germany.

### Slight decline in multiple voluntary activities

Just over half (53 per cent) of volunteers took on one voluntary activity in 2024. Around a quarter (26 per cent) of volunteers are involved in two different voluntary activities at the same time and a fifth (21 per cent) are involved in three or more activities (Figure 4–1). This means that volunteers are active in an average of 1.8 activities in 2024. The number of activities fell slightly in 2024 compared to previous years: in both 2014 and 2019, this number remained stable at an average of 2.0 activities per volunteer. The percentage of people with a single voluntary activity has risen from 49 per cent in 2019 to 53 per cent in 2024. In the same period, the percentage of people with four or more volunteering roles has fallen from 12 per cent to 9 per cent.

**Figure 4-1: Number of voluntary activities compared over time 2014–2024**

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent..



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2014 (n =12,516), FWS 2019 (n =12,040), FWS 2024 (n=11,921).

Source: FWS 2014–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

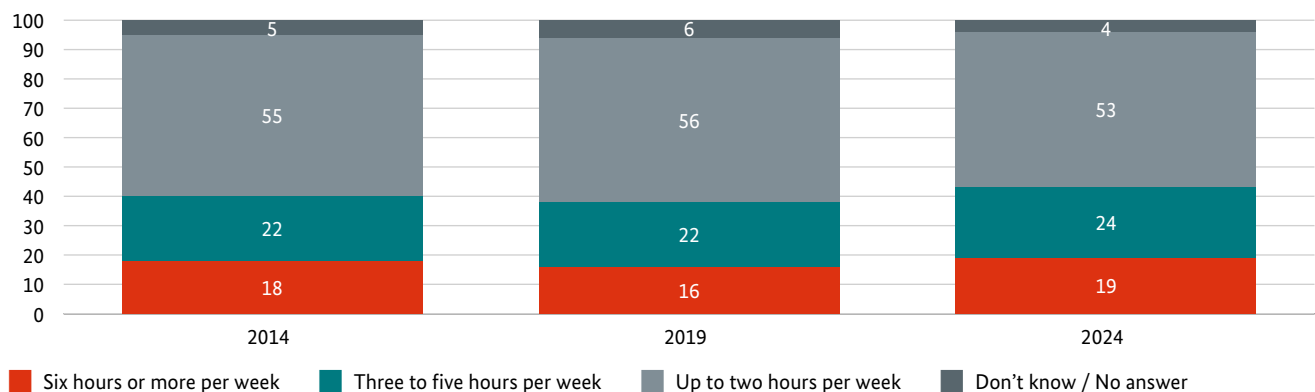
### Tendency towards more time-intensive involvement

When asked about the amount of time spent volunteering, around a quarter of volunteers (24 per cent) state that they spend three to five hours a week volunteering and just under one in five (19 per cent) state six or more hours a week. At 53 per cent, most people spend up to two hours a week on voluntary work. For people with several voluntary activities, this and the following information refers to the most time-intensive activity. A time comparison with 2019 shows that volunteers in 2024 are slightly more likely than in 2019 to invest three

to five hours or even more than six hours per week in their voluntary work (2019: 38 per cent and 2024: 43 per cent; Figure 4-2). At the same time, the proportion of volunteers who contribute up to two hours per week has fallen from 56 per cent in 2019 to 53 per cent in 2024. In the 2014 and 2019 surveys, a slight shift towards less time spent on the most time-intensive voluntary activity can be observed; this trend now appears to be reversing. It is not yet clear whether this is a short-term change or whether this trend will continue in the long term.

**Figure 4-2: Hours per week for the most time-consuming activity compared over time 2014–2024**

“If you think of the last 12 months: how many hours [per week] have you spent on average on this [most time-consuming] activity?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2014 (n =12,424), FWS 2019 (n =11,936), FWS 2024 (n=11,557).

Source: FWS 2014–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

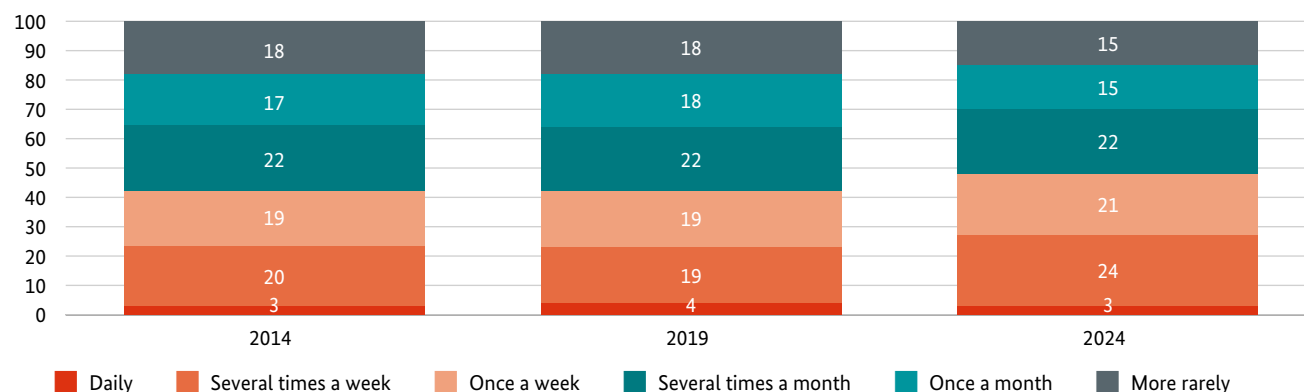
When asked about the frequency with which the activity is carried out, almost half (48 per cent) of those involved in 2024 state that they carried out the activity once or more per week, compared with just 42 per cent in 2019. Accordingly, the frequency with which volunteers pursue their activities has increased (Figure 4–3).

It should be noted that the rate of volunteering and volunteering intensity develop differently over time. At

36.7 per cent, the rate of volunteering in 2024 has fallen slightly compared to 2019, and multiple volunteering has also declined slightly from an average of 2.0 to an average of 1.8 activities per volunteer. In terms of the intensity with which volunteering is carried out, however, the opposite trend is emerging: both the time spent on the activities and the frequency with which they are carried out increased in 2024. This indicates an intensification of voluntary work.

**Figure 4–3: Frequency of volunteering compared over time 2014–2024**

“When you think of the last 12 months: how often did you carry out this [most time-consuming] activity [name of activity]?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2014 (n = 12,424), FWS 2019 (n = 11,936), FWS 2024 (n = 11,557).

Source: FWS 2014–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

### People who devote a particularly large amount of time to volunteering

In 2024, more than a fifth (22 per cent) of men who volunteer state that they volunteer six or more hours a week. At 16 per cent, the percentage of women volunteers is somewhat lower here. Although men and women volunteer equally often, men spend more time volunteering than women (Figure 4–4). This difference has been evident in all waves of the survey since 1999.

The time resources available for volunteering can vary depending on the phase of life and age: while the amount of time men spend on volunteering increases slightly or remains unchanged with increasing age, women between the ages of 30 and 49 spend significantly less time on volunteering than women in all other age groups (Figure 4–5). However, a look at the overall volunteering rate shows that women between the ages of 30 and 49 get involved particularly often, with their volunteering rate of 42.6 per cent being higher than that of men of the same age (38.4 per cent). It is possible that women in the family phase of life,

especially between the ages of 30 and 49, have proportionately less free time available than men, who can devote more time to volunteering.

Volunteers aged 65 and over spend the most hours per week on their voluntary work. In the age group 75 years and older, the rate of volunteering is comparatively low at 21.1 per cent, but people in this age group invest the most time in their volunteering: 24 per cent devote six or more hours per week to it (Figure 4–4).

There are also differences in terms of educational background: volunteers with a low level of school education spend the most time on their voluntary work, with more than a quarter (27 per cent) of this group volunteering six or more hours a week. When it comes to a volunteering six or more hours per week, the percentages are significantly lower for people with a medium level of school education (19 per cent) and for people with a high level of school education (16 per cent). The percentage of people who spend at least three or six hours a week on volunteering is comparable to that of people with a higher level of school education.

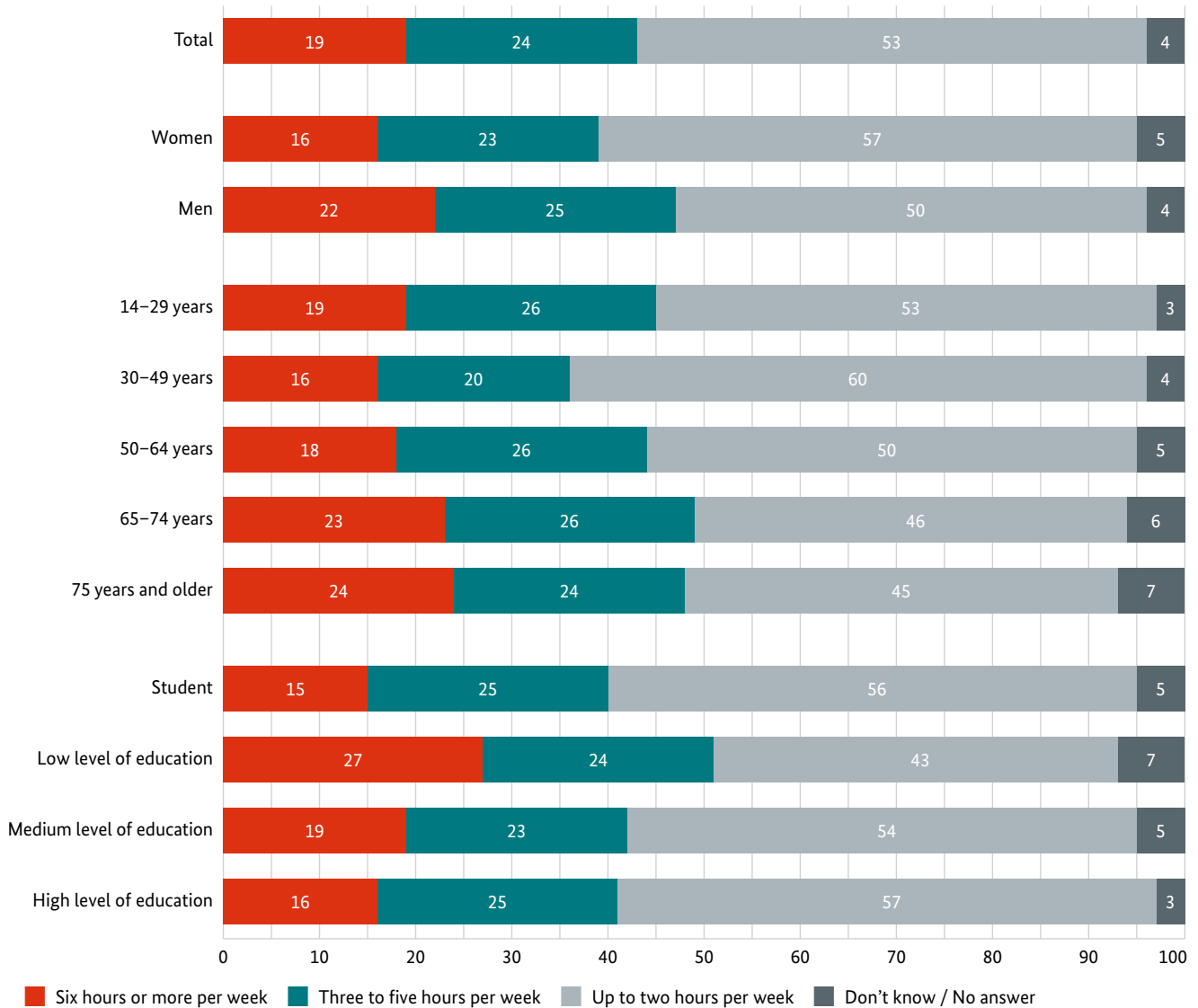
## Amount of Time and Frequency of Volunteering

These differences by school education can be seen across all age groups and have increased over the last ten years. This shows an opposite pattern to the rate of volunteering: although people with a lower level of

school education have a lower level of volunteering, when they are involved, they spend more time volunteering than people with a medium or higher level of school education.

**Figure 4-4: Number of hours per week spent volunteering, by gender, age and school education**

*"If you think of the last 12 months: how many hours [per week] have you spent on average on this [most time-consuming] activity?"; figures in per cent.*



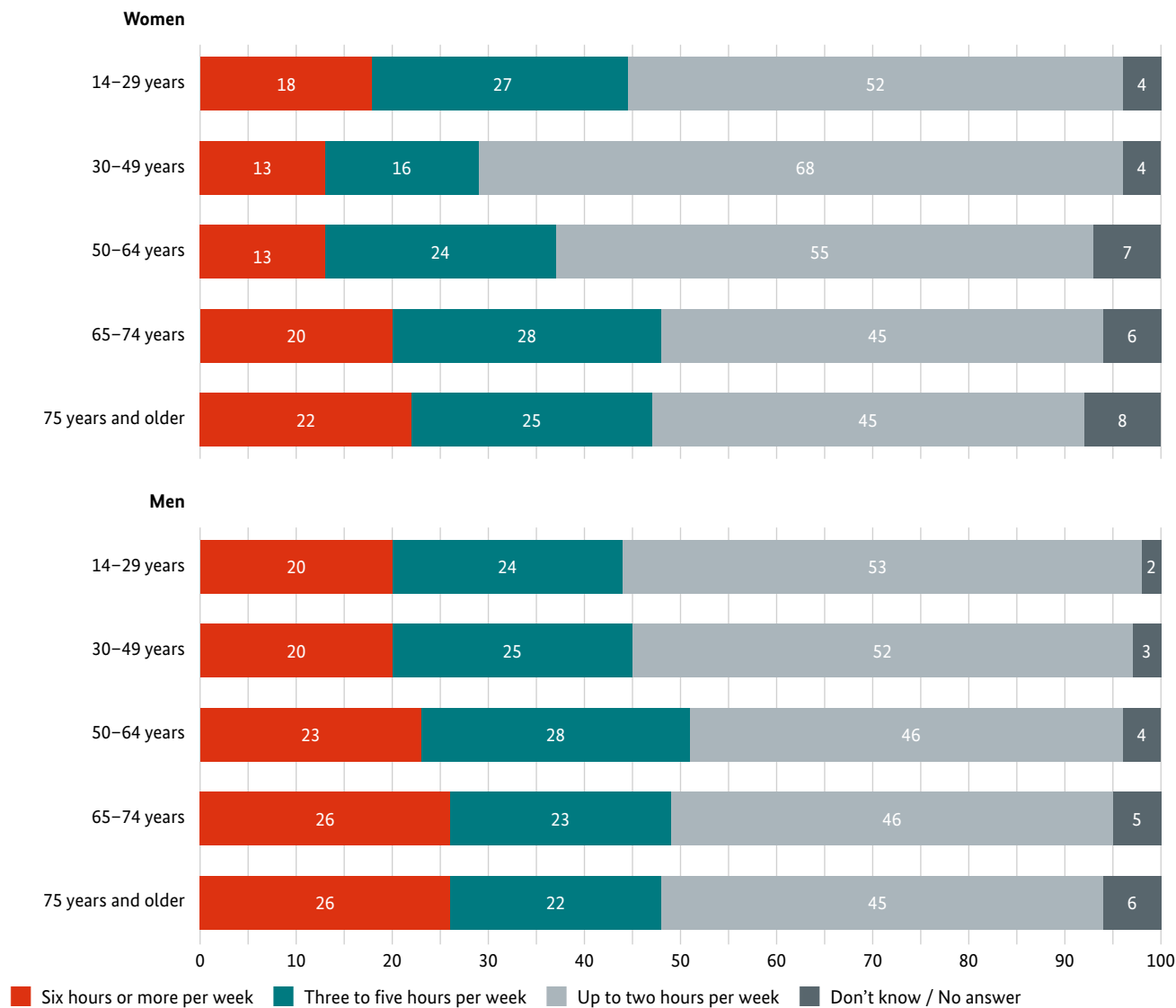
Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2024 (n= 11,557).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

**Figure 4–5: Volunteering hours per week by gender and age**

“If you think of the last 12 months: how many hours [per week] have you spent on average on this [most time-consuming] activity?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2024 (n= 11,557).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

### Conclusion

Overall, the results of the Survey on Volunteering 2024 show that volunteering has not lost any of its importance in Germany. The overall rate of volunteering has fallen slightly, and the number of activities carried out by volunteers has also declined slightly. However, volunteers also concentrate more on their most

time-intensive activities and tend to carry them out more frequently and for more hours per week. Overall, this indicates an intensification in the carrying out of voluntary activities. In particular, people with a low level of school education, older people and men show an above-average level of time commitment in comparison. These developments emphasise that volunteering continues to play an important role in social life.

## 5. Social Areas of Volunteering

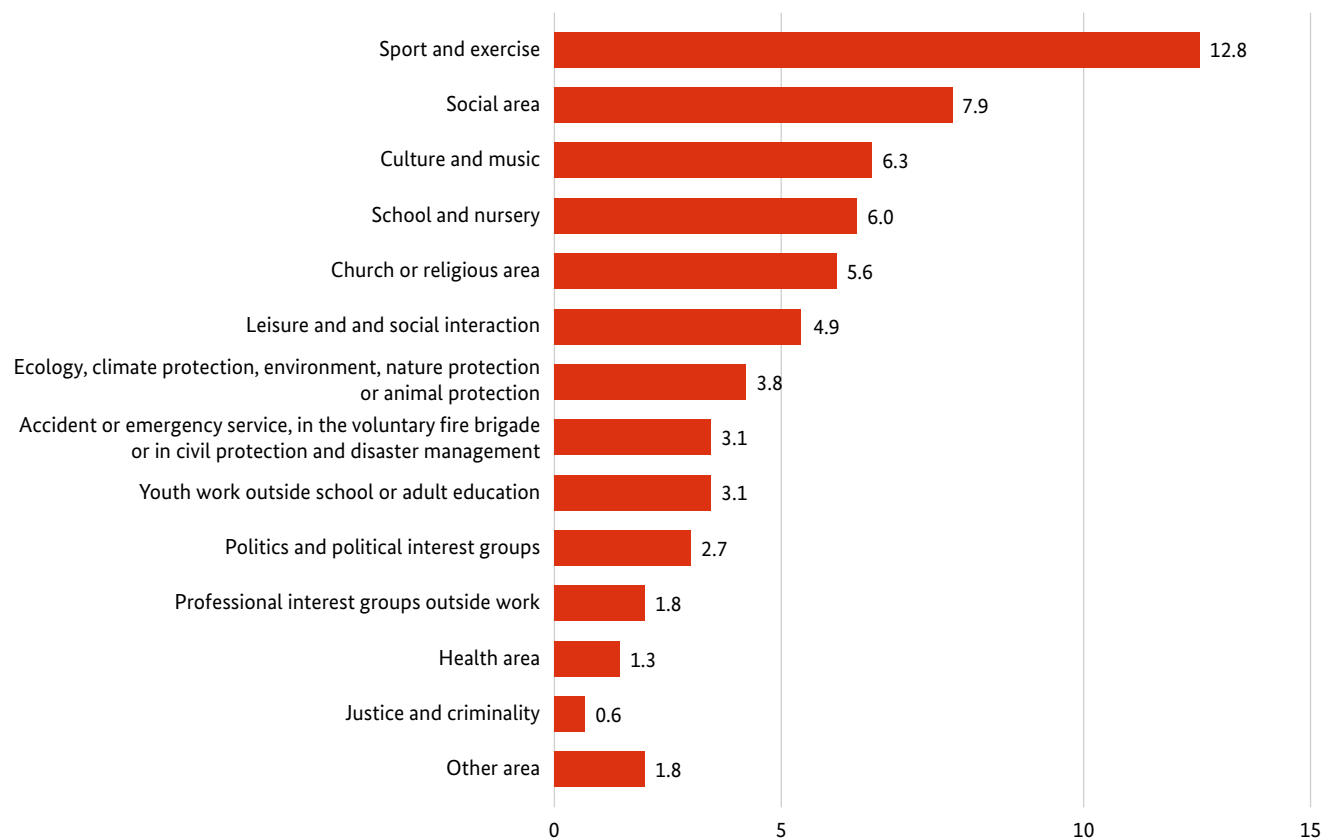
Volunteering in Germany is extremely diverse and takes place in different areas of society. Voluntary activities range from supporting youth groups, working in sports clubs or helping elderly people in the neighbourhood to volunteering with the volunteer fire brigade and serving as a lay judge in court proceedings.

In the Survey on Volunteering, volunteers categorise their voluntary activities into one of 14 social areas. They often carry out more than one activity, i.e. they have multiple commitments. The results for the areas of

volunteering are thus partly based on multiple responses from the volunteers. As such, the sum of the areas of volunteering does not give the rate of volunteering (Figure 5–1). Assignment to the social areas is done by the interviewees during the interview. Depending on how they see themselves, similar or identical activities can be assigned to different areas: voluntary work in a sports club can be categorised as “sport and exercise”, but also as “extracurricular youth work or educational work for adults”.

**Figure 5–1: Percentage of volunteers in 14 areas**

*“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; multiple answers possible; figures in per cent.*



Unweighted basis: all respondents. FWS 2024 (n= 27,542).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian)

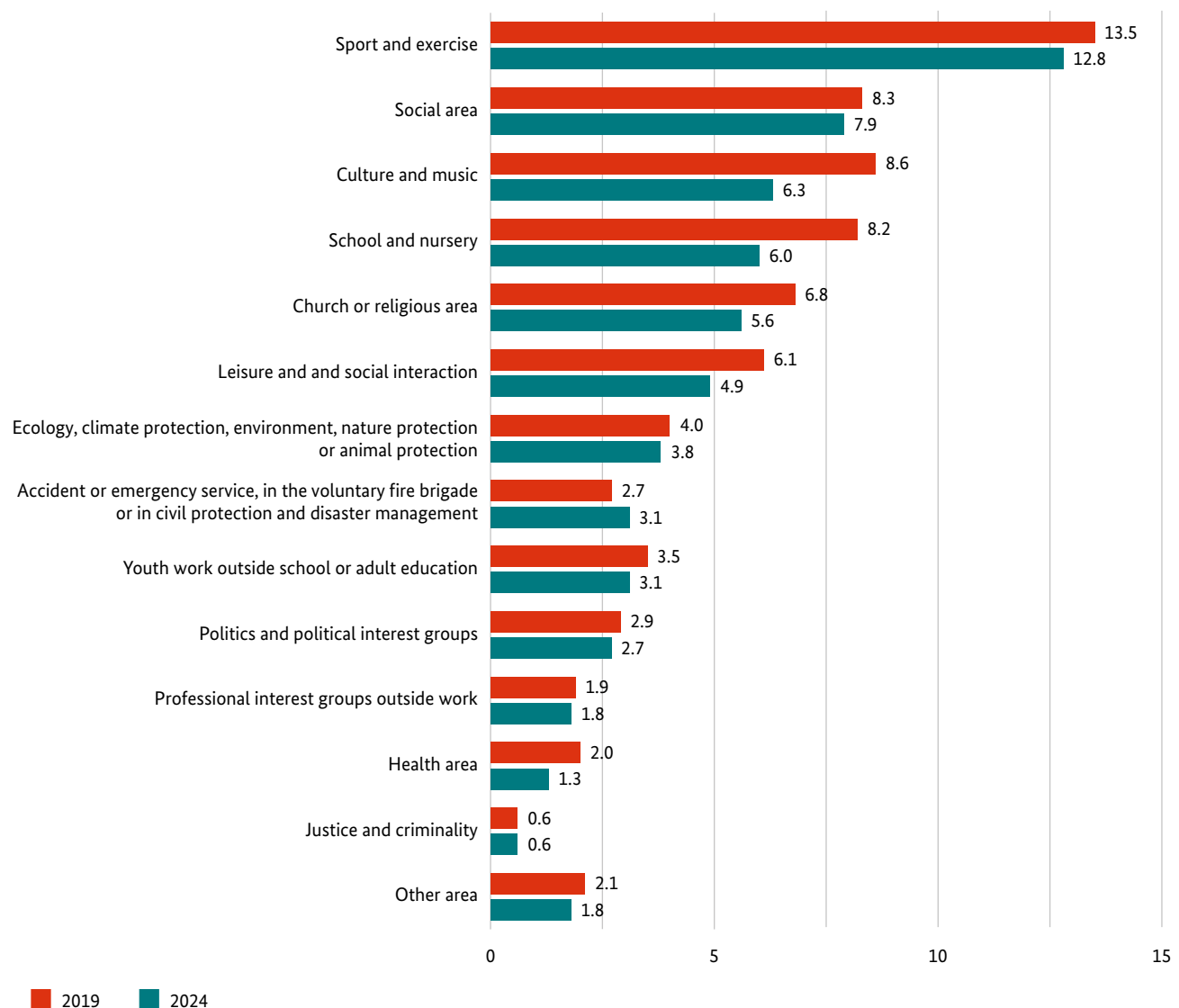
### Voluntary commitment is broadly diversified

At 12.8 per cent, people are most frequently involved in sport and exercise. The vast majority of these tasks are performed in clubs, for example as a trainer, as a counsellor or as a secretary, in auditing a club's accounts, or by helping out at events. In second place, at 7.9 per cent, is the social sector for people who need support. Many of these volunteers provide neighbour-

hood support or are involved in helping refugees or elderly people. 6.3 per cent are active in the field of culture and music and take on tasks in a choir or music group, in a carnival or fancy-dress club, in theatre groups, or in the preservation of historical monuments, for example. 6.0 per cent are involved in schools and nurseries and 5.6 per cent in the area of church and religion.

**Figure 5–2: Percentage of volunteers in 14 areas compared over time 2019–2024**

*“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; multiple answers possible; figures in per cent.*



Unweighted basis: all respondents. FWS 2019 (n=27,762), FWS 2024 (n=27,542).  
Source: FWS 2019–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian)

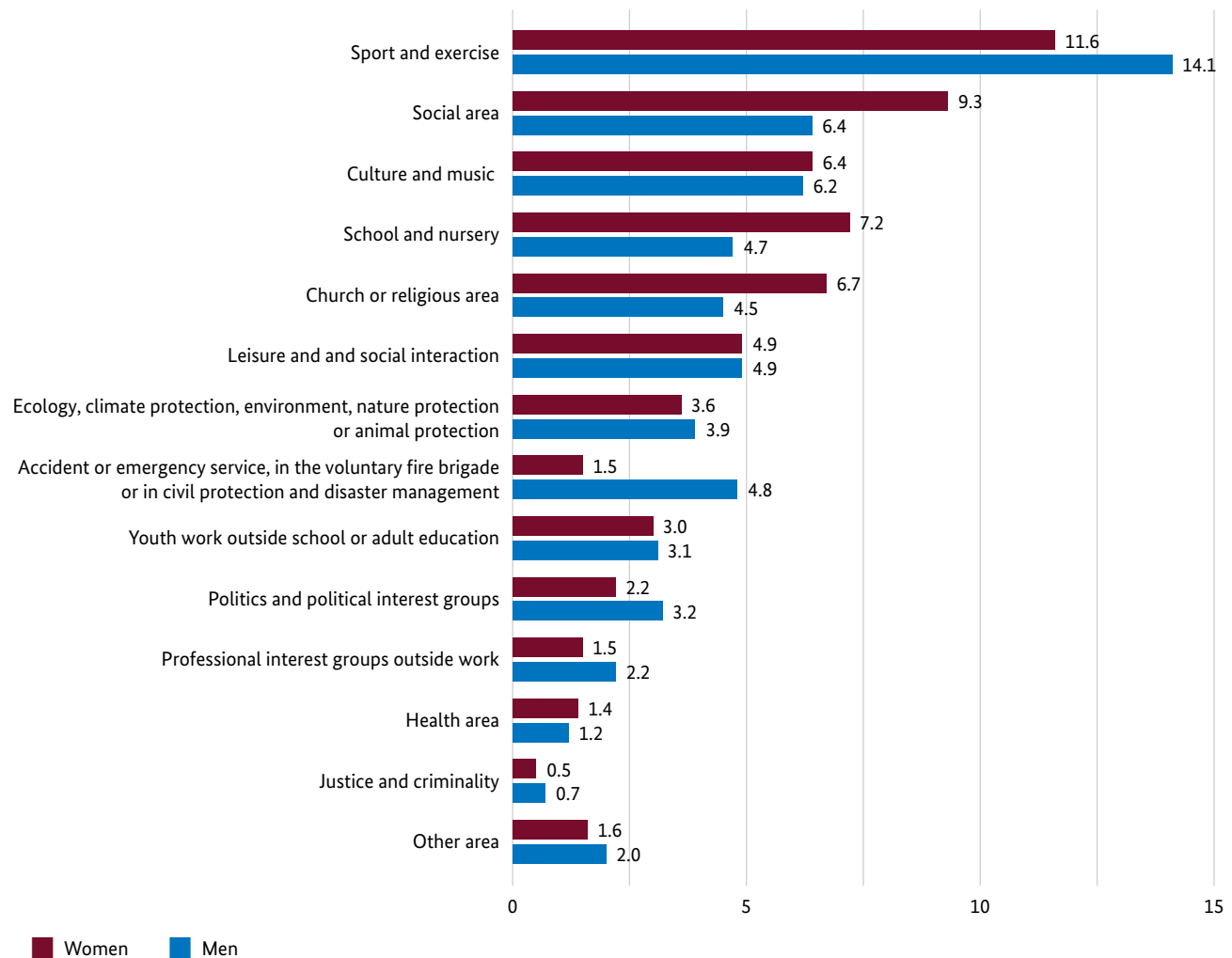
### Distribution across the social sectors is similar to 2019

The distribution of voluntary activities across the 14 areas of society largely corresponds to the sequence in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering (Figure 5–2). However, the slight decline in the number of voluntary activities carried out (see Chapter 4) is also visible here. Volunteering has declined somewhat in several areas: in 2024, slightly fewer people were involved in culture and music than five years previously (change from 8.6 per cent in 2019 to 6.3 per cent in 2024), while the figure for

schools and nurseries fell from 8.2 per cent to 6.0 per cent. There has been a slightly weaker decline in involvement in the area of church and religion and in leisure and social activities. An opposing trend with a slight increase from 2.7 per cent to 3.1 per cent can be seen in the accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management sector. Events such as the flood disaster in 2021 and the associated heightened awareness of such dangers may have contributed to more people becoming involved in disaster control or the fire service.

Figure 5–3: Percentage of volunteers in 14 areas by gender

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; multiple answers possible; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all respondents. FWS 2024 (n= 27,542).  
Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### Differences in the areas of volunteering between women and men remain

Volunteering by women and men differs significantly in some areas of society (Figure 5–3). 9.3 per cent of women and 6.4 per cent of men are involved in the social sector. Women (7.2 per cent) are also more likely than men (4.7 per cent) to volunteer in schools and nurseries, for example in the parents' council, in a support organisation or in the student council. The same picture emerges in the ecclesiastical or religious sector: 6.7 per cent of women and 4.5 per cent of men volunteer in this area.

Conversely, more men (14.1 per cent) than women (11.6 per cent) are involved in sport and exercise, for example in a sports club or exercise group. Men are also much more involved in accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management (4.8 per cent) than women (1.5 per cent). A slightly higher rate of volunteering amongst men can also be seen in the area of politics and political lobbying (3.2 per cent men and 2.2 per cent women) as well as in professional lobbying outside the company (2.2 per cent of men and 1.5 per cent of women). In the previous volunteering surveys, similar differences between women and men were observed in the areas of volunteering.

There are no differences in volunteering in the fields of culture and music, leisure and socialising, and ecology, climate protection, environmental protection, nature conservation and animal welfare, where women and men are equally involved. There are also no differences in extracurricular youth work or adult education, nor in the areas of health, justice and crime.

### Volunteering in the areas varies according to age groups

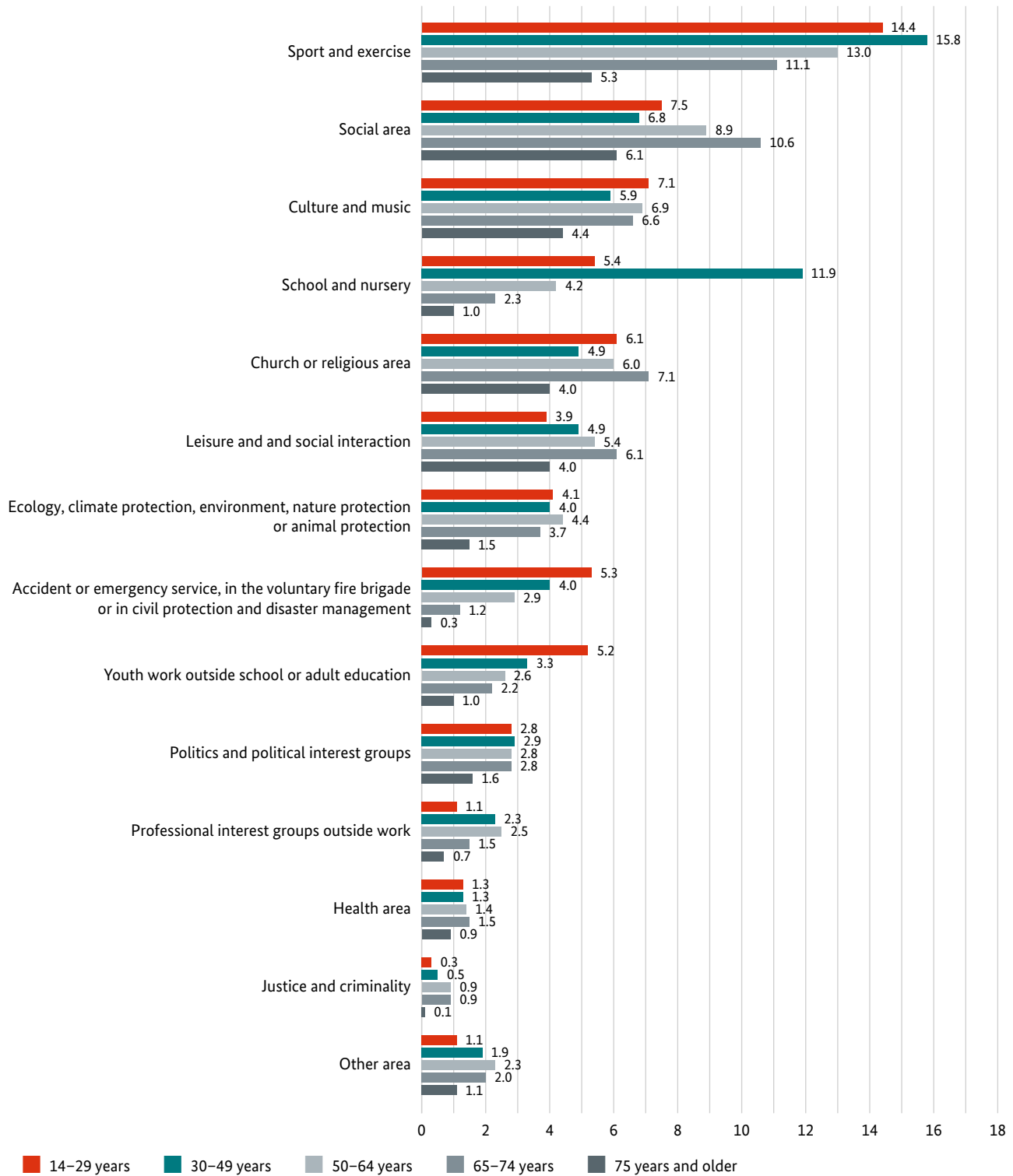
In some of the 14 social areas, age-specific differences in volunteering can be recognised (Figure 5–4). Younger people are more likely than the general population to take on tasks in accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management (5.3 per cent of 14- to 29-year-olds compared to 3.1 per cent of the general population). The youngest age group is also most frequently involved in extracurricular youth or educational work for adults (5.2 per cent of 14- to 29-year-olds compared to 3.1 per cent of the total population).

In the area of sport and exercise, voluntary tasks are particularly frequently undertaken by younger and middle-aged people: here, 15.8 per cent of 30- to 49-year-olds are involved compared to 12.8 per cent of the population as a whole, with the percentage falling significantly with increasing age. Between the ages of 30 and 49 – the family phase with children in the household – a particularly large number of people (11.9 per cent compared to 6.0 per cent of the total population) are involved in the school and nursery sector and, at 15.2 per cent, women are significantly more likely to be involved than men (8.6 per cent). Voluntary involvement in professional interest groups outside the company is increasingly found in the “working age range” between 30 and 64.

In the social sector, it is the 65- to 74-year-olds who are the most involved, at 10.6 per cent, with 12.9 per cent of women and 7.9 per cent of men. This age group is also particularly involved in the church or religious area compared to the population average. In the other areas of society, the level of volunteering in the various age groups is quite similar, and even if it is significantly lower in the oldest age group in some cases, it is also remarkably wide-ranging here.

Figure 5-4: Percentage of volunteers in 14 areas by age

"You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?"; multiple answers possible; figures in per cent.

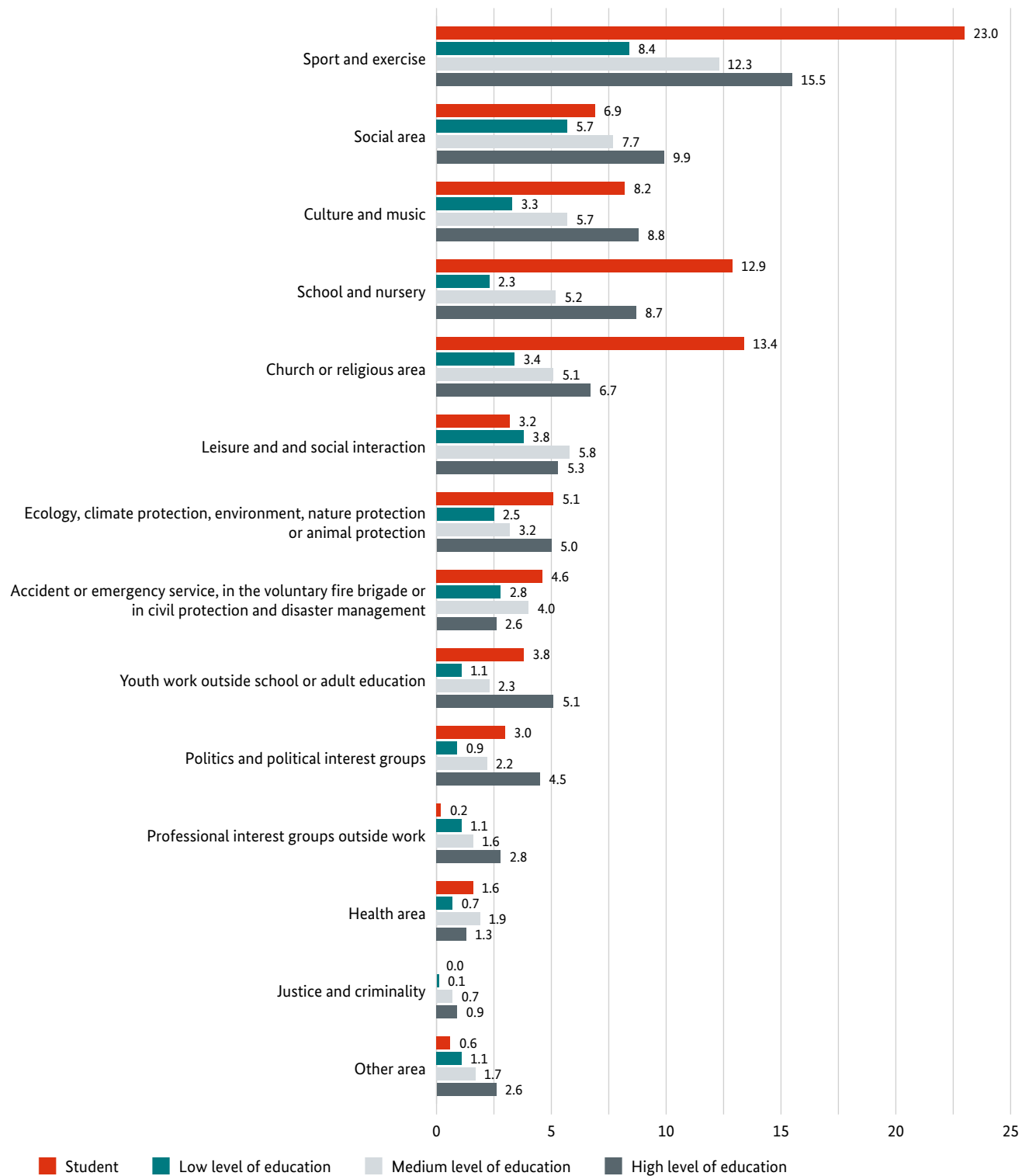


Unweighted basis: all respondents. FWS 2024 (n= 27,542).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Figure 5–5: Percentage of volunteers in 14 areas by school education

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; multiple answers possible; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all respondents with information on school education. FWS 2024 (n= 27,535).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### Clear correlation between educational background and volunteering in most areas

The higher the level of school education, the more frequently people are involved in voluntary work (see Chapter 2); this pattern is also evident in the 14 social areas. In three areas, however, people with a secondary school education are slightly more involved than the other education groups: In the areas of leisure and social activities, health care, accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management (Figure 5–5). In the area of sport and exercise, on the other hand, where proportionally the most volunteers are active, almost twice as many people with a high level of school education are involved as people with a low level of school education (15.5 per cent to 8.4 per cent). The educational effect is also very pronounced in extracurricular youth work or educational work for adults (5.1 per cent with a high level of school education and 1.1 per cent with a low level of school education), in the school or nursery sector (8.7 per cent to 2.3 per cent) and in the area of politics and political advocacy (4.5 per cent to 0.9 per cent).

An above-average number of schoolchildren are involved in the church or religious area (13.4 per cent compared to 5.6 per cent of the total population aged 14 and over), as well as in schools and nurseries (12.9 per cent compared to 6.0 per cent of the total population) and in sport and exercise (23.0 per cent compared to 12.8 per cent). In addition, the percentage of pupils who are committed to ecology, climate protection, environmental protection, nature conservation or animal welfare is particularly high at 5.1 per cent, which is on a par with people with a high level of school education.

### Conclusion

An examination of the various areas of volunteering shows how diverse and vibrant the volunteering landscape in Germany is, in which people can participate according to their interests, abilities and circumstances. Volunteers are particularly active in the areas of sport and exercise as well as in the social sector. The different levels of involvement in different areas of society can be explained in part by the stage of life of those involved. For example, volunteering by school pupils is particularly common in the school environment. This everyday area, but also the church or religious environment or the area of sport and exercise, offer young people many opportunities to actively participate and take on responsibility. People between the ages of 30 and 49 are often parents and are more involved in school and nursery than the population as a whole.

The different commitment of women and men in these areas could be attributed to existing gender roles and the associated social expectations and traditions: women are more likely than men to be involved in the social sector, in schools and nurseries and in the church or religious area. Men are more likely to take on voluntary tasks in the areas of sport and exercise as well as in accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management.

## 6. Organisational Framework of the Voluntary Activity

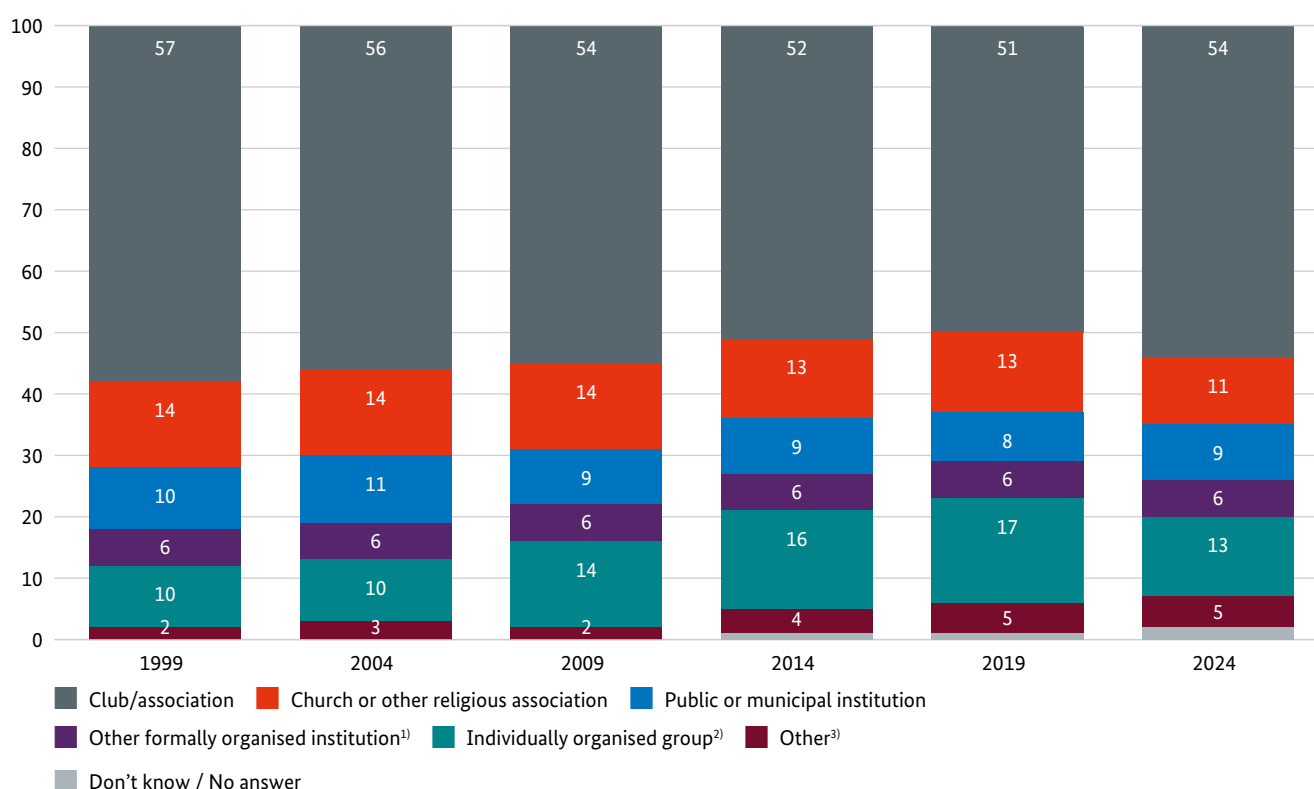
Volunteering takes place in different organisational forms, and therefore also in different spaces and structures. The following information refers to the most time-intensive activity for people with several voluntary activities. At 48.5 per cent, almost half of those who volunteer do so in a club. This is particularly often the case if the activity is related to sport and exercise. Alongside clubs, associations are one of the “traditional” forms of organisation for volunteering, with 5.5 per cent of volunteers working in an association (Table 6-1). Clubs are often located at a regional level, whereas associations often act as larger and supra-regional

interest groups or as umbrella organisations for clubs or other stakeholders. A total of 54 per cent of volunteers are involved in a club or association (Figure 6-1).

11 per cent of volunteers work in churches or religious associations. 9 per cent are involved in a state or municipal organisation – particularly frequently in the voluntary fire brigade and rescue services, but also in schools and nurseries. A total of 6 per cent work voluntarily in other formally organised institutions: 3 per cent in political parties or trade unions and 3 per cent in private organisations or foundations.

Figure 6-1: Organisational forms of voluntary activities compared over time 1999–2024

“In which organisational framework do you carry out your [most time-consuming] activity?”; figures in per cent.



<sup>1)</sup> Party, trade union, private institution, foundation

<sup>2)</sup> Neighbourhood support, self-help group, initiative or project work, self-organised group, alone, not in a group, organisation/institution

<sup>3)</sup> The answer option “Other” was included in the category “Other formally organised institution” in the FWS 2019 (Simonson et al. 2022, p. 14)

Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 1999 (n = 4,688), FWS 2004 (n = 5,142), FWS 2009 (n = 7,006), FWS 2014 (n = 12,424), FWS 2019 (n = 11,936), FWS 2024 (n = 11,557).

Source: FWS 1999–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

**Table 6–1: Organisational forms of voluntary activities compared over time 1999–2024**

“In which organisational framework do you carry out your [most time-consuming] activity?”; figures in per cent

|                                        | 1999            | 2004 | 2009 | 2014 | 2019 | 2024 |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Club or association</b>             | 57              | 56   | 54   | 52   | 51   | 54   |
| Club                                   | 50              | 49   | 47   | 47   | 45   | 48,5 |
| Association                            | 7               | 7    | 7    | 5    | 6    | 5,5  |
| <b>Church or religious association</b> | 14              | 14   | 14   | 13   | 13   | 11   |
| <b>State or municipal institution</b>  | 10              | 11   | 9    | 9    | 8    | 9    |
| <b>Other formally organised group</b>  | 6               | 6    | 6    | 6    | 6    | 6    |
| Party                                  | 3               | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    |
| Trade union                            | 1,5             | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Private institution                    | 2 <sup>1)</sup> | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    |
| Foundation                             |                 | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| <b>Individually organised group</b>    | 10              | 10   | 14   | 16   | 17   | 13   |
| Neighbourhood support                  | – <sup>2)</sup> | –    | –    | 2    | 3    | 2    |
| Self-help group                        | 1               | 1    | 1    | –    | 1    | 1    |
| Initiative or project work             | 3               | 4    | 4    | 3    | 3    | 2    |
| Self-organised group                   | 6               | 5,5  | 7    | 9    | 7    | 5    |
| Alone, not in a group                  | –               | –    | 2    | 2    | 3    | 3    |
| <b>Other</b>                           | 2               | 3    | 2    | 4    | 5    | 5    |
| <b>Don't know / no response</b>        | 0               | 0    | 0    | 1    | 1    | 2    |

<sup>1)</sup> in 1999, “private organisation” and “foundation” were asked together as one answer option

<sup>2)</sup> not given as an answer option in the years in question

Unweighted basis: all volunteers FWS 1999 (n = 4,688), FWS 2004 (n = 5,142), FWS 2009 (n = 7,006), FWS 2014 (n = 12,424), FWS 2019 (n = 11,936), FWS 2024 (n = 11,557).

Source: FWS 1999–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

Of all volunteers, 13 per cent are involved in individually organised groups. This category includes activities in neighbourhood support and in self-help groups as well as in informal initiatives or as part of project work, in self-organised groups or alone<sup>2</sup>. This more “informal” involvement is characterised by more or less formal structures, can also take place in associations without a legal form, is often carried out in the direct environment or among people who are equally affected and is also more sporadic or non-binding. The distinction between this and involvement in formally organised structures is blurred and, in some cases, not clearly distinguishable.

### Clubs remain the established structure for volunteering

A look at the forms of organisation over time shows a slight shift back towards formally organised volunteering, with 54 per cent engaging in clubs and associations in 2024. Previously, involvement in clubs and associations had lost some of its importance: in 2014, its share of all organisational forms was 52 per cent and 51 per cent in 2019, compared to 54 per cent in 2009.

The percentage of voluntary work in churches or other religious associations is on a slight but steady downward trend. Between 2019 and 2024, this share fell from 13 per cent to 11 per cent. One reason for this decline could be the decline in membership of the two major Christian churches.

Between 2004 (10 per cent) and 2019 (17 per cent), there was a steady increase in volunteering among the individually organised groups.<sup>3</sup> This trend does not continue in 2024: at 13 per cent in individually organised groups, involvement in this more “informal” setting has declined. It is conceivable that people with multiple commitments invest a higher proportion of their time in formally organised commitment than in informal commitment in individually organised groups. The question about the organisational framework of the commitment refers to the most time-intensive activity for those with multiple commitments. As such, a more informal commitment may be depicted less

frequently in this survey. It is also possible that some individually organised commitments have become formalised over time. For example, voluntary work in the course of the refugee and migration movement in 2015 and the following years was characterised by spontaneous and informal help, while refugee aid after the war of aggression in Ukraine was partly based on already established structures. Slight shifts are also conceivable as a result of contact restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic: formal and “traditional” forms of organisation such as clubs and associations with their institutionalised structures may have proven to be more durable and resilient under these particular conditions than informal forms of volunteering such as individually organised groups and initiatives. It remains to be seen whether these developments in the organisational framework of volunteering represent an actual trend reversal.

Over time, there has been an increase in the proportion of people who are unable to assign their most time-intensive commitment to any of the organisational forms mentioned and therefore select the option “Other” or who cannot answer the question (“Don’t know” or “No response”).

### Differences by gender, age and school education

Depending on the type of organisation, women and men volunteer in different ways. At 54 per cent, men are significantly more involved in clubs than women (44 per cent). This finding is linked to the greater involvement of men in sport and exercise, which is predominantly practised in clubs. Women and men are equally involved in associations, statistically there is no difference between men (5 per cent) and women (6 per cent), the difference in numbers is within the (random) fluctuation range. At 13 per cent, women are more likely than men (8 per cent) to spend the most time volunteering in churches or other religious associations. Women are also more likely to be involved in informal volunteering in individually organised groups (15 per cent) than men (11 per cent) (Figure 6–2).

2 When stating that the activity is carried out “alone, not in a group, organisation or institution”, it is often clear from the open-ended responses that the activity is carried out in a community setting: these volunteers are obviously alone when carrying out the activity, but the commitment is organised within the framework of a group or institution: for example, when working as everyday support in a care home for the elderly or in a visiting service via the Workers’ Welfare Association.

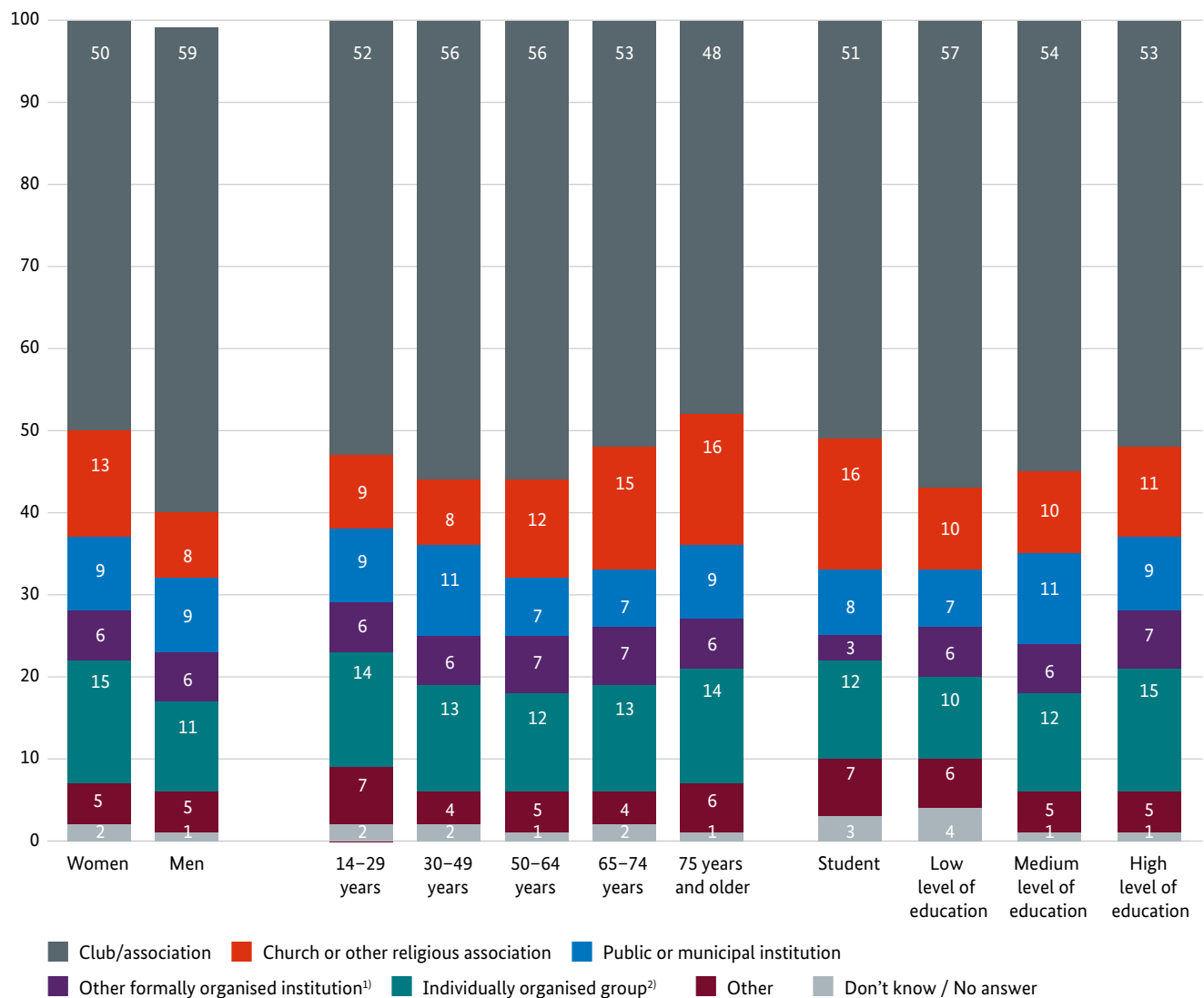
3 It should be noted at this point that the “neighbourhood support” response option was not available for selection in the first three survey years of the Survey on Volunteering (1999, 2004 and 2009). The response option “Alone, not in a group, organisation or institution” was not asked in the two years 1999 and 2004 and the response “Self-help group” was not available as an option in 2014.

In terms of age, people aged between 30 and 64 are slightly more likely to volunteer in clubs or associations than younger and older people. This is partly due to the fact that 30- to 49-year-olds are more likely than average to be involved in sport and exercise, and therefore to a large extent in clubs. An above-average

number of older people over the age of 65 volunteer in churches or other religious associations. It is worth noting that both younger people under 30 and the oldest age group (75 years or older) are involved in individually organised groups at a slightly disproportionately high rate.

**Figure 6-2: Organisational forms of volunteering by gender, age and school education**

"In which organisational framework do you carry out your [most time-consuming] activity?"; figures in per cent.



<sup>1)</sup> Party, trade union, private institution, foundation

<sup>2)</sup> Neighbourhood support, self-help group, initiative or project work, self-organised group, alone, not in a group, organisation/institution

Basis: all volunteers. FWS 2024 (n= 11,557).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

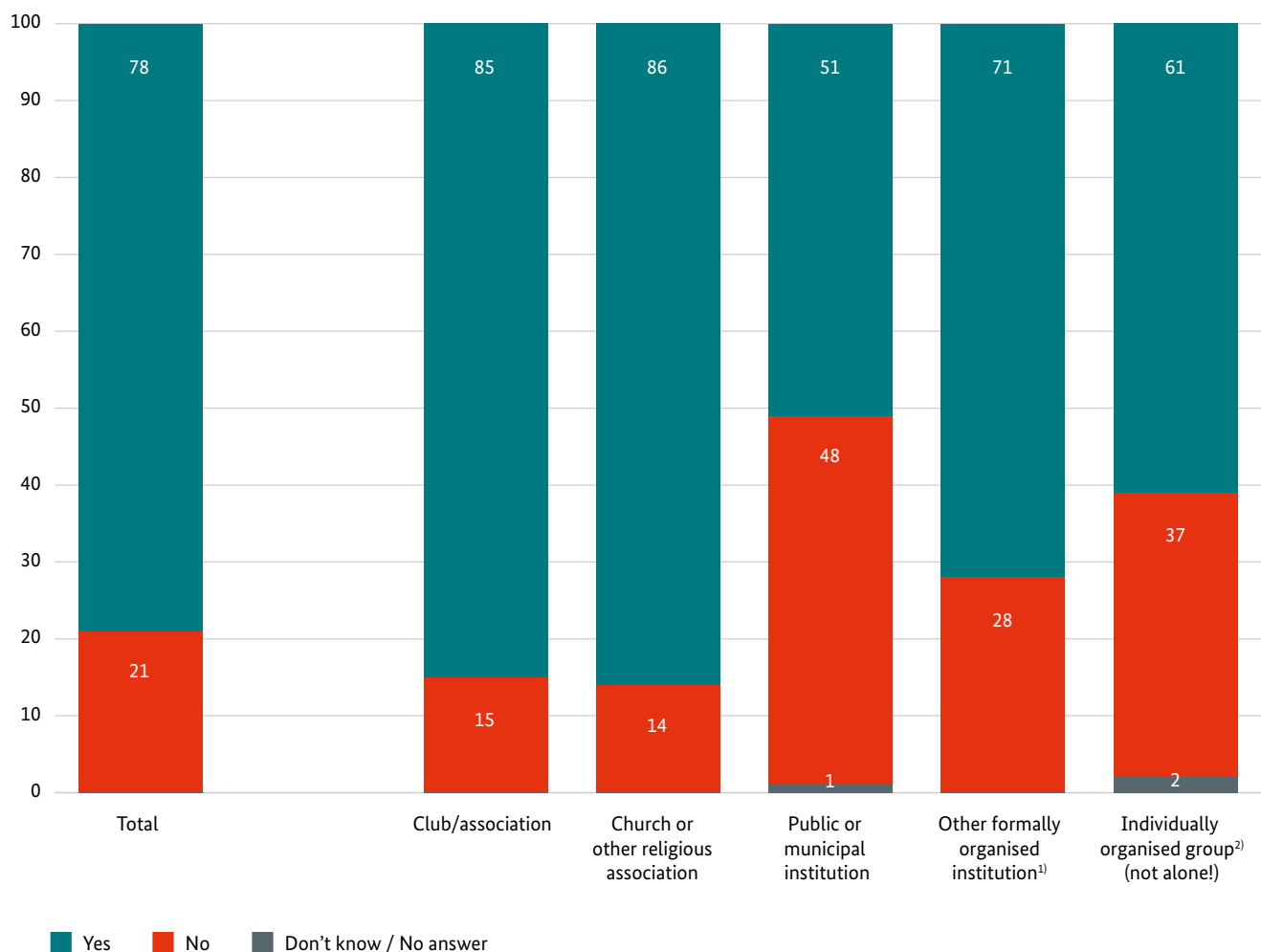
Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

With regard to school education, no differences can be seen in the two most common forms of organisation, clubs and associations and churches or religious associations, according to the educational background of those involved. However, the following differences are statistically significant: people with a low level of school education are more likely to be involved in an association (8 per cent) than people with a high level

of school education (4 per cent) and those with a medium level of school education (6 per cent). An opposite educational effect can be seen in the case of involvement in individually organised groups, where people with a high level of school education are slightly more common (15 per cent with a high level of school education and 10 per cent with a low level of school education).

**Figure 6–3: Membership in the organisation according to organisational framework**

“Are you also a member of [this] [insert organisation of the most time-consuming commitment]?”; figures in per cent.



<sup>1)</sup> Party, trade union, private institution, foundation

<sup>2)</sup> Neighbourhood support, self-help group, initiative or project work, self-organised group; here **without** those who are involved alone, not in a group, organisation or institution. Unweighted basis: all volunteers who stated the organisational form of their most time-intensive volunteering activity, excluding those who are involved alone, not in a group, organisation or institution or who state “Other”. FWS 2024 (n= 10,551).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

In state or municipal organisations, volunteers with a secondary school education are comparatively common. There appears to be a correlation here with the finding that voluntary work in accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management is more frequently carried out by people with a secondary school leaving certificate than by volunteers with other educational backgrounds.

### **78 per cent of those involved are members of the organisation**

At 78 per cent, more than three quarters of volunteers are also members of their most time-intensive volunteering organisation. This has not changed compared to the 2019 Survey on Volunteering (79 per cent). At 75 per cent, women are slightly less likely to be members of their volunteering organisation than men (81 per cent). There are also differences between age groups: membership is least common among those aged under 50 (77 per cent of 14- to 29-year-olds and 76 per cent of 30- to 49-year-olds are members of the organisation) and most common in the oldest age group: 84 per cent of those aged 75 or over are also members of the organisation.

Figure 6-3 shows the proportion of membership according to the organisational framework of the

voluntary activity. The highest percentage of members are involved in clubs and associations as well as churches or religious associations. Volunteers often have to be members of clubs in order to volunteer with them. In churches or other religious organisations, it is often the members of the faith community who are particularly motivated to get involved due to their commitment to the faith or the institution.

### **Conclusion**

Almost half (48.5 per cent) of those who volunteer do so in a club, and significantly more men than women. This is followed in second place by involvement in churches or other religious associations (11 per cent), where women are more involved than men. 13 per cent are involved in individually organised groups, and here too women are more involved than men in participating in volunteering.

In the years between 2004 and 2019, the proportion of those who carry out their most time-intensive activity in individually organised groups increased slightly. In 2024, this percentage has fallen again slightly, so there is a slight shift in favour of formally organised volunteering. The percentage of people who are involved in a club or association has risen from 51 per cent in 2019 to 54 per cent in 2024.

# 7. Management and Board Positions in Voluntary Activity

A large proportion of volunteers carry out their work in clubs or other formal forms of organisation. These organisations depend on the fact that there will always be people who take on special responsibility in a management role. Such management and board positions often require a greater time commitment and are associated with obligations, which is why there are not always enough people willing to take on these roles. Since the start of the Survey on Volunteering, all volunteers have been asked whether they take on a leadership or board role as part of their voluntary work.

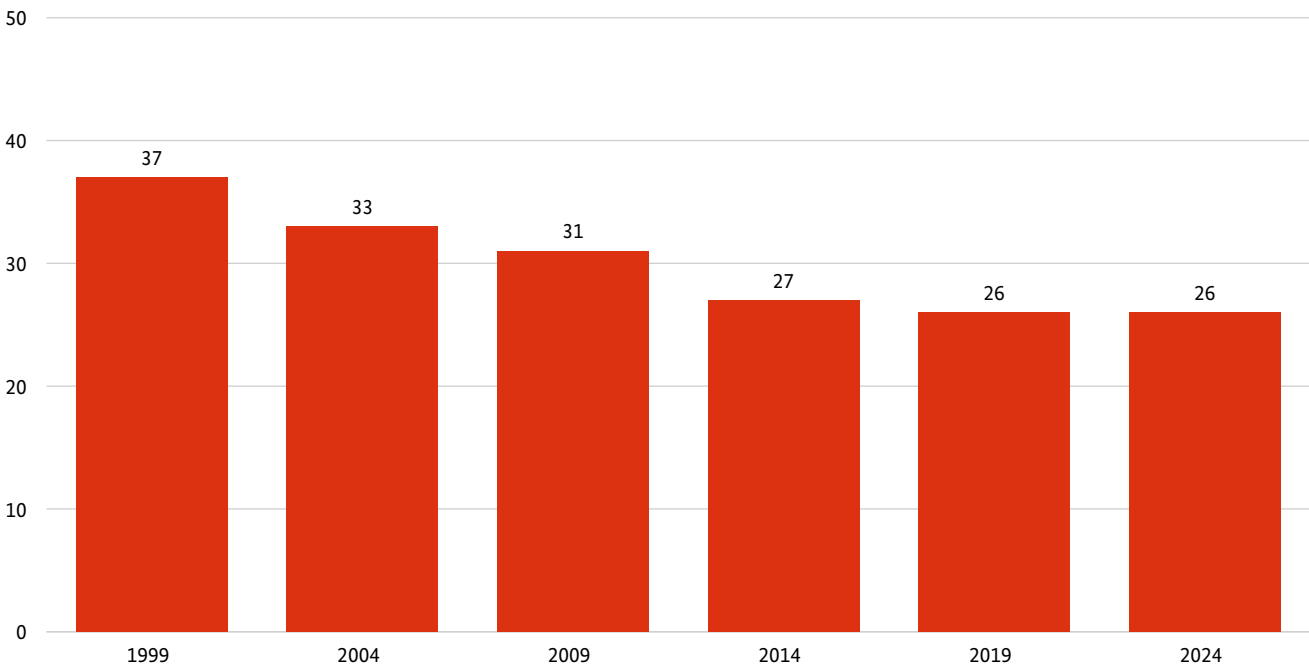
In the case of people with multiple commitments, this question refers to the most time-consuming activity.

## A quarter of volunteers hold a management or board position

Over a quarter (26 per cent) of volunteers hold a management or board position as part of their voluntary work. Compared to the 2014 Survey on Volunteering (27 per cent) and the 2019 survey (26 per cent), this percentage has remained almost unchanged for ten years (Figure 7-1).

Figure 7-1: Percentage of volunteers holding management and board positions in voluntary work compared over time 1999–2024

“Do you hold a management or board position [in the most time-consuming activity]?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 1999 (n=4,688), FWS 2004 (n=5,142), FWS 2009 (n=7,006), FWS 2014 (n=12,424), FWS 2019 (n=11,936), FWS 2024 (n=11,557). Source: FWS 2019–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

**Management positions are particularly frequently held by older people and men**

As people get older, the percentage of volunteers who hold a management or board position increases. The percentage of management positions is highest in the 65 to 74 age group at 31 per cent and in the over-75 age group at 29 per cent. At 28 per cent, the 50 to 64 age group also has an above-average number of volunteers in management positions. This percentage is lowest in the youngest age group, 14- to 29-year-olds, at 21 per cent (Figure 7–2). Older people, especially after the transition to retirement, obviously have greater time resources. In addition, they often bring many years of experience and networking to the table.

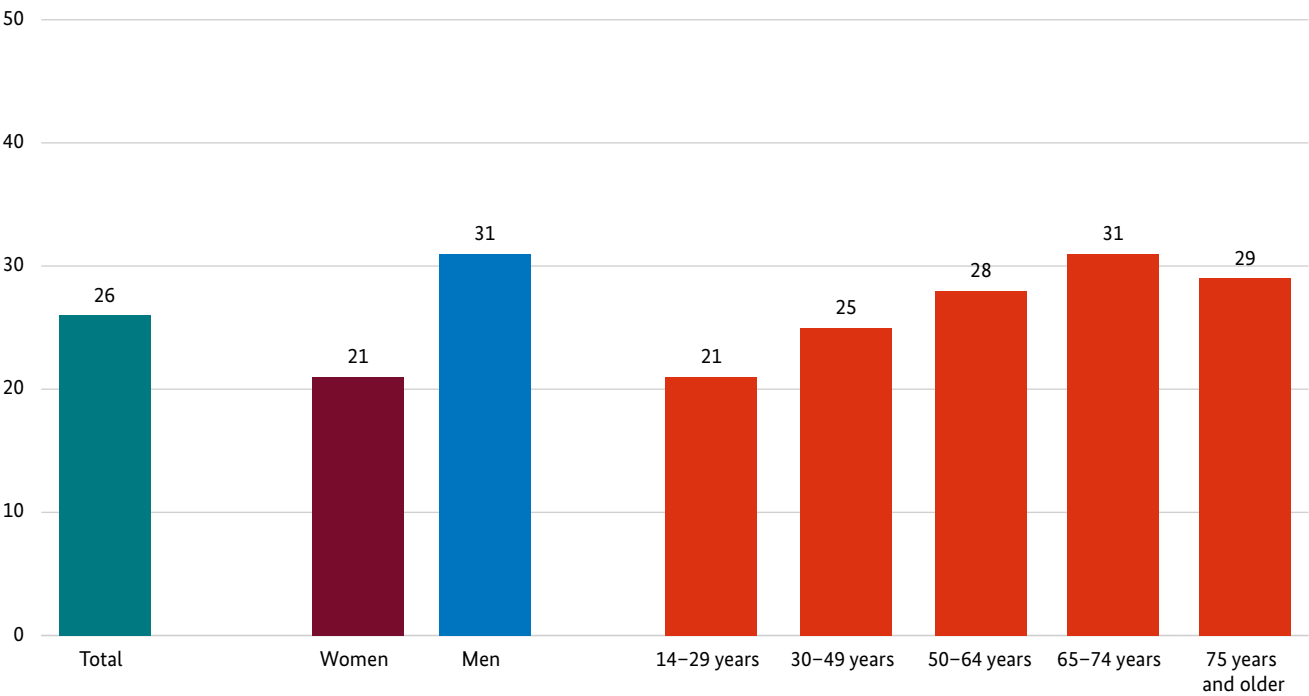
In all waves of the survey since 1999, the percentage of men holding management and board positions was

higher than that of women. This result was seen again in 2024: at 31 per cent, men are more likely to take on a leadership role in their voluntary work than women at 21 per cent (2019: 30 per cent to 22 per cent). In terms of organisational forms, this result corresponds with the finding that men are proportionately more involved in clubs and associations (59 per cent) than women (50 per cent). As shown in Chapter 6, in individually organised groups (often without a formal organisational structure), women are again slightly more likely to be involved (15 per cent) than men (11 per cent).

Formal obligations and responsibilities in a management and board position are often associated with a higher time commitment: 27 per cent of those with a leadership role invest at least six hours a week in their work, compared with only 16 per cent of those without such a role.

**Figure 7–2: Percentage of volunteers holding leadership or board positions in voluntary work by gender and age**

*“Do you hold a management or board position [in the most time-consuming activity]?”; figures in per cent.*



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2024 (n= 11,557).  
Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

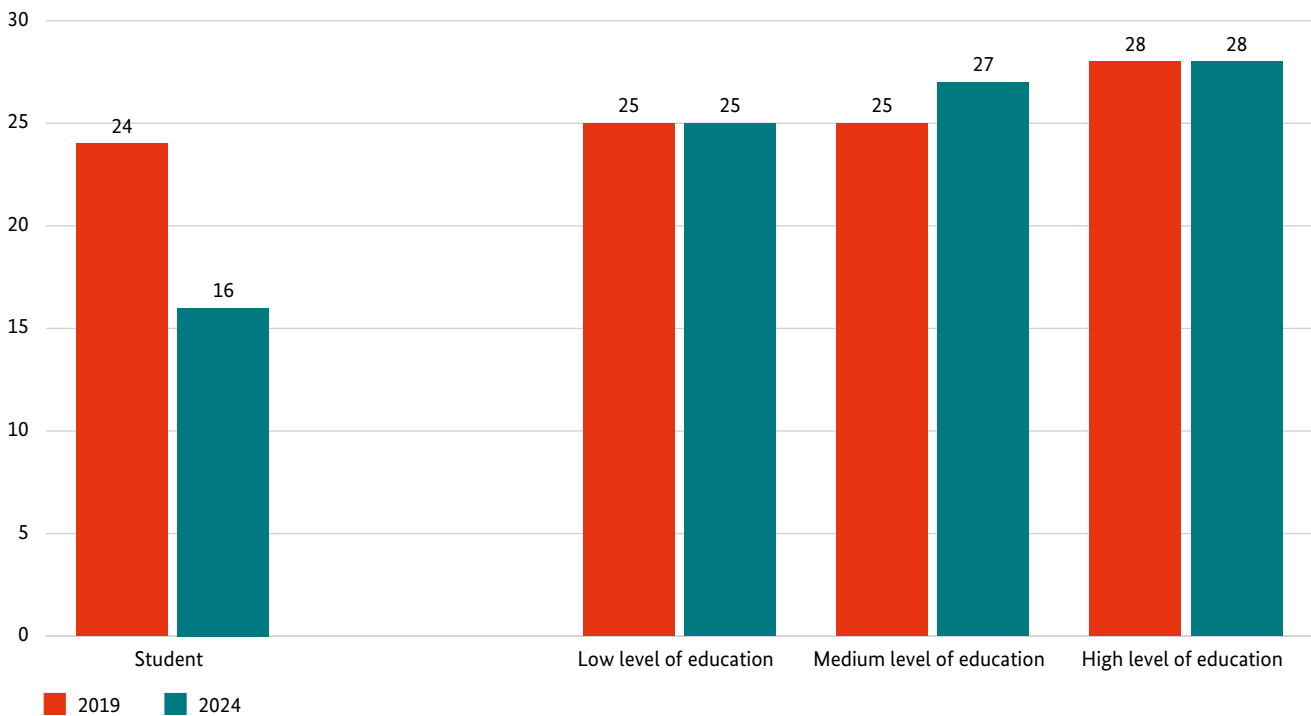
**Volunteers with a higher level of school education are slightly more likely to take on management or board positions**

Differences in the assumption of management and board positions can also be observed with regard to school education. 28 per cent of those with a high level

of school education and 27 per cent with a medium level of school education are slightly more likely than those with a low level of school education to be involved in a leadership role (25 per cent; Figure 7–3). At 16 per cent, school pupils are significantly less likely to be in leadership positions.

**Figure 7–3: Percentage of volunteers with leadership and board positions in voluntary work by school education compared over time 2019–2024**

“Do you hold a management or board position [in the most time-consuming activity]?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2019 (n=11,936), FWS 2024 (n=11,557).  
Source: FWS 2019–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

**Conclusion**

One quarter (26 per cent) of volunteers hold a management or board position. This percentage has remained stable at the same level for ten years. People aged 50 and over are the most likely to take on a leadership role.

Factors such as experience, personal networking and sufficient time resources, which are more readily available to volunteers as they get older than in earlier phases of their lives, are evidently important for taking on leadership roles in volunteering.

## 8. Use of Digital Applications for the Voluntary Activity

Digitalisation now extends to almost all areas of life and therefore also to volunteering. The internet, apps or other digital applications are used to carry out most volunteering activities, be it via a smartphone, tablet or computer. However, volunteering does not usually take place exclusively in the digital space, but as a hybrid form: some of the involvement takes place via digital applications, for example via messenger apps for appointments, while other parts of volunteering continue to take place in “analogue” personal contact.

The use of digital applications in volunteering has become increasingly important over time, which has also changed the way in which volunteers organise themselves and use their time for charitable purposes. Digital applications enable volunteers to network with each other, coordinate projects and utilise resources regardless of time and place. Due to their flexibility, these applications can also create new approaches to volunteering, for example for young people or people with limited mobility.

The coronavirus pandemic has also increased the use and spread of digital applications, as contact restrictions have also limited volunteering during this time. Many volunteers and volunteering organisations have therefore resorted to digital alternatives, such as video conferencing instead of on-site meetings. In the narrower sense, “digital volunteering” refers to volunteering that is carried out predominantly or exclusively with the aid of digital applications in the digital space.

The Survey on Volunteering analyses the extent to which volunteers use digital applications as part of their

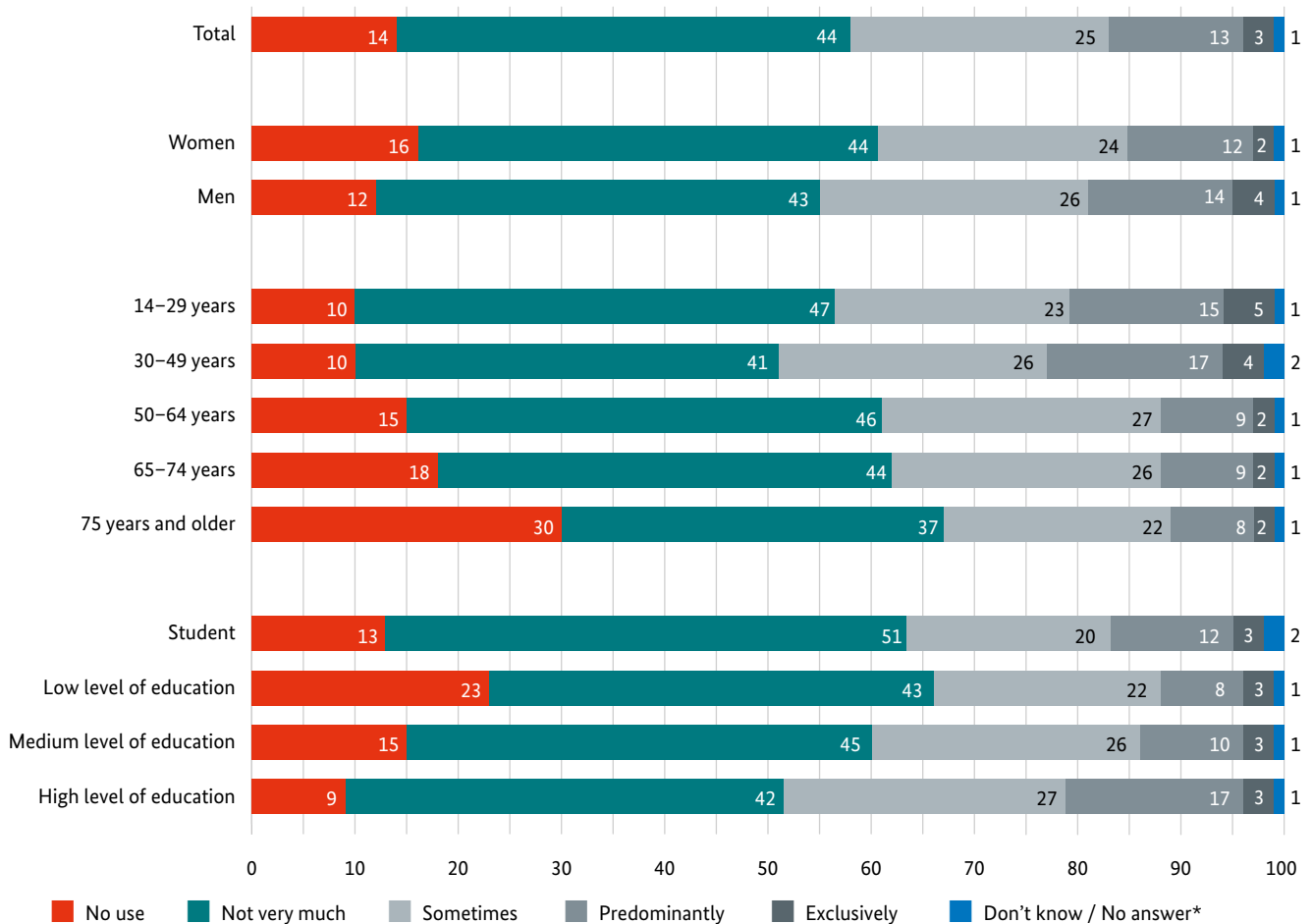
voluntary work and what role these tools play for them. For the 2024 survey, the questions on digital volunteering were revised and new questions were added (see Appendix on Methods, the section on the questionnaire). Therefore, a direct comparison with the results of the 2019 Survey on Volunteering is not possible.

### **The internet, apps and digital applications are used by 86 per cent of volunteers**

Overall, 86 per cent of all volunteers state that they use the internet, apps or other digital applications as part of their voluntary work. For volunteers with several voluntary activities, the information below refers to the most time-intensive activity. 69 per cent of all volunteers carry out their work to some extent (25 per cent) or to a lesser extent (44 per cent) with the aid of the internet, apps or other digital applications. A total of 16 per cent of volunteers are involved in digital volunteering: 13 per cent engage primarily with the aid of digital applications, while exclusively digital volunteering is still rare at 3 per cent (Figure 8–1). A further 1 per cent use digital apps for their volunteering, but did not specify how intensively they are used. 14 per cent of volunteers state that they do not use the internet or online applications for their voluntary work at all. At 30 per cent, this percentage is particularly high in the 75+ age group and is also above average for people with a low level of school education at 23 per cent. This shows that digital participation is not the same for all social groups. Conversely, people under the age of 50 are particularly likely to use such tools for their work (non-use of only 10 per cent), as are people with a high level of school education (non-use of 9 per cent).

**Figure 8–1: Intensity of use of digital applications for volunteering by gender, age and school education**

“Do you practice your [most time-consuming] activity not very much, sometimes, predominantly, or exclusively with the help of the internet, apps or other digital or online applications?”; figures in per cent.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2024 (n=11,557)

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

\* 1 per cent of all volunteers use digital apps for their volunteering, but did not specify how intensively they use them (“Don’t know” / “No response”)

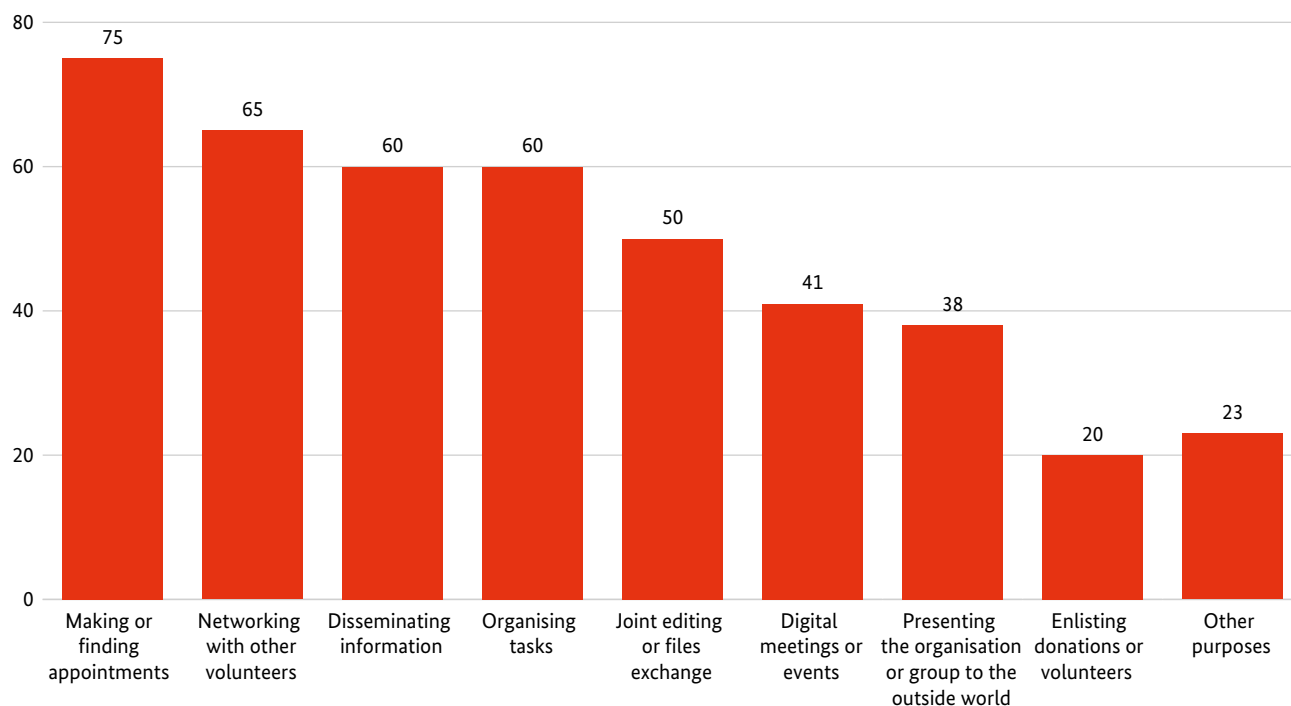
### The vast majority of volunteers use digital applications

Digital communication applications are most frequently used to arrange meetings with other volunteers (75 per cent) or to network and exchange information, for example using messenger apps (65 per cent). Digital applications are also frequently used when carrying out voluntary work, for example to disseminate information (60 per cent), organise tasks (60 per cent), or work on files together (50 per cent). Digital applications are therefore mostly a means to an end and support volunteering, which still primarily takes place in the “non-digital” space (Figure 8–2).

However, four out of ten volunteers (41 per cent) also state that they meet digitally as part of their voluntary work or take part in events online. Four out of ten also use digital channels (38 per cent) to present the organisation or group to the outside world, for example by maintaining the homepage or social media account, and 20 per cent use digital applications to solicit donations or recruit volunteers.

**Figure 8–2: Types of use of digital applications in the context of volunteering**

“Now it’s about whether you use the internet, apps or other digital or online applications for your [most time-consuming] activity. This can be via a smartphone, computer, tablet or similar. Do you use such apps or applications for your activity...”; figures in per cent; multiple answers possible.



Unweighted basis: all volunteers. FWS 2024 (n= 11,557).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### Digital applications bring more flexibility and lower access barriers

The role of digital applications for volunteering is very diverse (Figure 8–3): over half (56 per cent) of those who use these tools state that they can use the apps and applications very well for their local volunteering. Just under half (46 per cent) emphasise the greater freedom to organise their time. 45 per cent are able to get involved in different things and topics at the same time. Almost four in ten (37 per cent) volunteers believe that they can do more for society using digital applications.

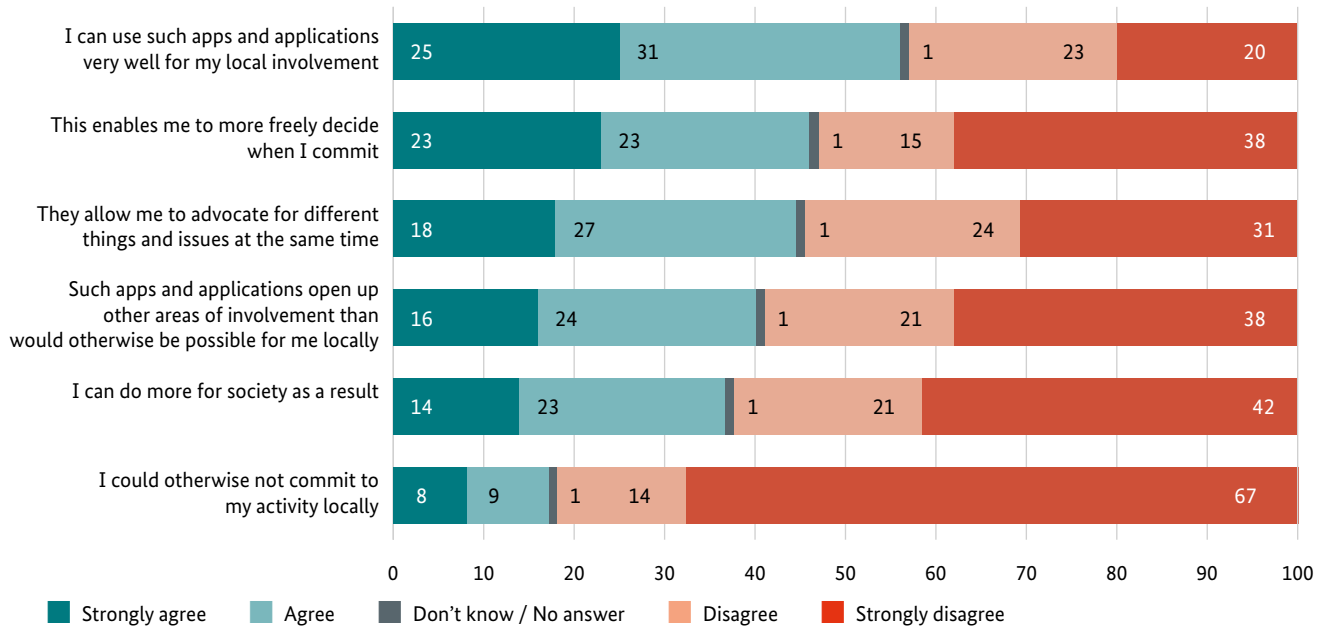
There is also a high demand among volunteers for digital opportunities for location-independent volunteering: for 40 per cent of those who use digital applications, this opens up other areas of volunteering than would be possible for them locally. 17 per cent state that

they would not be able to get involved in their volunteering without the internet, apps or other digital applications. When asked about support options on the part of organisations, groups or institutions, over a quarter (27 per cent) of all volunteers express the wish that their organisation should offer (more) opportunities for digital volunteering regardless of location (not shown).

Digital applications thus not only support committed individuals in their volunteering, they can also lower the barriers to entry for people who want to get involved. Of the individuals who are not volunteers, one in seven (14 per cent) state that not being able to find an activity that they can do digitally or online is a possible obstacle (not shown). The expansion of digital volunteering formats could incentivise these non-volunteers to get involved.

**Figure 8–3: The role of digital applications for volunteering**

“What role does the internet, apps or other digital or online applications play for you with your [most time-consuming] activity? To what extent do the following statements apply to you... not, barely, somewhat or completely?”; figures in per cent.



Basis: Volunteers who use digital applications. FWS 2024 (n= 10,157).

Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

Deviations from 100 per cent are due to rounding.

### Conclusion

The results of the 2024 Survey on Volunteering show that digital applications have a firm place as a means of communication, a tool or a platform for volunteering. Almost nine out of ten volunteers (86 per cent) use the internet, apps or other digital applications at least occasionally as part of their voluntary work. Digital volunteering that takes place predominantly or exclusively in the digital space is at 16 per cent, with purely digital volunteering remaining rare at 3 per cent. For the majority of volunteers, digital applications support (analogue-based) practical volunteering.

The Survey on Volunteering thus confirms the finding that the increasing digitalisation of volunteering is not replacing previous forms of volunteering, but rather supplementing them and opening up new communication channels. The ability to volunteer independent of time and place also opens up new avenues for volunteering. There is great potential in digital volunteering and the use of digital tools to create inclusive volunteering opportunities for people with physical disabilities or for people with differently motivated volunteering needs.

# 9. Regional Aspects of Volunteering

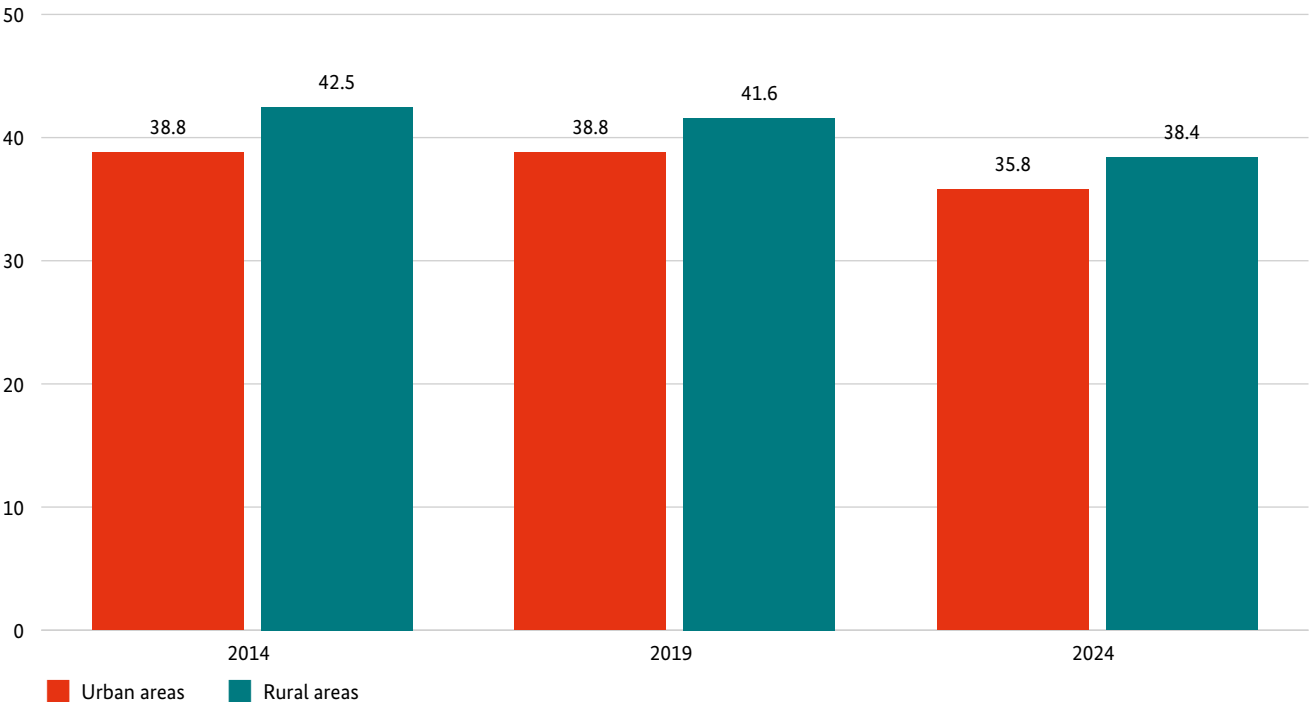
Volunteering plays an important role in social cohesion throughout Germany. Millions of people get involved in clubs, initiatives or projects in their free time, for example in sport, culture, social work, nature and environmental protection, rescue services or disaster control. Participation in volunteering rates differ between the regions in Germany and between the federal states. Framework conditions, long-established structures and volunteering programmes vary considerably across Germany in some cases. A look at the regional volunteering rates can help to better understand the diverse conditions and challenges of volunteering.

## People in rural areas are slightly more likely to volunteer

People in rural areas are slightly more likely to volunteer (38.4 per cent) than people in urban areas (35.8 per cent). This difference between urban and rural areas has hardly changed since the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, with the gap narrowing only slightly from 2.8 to 2.6 percentage points. In 2019, the percentage of volunteers was 38.8 per cent in urban regions and 41.6 per cent in rural regions. The slight decline in the rate of volunteering between 2019 and 2024 affects both urban and rural areas (Figure 9–1).

Figure 9–1: Percentage of volunteers by region type compared over time 2014–2024

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Basis: all respondents who consented to have regional information linked to their data. FWS 2014 (n=25,475), FWS 2019 (n=24,076), FWS 2024 (n=26,806).  
Source: FWS 2014–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

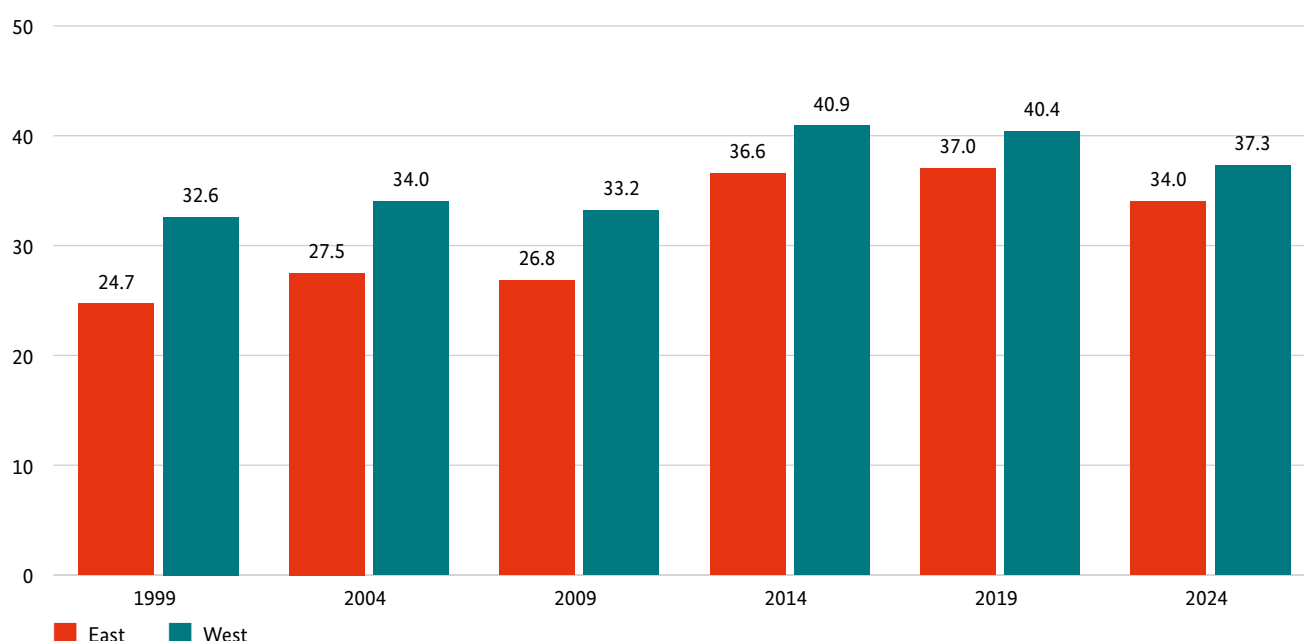
### Slightly higher volunteering rate in the western federal states

There is little difference between the volunteering rates in the western German states (37.3 per cent) and the eastern German states (34.0 per cent; including Berlin), with a difference of 3.3 percentage points. Compared to

2019, this difference has remained the same. Since the first Survey on Volunteering in 1999, the difference between East and West has steadily decreased over time – from 7.9 percentage points in 1999 to 3.4 percentage points in 2019. In 2024, this trend towards equalisation of volunteering has not continued (Figure 9–2).

**Figure 9–2: Percentage of volunteers in East and West Germany compared over time 1999–2024**

*“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.*



Basis: all respondents. FWS 1999 (n=14,922), FWS 2004 (n=15,000), FWS 2009 (n=20,005), FWS 2014 (n=28,690), FWS 2019 (n=27,762), FWS 2024 (n=27,542).  
Source: FWS 1999–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### In all federal states, over 30 per cent of the population is involved in voluntary work

In all federal states, at least 30 per cent of the population aged 14 and over are involved in voluntary work. In Hesse, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, more than 40 per cent of the population is involved in voluntary activities (Figure 9–3). With regard to the rates by federal state, it should be noted that the results are subject to higher statistical margins of error, as the case numbers in the federal states are significantly smaller than the total number of cases in the Survey on Volun-

teering<sup>4</sup>. As a rule, there are therefore no statistically significant differences in the volunteering rates between the federal states. The differences are only statistically significant in exceptional cases – for example, when one state has a rate of volunteering of just under 40 per cent and another just over 30 per cent. When comparing the federal states, it should be borne in mind that the spatial and socio-demographic structures of the federal states differ. Factors such as population density and demographics, the economic situation and even local customs and traditions can influence the level of volunteering in the federal states.

4 The number of cases, i.e. the number of interviews per federal state, is between 1,000 and 5,050 (unweighted).

Figure 9–3: Percentage of volunteers in the federal states

“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.



Basis: all respondents. FWS 2024 (n= 27,542).

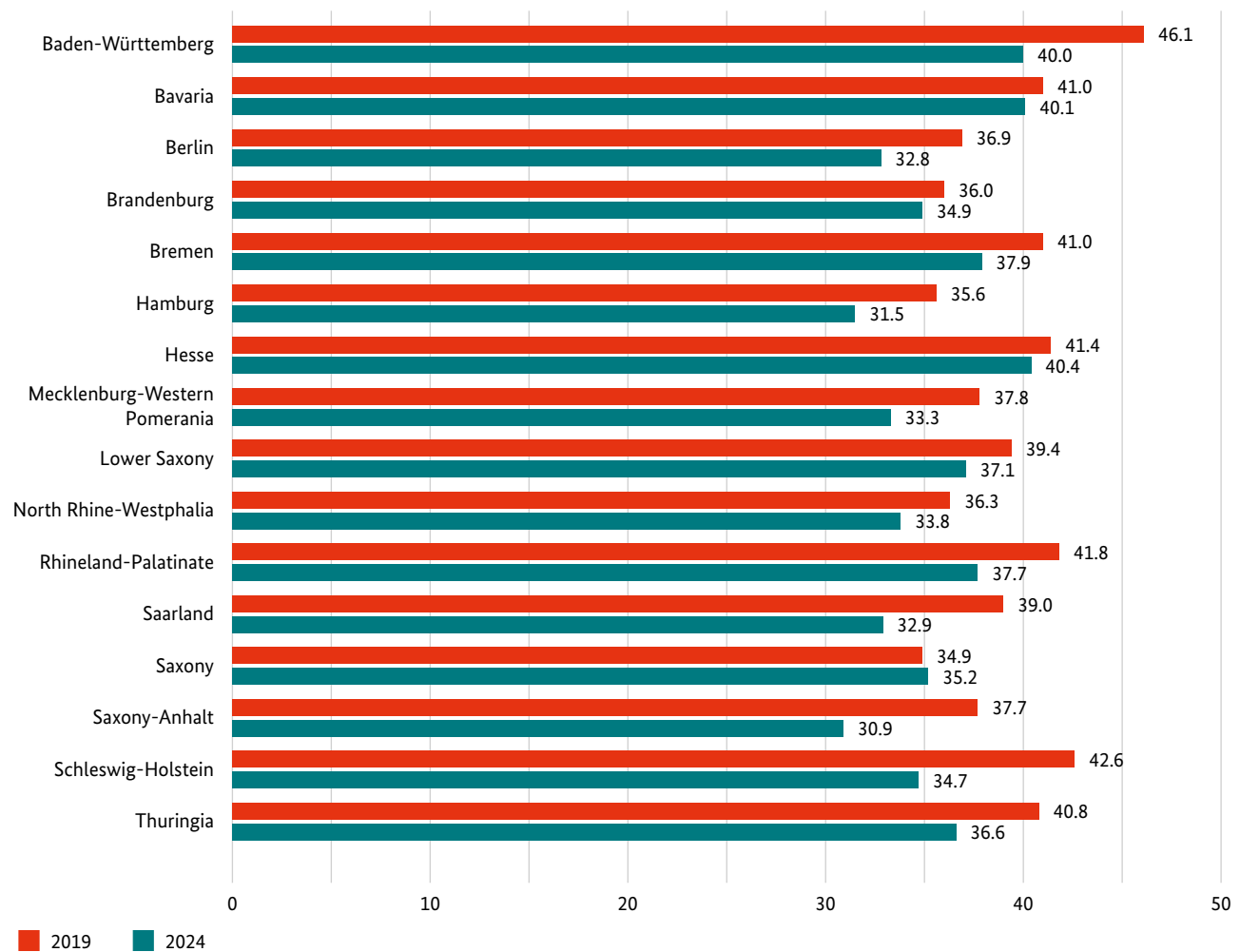
Source: FWS 2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

In a state comparison, the slight decline in the rate of volunteering in 2024 is evident in almost all states (Figure 9–4). Due to the smaller number of cases at federal state level, these changes are usually not statistically significant – with the exception of

Schleswig-Holstein and Baden-Württemberg. It should be noted that these two federal states were at the top of the volunteering rates in 2019, meaning that the decline observed was from a very high level.

**Figure 9–4: Percentage of volunteers in the federal states compared over time 2019–2024**

*“You said, you are active in [display name of area]. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you taken on duties or tasks in this area that you do on a voluntary basis?”; figures in per cent.*



Basis: all respondents. FWS 2019 (n=27,762), FWS 2024 (n=27,542).  
Source: FWS 2019–2024, weighted, own calculations (Verian).

### Conclusion

Volunteering is of great importance in all regions of Germany. There are differences in the level of involvement between urban and rural areas and between the federal states. People in rural areas are slightly more

likely to get involved than those in urban areas, and the western federal states have a slightly higher rate of involvement. But volunteering is widespread everywhere: in all federal states and types of region, over 30 per cent of the population aged 14 and over are involved in voluntary work.

## 10. Conclusion and Outlook

In 2024, around 27 million people in Germany are involved in voluntary work. That is 36.7 per cent of the resident population aged 14 and over. Most volunteers are involved in sport and exercise, as in all previous waves of the Survey on Volunteering. In second place is social volunteering “for people who need support”. This is followed by volunteering in culture and music, in schools and nurseries and in church or religious activities.

Overall, the 2024 Survey on Volunteering shows that volunteering in Germany is proving to be very consistent in its outstanding importance for the community. Against the backdrop of social change, the level of volunteering is very stable: across Germany, more than 30 per cent of the resident population aged 14 and over are involved in voluntary work in all federal states. In the western federal states, the rate of volunteering is still slightly higher at 37.3 per cent than in the eastern federal states (including Berlin) at 34.0 per cent. In 2024, people in rural areas are also slightly more likely to be involved (38.4 per cent) than people in urban areas (35.8 per cent).

The volunteers’ view of their voluntary work also testifies to a pronounced consistency: 70 per cent intend to continue volunteering over the next twelve months as before. The percentage of those who would like to increase the amount of time they spend working (10 per cent) and those who would like to invest less time (10 per cent) are roughly equal. Only 6 per cent of volunteers intend to end their involvement completely.

In 2024, volunteers once again invested slightly more time in their voluntary work. In the 2014 and 2019 surveys, a slight shift towards less time being spent on volunteering was observed; this trend has reversed. Around a quarter of volunteers (24 per cent) state that they spend three to five hours a week on the activity and almost one in five (19 per cent) even spend six or more hours. In 2019, these percentages were 22 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. However, it is not only the time spent on these activities that has increased compared to 2019, but also the frequency with which they are carried out: in 2024, 48 per cent of volunteers stated that they carried out the activity once or more a week, compared with 42 per cent in 2019.

In terms of organisational forms, clubs remain the established structure for volunteering. Almost half (49 per cent) of volunteers carry out their work in a club. A total of 54 per cent are involved in clubs and associations, meaning that involvement in formal organisational structures is slightly more common in 2024 than in 2019. At the same time, slightly fewer people were involved in individually organised groups such as neighbourhood support, initiatives or self-organised groups in 2024 than in 2019. Between the 2004 and 2019 Survey on Volunteering, a proportionate increase in volunteering in individually organised groups was observed; this trend did not continue in 2024.

Currently, a quarter (26 per cent) of those involved hold a management or board position as part of their voluntary work – this percentage has remained stable for ten years. At 31 per cent, men are more likely to take on leadership roles as part of their volunteering than women at 21 per cent. As the age of volunteers increases, so does the percentage of those who hold a management or board position.

The use of digital applications in volunteering is widespread: nine out of ten volunteers (86 per cent) use digital applications as part of their voluntary work. The possible uses range from arranging appointments (75 per cent) to soliciting donations or recruiting volunteers (20 per cent). Volunteering that takes place exclusively digitally is rather rare at 3 per cent. In other words, “digital” volunteering does not usually replace “analogue” volunteering. Digital applications predominantly support practical and analogue activities. Such applications often make volunteering possible in the first place, as they allow volunteers to participate flexibly regardless of location or time. However, the need goes beyond the “status quo”: more than a quarter of volunteers would like the organisation to offer them more opportunities to volunteer digitally, regardless of their location. For volunteering organisations, digital applications and the high willingness of volunteers to use them offer the potential to develop new forms of volunteering and thus also address previously unreachable groups of people for volunteering.

### The development of volunteering

With a rate of volunteering of 36.7 per cent, volunteering is in slight decline: in 2019, the rate of volunteering was 39.7 per cent, compared to 40.0 per cent in 2014. The slight decline in overall volunteering is accompanied by an intensification in volunteering: in 2024, volunteers concentrate more on one main activity or task instead of pursuing several different voluntary activities. This is because in 2024, the average number of voluntary activities that volunteers carry out at the same time decreased slightly compared to the previous year. Both the frequency with which the volunteers carry out this main activity and the number of hours they spend on it have increased, which indicates a more intensive commitment.

The decline in the rate of volunteering by three percentage points can be attributed to a small extent to methodological effects in the survey. In the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, the open-ended responses describing volunteering were checked somewhat more consistently than in the previous waves. However, this does not explain the overall extent of the change: the decline in the rate of volunteering can also be seen independently of the checking and allocation of the open-ended responses.

The decline in volunteering in Germany can be observed in all social groups. However, the rate of volunteering among people with a higher level of school education has fallen slightly disproportionately compared to 2019. A similar trend can be seen among middle-aged people aged 30 to 49, where the decline in volunteering is most pronounced. In terms of employment, there is a greater decline in the rate of volunteering among part-time employees and people in marginal employment. In addition, volunteering among people with children under the age of 14 is declining somewhat more strongly. Overall, the decline in volunteering is equally pronounced among women and men, although differences can be seen in certain phases of life: compared to 2019, the level of volunteering among 30- to 49-year-old women has fallen slightly more than that of men of the same age.

When analysed according to areas of involvement, a corresponding picture emerges: a decline in the rate of volunteering can be observed almost everywhere. In

particular, the areas of “School and nursery” and “Culture and music” show a slightly disproportionate decline in volunteering. The “Accident and emergency services, voluntary fire brigade” segment, on the other hand, sees a very slight increase.

These individual findings are important for assessing developments in the extremely diverse areas in which people volunteer.

### Backgrounds and effects

The overall development of volunteering is characterised in part by opposing trends and thus cannot be attributed to uniform causes.

It is possible that the decline in volunteering is related to the after-effects of the coronavirus pandemic. This is supported above all by the finding that volunteering in more informally organised areas (neighbourhood support, initiatives or project work, self-organised groups) is declining somewhat more strongly in comparison. This could be due to the fact that it was more difficult to maintain these self-organised groups without formal structures during the coronavirus period. Clubs or other more organised volunteering structures, on the other hand, were able to become active and capable of acting again more quickly during and after the end of the pandemic. In retrospect, the current level of volunteering seems remarkably stable against the backdrop of the at times severe restrictions on public life due to contact restrictions and other pandemic measures. The structures in the “third sector”, the charitable non-profit sector, have evidently proven to be resilient, i.e. resistant and durable in the face of external impairments. This also applies to the more informal involvement in individually organised groups and initiatives, which has only seen a slight decline.

The findings presented indicate that the decline could also be related to changes in individual social groups. It is not young people under the age of 30 whose volunteering is declining disproportionately, for example due to the time demands of training, studying or starting a career, or high levels of social media use. What is striking is the somewhat stronger decline in the rate of volunteering among middle-aged people aged 30 to 49 – particularly among women, part-time employees and people with children.

The very slight increase in the number of people involved in disaster management and volunteer fire brigades, which runs counter to the general trend, may be due to natural disasters such as the floods in Rhineland-Palatinate and North Rhine-Westphalia in the summer of 2021. In the context of climate change, people are often more aware of extreme weather events and the associated risks. This reflects a generally growing need for people to provide spontaneous, flexible and very specific help, especially in emergencies or to cope with natural disasters, which are particularly challenging and have a strong impact on the public. A comparable dynamic could be observed with regard to the particular challenges posed by the refugee movements to Germany from 2015 onwards in the area of refugee aid.

To summarise, it can be said that volunteering remains at a high level in 2024 – despite the protracted restrictions on public life during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 to 2022, despite accelerating social change, and despite somewhat stricter methodological standards in the Survey on Volunteering.

### Conclusion

Volunteering varies according to age and the associated phase of life and thus reflects the different circumstances, opportunities and preferences of the volunteers. The forms of commitment and associated obligations are just as diverse. At the same time, there is also a wide range of voluntary work that is more short-term and less binding and takes place in self-organised groups or initiatives. This reflects the diversity and dynamism of volunteering in Germany.

However, the Sixth Survey on Volunteering also makes it clear that there are still some significant differences between population groups in terms of both participation and the organisation of volunteering. These can be explained not only by individual differences in volunteering preferences, but also by school education and – to a lesser extent – by urban or rural living environment.

A broad and diverse range of voluntary work is essential for a functioning community. At the same time, it represents a central form of social participation. For those who practise it, it means the opportunity to contribute to the community through concrete action and to help shape their own life contexts. This results in social integration as well as personal fulfilment and satisfaction. Volunteering has an inclusive effect.

Civil society and the federal levels of government therefore have the task of helping to ensure that all those who wish to get involved can find access to the voluntary work they want, both in the interests of individuals who have not previously volunteered and in the interests of society as a whole.

The Survey on Volunteering documents a widely functioning volunteering programme that shapes society. It shows how diverse and wide-ranging the activities and areas in which volunteers are involved in Germany are. At the same time, it emphasises the great potential for new volunteering as both a positive insight and a challenge.

# Appendix on Methods

The German Survey on Volunteering is a telephone survey on volunteering in Germany. It has been carried out every five years since 1999 on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ). The basic population of the survey is the German resident population in private households aged 14 and over. The scientific management of the Sixth Survey on Volunteering 2024 lies with the social research institute Verian<sup>5</sup>, which was also responsible for carrying out the fieldwork. An advisory board provided valuable input from the field of volunteering and volunteering research, particularly in the revision of the questionnaire and the evaluation planning.

The 2024 Survey on Volunteering's design is based on previous surveys in key aspects, both in terms of the method, content, data processing and data weighting, in order to enable comparability of the results over time. The average duration of the interviews was 25 minutes. Around 27,500 people aged 14 and over were surveyed by telephone between November 2023 and June 2024.

In its definition of volunteering, the Survey on Volunteering is based on the definition of the Enquete Commission "Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements" [The Future of Civic Volunteering] from 2002 (Deutscher Bundestag 2002, p. 38). Volunteering is defined as activities or tasks

1. that are voluntary and which are carried out outside of work and family in leisure time (**voluntariness**),
2. that are not aimed at material gain, i.e. the acquisition of income or profit, i.e. are neither gainful employment nor entrepreneurial activity (**non-profit status**),
3. that relate to common social purposes or to helping other people (**orientation towards the common good**),
4. that go beyond family relationships or activities in the immediate circle of friends, neighbours or acquaintances (**public space**),

5. and that take place as an element of civil society in a collective-community framework – institutionally or possibly also self-organised (**collective-community framework**).

These five criteria distinguish volunteering from other forms of activity, for example private activities in one's own family environment or among friends or acquaintances, as well as those that are carried out outside a collective/community framework.

The Survey on Volunteering therefore uses a broad understanding of "volunteering", which as a generic term includes very different forms of volunteering – from voluntary work, self-help and activities in clubs and associations to self-organised projects and initiatives. "Volunteering" also includes voluntary services, which are characterised by a legally regulated form of organisation and fixed hours. The traditional term "honorary position" describes a narrowly defined sub-area of volunteering, namely only people who take on a formal position in a formal organisation such as a club or association (for example club board) or hold an office by election or appointment (for example honorary mayor).

## Questionnaire

The Survey on Volunteering's survey instrument is a questionnaire that is further developed for each new survey wave. Compared to the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, some questions were revised in the questionnaire for the 2024 survey and a few new questions were included. Overall, the 2024 questionnaire had to be shortened by five minutes compared to 2019, and as such individual questions and items from the previous 2019 survey were deleted. For example, a new question was included asking volunteers about their planned future time frame for volunteering. The questions on the use of digital applications were revised. In addition, individual items were reformulated and supplemented

<sup>5</sup> Verian operated under the names Infratest Sozialforschung, Emnid Meinungsforschung and Kantar Public until 2023. Infratest Sozialforschung was already responsible for the first three waves of the Survey on Volunteering.

in the survey on motives for volunteering and reasons for obstruction and termination.

The coronavirus pandemic or related measures were newly included as a possible motive in the question on the reasons for ending a previous volunteering activity. In the course of revising the questionnaire, Verian deliberately decided against a retrospective survey on the short and medium-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on volunteering in the period from March 2020 to March 2022. During this time, the fight against the coronavirus pandemic led to extensive restrictions on public life on several occasions (including contact restrictions and lockdowns), which also had an impact on volunteering. These restrictive measures were gradually lifted in spring 2023. It would not be possible to quantify the effect of the coronavirus pandemic at the time on the level of volunteering using a cross-sectional survey such as the Survey on Volunteering. This would require what are referred to as “panel surveys”, in which the same people are interviewed over a longer period of time and thus accompanied in their life. The unique feature of the Survey on Volunteering is that it can be used to determine the level of volunteering at the time of the survey with a time window in the last 12 months (see explanations below on the core module volunteering survey and Figure A-1).

The core module of the Survey on Volunteering are the questions on volunteering, which are used to determine the volunteering rate (Figure A-1). Only minimal changes were made to this set of questions so as not to influence the time series. These questions are asked in three steps: firstly, the persons are asked whether they are active in one of 14 areas of volunteering, i.e. whether they are involved somewhere. In the second step, people who mention activities in one of these areas are asked whether they have also taken “voluntary activities” or “tasks” in these areas within the last twelve months that are “voluntary” and “unpaid or carried out for a small allowance”. In a third step, three follow-up questions are asked about each individual voluntary activity mentioned. These are answered as open-ended responses (i.e. questions without specified answers): *firstly*, the type of group, organisation or institution, *secondly*, the specific task or work performed and *thirdly*, the name of the activity.

Compared to the 2019 Survey on Volunteering, only minimal adjustments were made to the wording and examples for the areas of volunteering in the 2024 volunteering survey (for example in the eighth area to include the terms “ecology” and “climate protection”). In the 2014 Survey on Volunteering, there was a major change to the volunteering survey: the questions on activities (step 1) and volunteering (step 2) were asked for the first time using the time window “in the last twelve months”. Previously, in the 1999, 2004 and 2009 survey waves, respondents were asked instead about their “current” involvement, i.e. a narrower time period. On the one hand, the introduction of the new wording from 2014 was intended to ensure that all respondents provided information over a clearly defined time interval. With the time window “in the last twelve months”, seasonal volunteering and irregular activities are also recorded more reliably and somewhat more frequently than in the time-based survey up to the 2009 Survey on Volunteering. Since 2014, the development of the proportion of volunteers, i.e. the rate of volunteering, can therefore be assessed more precisely than in the first three surveys.<sup>6</sup>

6 The 2019 Fifth German Survey on Volunteering contains a detailed description (Simonson et al. 2022, page 34 ff. and page 61 ff.).

Figure A-1: Volunteering survey

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Step 1</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Question about activity in 14 areas</b></p> <p>There are a range of ways of getting involved, outside of work and family for example in a club, an initiative, a project, a community or a self-help group I will name a few different areas that are possible. If you think of the last 12 months: Have you been actively involved in one or more of these areas... Are you or have you been actively involved somewhere...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) <b>In the area of sport and exercise</b><br/>e. g. in a sports club or in an exercise group</li> <li>(2) <b>In the area of culture and music</b><br/>e. g. a theatre or music group, a choir, a cultural association or an association for cultural development</li> <li>(3) <b>In the area of leisure and social interaction</b><br/>e. g. in an allot garden association, a games club or senior club</li> <li>(4) <b>In the social area for people who need support</b><br/>e. g. in a charity or a different aid organisation, in the neighbourhood help or a self-help group or with a sponsorship</li> <li>(5) <b>In the health area</b><br/>e. g. as a helper in healthcare or in visiting services, in an association or a self-help group</li> <li>(6) <b>In the school or nursery area</b><br/>e. g. in a parents' association, the student board or a development association</li> <li>(7) <b>In youth work outside school or adult education</b><br/>e. g. looking after children or youth groups or running training programmes</li> <li>(8) <b>in the area of the ecology, climate protection, environment, nature protection or animal protection</b><br/>e. g. in a corresponding association, initiative or a self-organised project</li> <li>(9) <b>In the area of politics and political interest groups</b><br/>e. g. in a party, in the local council or town council, in political initiatives or solidarity projects</li> <li>(10) <b>In the area of professional interest groups outside work</b><br/>e. g. in a trade union, professional association, unemployment initiative</li> <li>(11) <b>In the church or religious area</b><br/>e. g. in the church, a religious organisation or a religious group</li> <li>(12) <b>In the area of justice and criminality</b><br/>e. g. as a lay judge or honorary judge, looking after offenders or victims of crime</li> <li>(13) <b>in the accident or emergency service, in the voluntary fire brigade or in civil protection and disaster management</b></li> <li>(14) <b>In an area not yet mentioned</b><br/>e. g. in citizens' initiatives or working groups on local and traffic development, but also citizens' clubs and others that haven't been mentioned yet</li> </ol> |
| <b>Step 2</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Question about voluntary work in 14 areas</b></p> <p>We are now interested in whether you also do voluntary activities or have taken on tasks in the areas in which you are active. We are looking at tasks and work taken on voluntarily for little or no remuneration.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Step 3</b> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Questions about all voluntary activities (open-ended questions)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What type of group, organisation or institution is it in which you volunteer?</li> <li>2. And what exactly do you do there? What is your duty or what work do you do there?</li> <li>3. Does your activity have a name? If so, what is it?</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

The topic of internet use was already included in the 2004 Survey on Volunteering. Questions were asked to measure the use of digital applications in the context of volunteering: “Do you use the internet for your voluntary work?” Since 2009, just under six out of ten volunteers have stated that they use the internet for their voluntary work (2009: 56 per cent; 2014: 56 per cent; 2019: 57 per cent). Despite the increased relevance of digital applications during this period, the percentage thus remained almost the same. With the spread of smartphones, digital applications are increasingly integrated into everyday routines. As such, users are often no longer aware of when and how often they are in the digital space. The questions used in the Survey on Volunteering in the years up to 2019 presumably “underestimated” the percentage of people who use digital applications as part of their voluntary work. For this reason, the questions in the 2024 Survey on Volunteering were changed. The respondents were specifically asked to name various digital applications for which they could indicate whether they use them as part of their voluntary work. These applications range from everyday tools for communication (for networking and exchange with other volunteers) to applications that require specific skills, such as maintaining websites to present the organisation or group to the outside world (see Chapter 8, Figure 8–2).

### Data collection

The data was collected as a standardised telephone survey (CATI; Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) on the basis of a representative random sample using a *dual frame approach*. “Dual frame” means that the overall sample is made up of a landline and a mobile phone sample. The generalisability of the sample to the population is ensured by a multi-stage random selection. The sample of telephone numbers was compiled according to the current ADM standard, using the “Gabler-Häder method” (Gabler/Häder 1998). In the landline sample, the interviewee in the household was also selected at random.

During the recruitment phase, the subject of the interview was not mentioned in order to avoid any bias in favour of volunteers. If the selected target persons were not able to conduct an interview in German, the survey could be conducted in five foreign languages: in Turkish, Russian, Polish, Arabic and English.

The field phase of the data collection took place from 9 November 2023 to 26 June 2024. A total of 27,650 interviews were generated. In the subsequent data preparation, a quality check of the data was carried out, which led to the exclusion of 108 interviews. As part of this review, interviews were removed if the interview time was too short, if there was too much missing information or if information was missing for weighting-relevant variables.

After the quality review, 27,542 cases were available for evaluation. Of these interviews, 16,280 came from the landline sample (59 per cent) and 11,262 from the mobile phone sample (41 per cent). The average survey duration was 25.6 minutes (median: 22.4 minutes). The interviews with individuals who were not volunteers lasted an average of 17.1 minutes, while the interviews with individuals who were volunteers lasted 36.2 minutes. 148 interviews were realised in the five foreign languages offered.

By increasing the number of cases in some federal states, it was ensured that at least 1,000 cases were available for analysis in all federal states. For analyses at federal level, this disproportionality was equalised as part of the weighting. In order to improve the proportion of mobile phones in the federal states with increased case numbers<sup>7</sup> and to increase the percentage of younger participants (under 35 years of age), around 3,000 interviews were specifically conducted on the basis of pre-qualified mobile phone numbers. These were telephone numbers of people who had previously taken part in telephone population studies and had agreed to be contacted for participation in other telephone interviews. Information was available for these persons, including their federal state and age.

7 Mobile phone numbers in Germany are not regionally localised (no area code as with the fixed network). It is thus only possible to target the interviews by federal state in the landline portion of the sample. Therefore, a disproportionate sample leads to an uneven distribution of the percentage of mobile phone cases, with very low rates in the smallest federal states.

### Checking the responses on volunteering

The activities recorded in the volunteering survey reflect the respondents' everyday understanding of volunteering. It is thus possible that activities are mentioned that do not correspond to the understanding of the term and the definition of the Survey on Volunteering and therefore do not count as volunteering. For this reason, this self-reported information (open-ended responses) from the interviewees on their voluntary activities was checked in two stages: firstly, during the interview and secondly during the data preparation phase.

During the telephone interview, an initial check of the information on voluntary activities was carried out, in which it was clarified with the interviewee at the end of the volunteering questions set whether all the activities mentioned were carried out on a voluntary basis. Interviews with respondents without "valid" voluntary activity were then continued as interviews with non-volunteers.

After completion of the data collection, all open-ended responses on voluntary activities in the volunteering survey was subjected to a second check ("ex-post review"). The open-ended responses were assessed as "valid" or "not valid" volunteering on the basis of a fixed catalogue of criteria. The procedure and catalogue of criteria were based on the survey waves of the 2014 and 2019 Survey on Volunteering (Simonson et al. 2022, page 37).

There are five criteria that were used for the check (Table A-1). The term "**activity**" refers to the fact that certain tasks are undertaken as part of the volunteering, which distinguishes the activity from simply "taking part" in a social activity. For example, simply taking part in swimming training in a club would not fulfil this criterion, whereas taking on the role of swimming coach in a youth sports club would. In addition, the activity was checked for the aspect of "**non-remunera-**

**tion**" in order to distinguish it from professional, paid or internal tasks during working hours, for example from a works or staff council activity. By "**public**" we mean that volunteering takes place outside the family or circle of friends or acquaintances, in order to distinguish it from, for example, assistance provided in the private sphere. The criterion of "**communality**" excludes activities that are carried out without any communal reference or cooperative character, i.e. that are not geared towards cooperation and mutual support.

The aspects of activity, non-remuneration, public and communality are already operationalised in the interview through various question texts in order to ensure that the interviewees only mention activities that meet these criteria as far as possible. The aspect of voluntariness was also addressed in the interview in the question texts and additionally in the check question. As such, this criterion (as in the 2014 and 2019 Survey on Volunteering) was not part of the test catalogue.

In the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, "**orientation towards the common good**" was added as an additional new criterion for the ex-post review of open-ended responses to the volunteering survey, as this allows a distinction to be made between volunteering and private leisure activities for some activities. In the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, for example, activities such as singing in a choir or playing in a band were categorised as "not valid" if the description of the activity indicated that it was purely a leisure activity. If these activities had an overriding community/social purpose, for example appearances in retirement homes, this was regarded as a public welfare orientation and the activity was categorised as "valid".

Interviews with people for whom all voluntary activities were categorised as "not valid" by the ex-post review were assigned to the "non-volunteer" group accordingly.

Table A-1: Catalogue of criteria for the “volunteer” or “non-volunteer” decision

| Five criteria                    | Criterion is not fulfilled                                      | Examples of “non-volunteer” activities                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Active                           | Passive membership or donations                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive club member</li> <li>• Donating blood</li> </ul>                                                                                                  |
| Free of charge                   | Professional, paid or in-house activity during working hours    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internship</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Works council activity</li> </ul>                                                                               |
| Public                           | Activity in the family or among friends                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caring for a parent</li> <li>• Looking after a grandchild</li> </ul>                                                                                      |
| Collective                       | Activity alone without community reference / team character     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tending own allotment garden</li> <li>• Planting and labelling old apple trees privately</li> <li>• Neighbourhood support: looking after a dog</li> </ul> |
| Oriented towards the common good | Activity without a community or social purpose or no assistance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of a band</li> <li>• Chairman of the advisory board of a condominium owners’ association</li> </ul>                                                |

Activities that clearly violated one of the five criteria for volunteering were not categorised as voluntary activities and were not included in the calculation of the rate of volunteering. In a few cases of doubt, where a clear assessment was not possible, these voluntary activities were accepted and included in the evaluation. The subjective categorisation of the interviewees themselves should apply here.

As a result of the two checking steps for the information on volunteering, the rate of volunteering initially determined in the interview in 2024 decreased from 38.8 per cent to 36.7 per cent (weighted values) as follows: The first step, the check during the interview, reduced the rate of volunteering by 0.6 percentage points, while the second step, the “ex-post review” during data preparation, reduced it by a further 1.5 percentage points (Table A-2).

Table A-2: Rate of volunteering (weighted)

|                                                        |               |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Rate of volunteering before the check in the interview | 38,8 per cent |
| Rate of volunteering after the check in the interview  | 38,2 per cent |
| Rate of volunteering after ex-post check               | 36,7 per cent |

In the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, an attempt was made to apply the described volunteering criteria consistently and coherently in the ex-post review of the open-ended volunteering survey. As such, the percentage of people who were “recoded” as not volunteers among all people who had initially (i.e. before all checks) assessed themselves as volunteers in the volunteering survey in the interview is 4.4 per cent, slightly higher than the values from 2014 (1.6 per cent) and 2019 (2.6 per cent). The scope of corrections has therefore increased slightly since 2014, but remains in the low single-digit range.

### Weighting

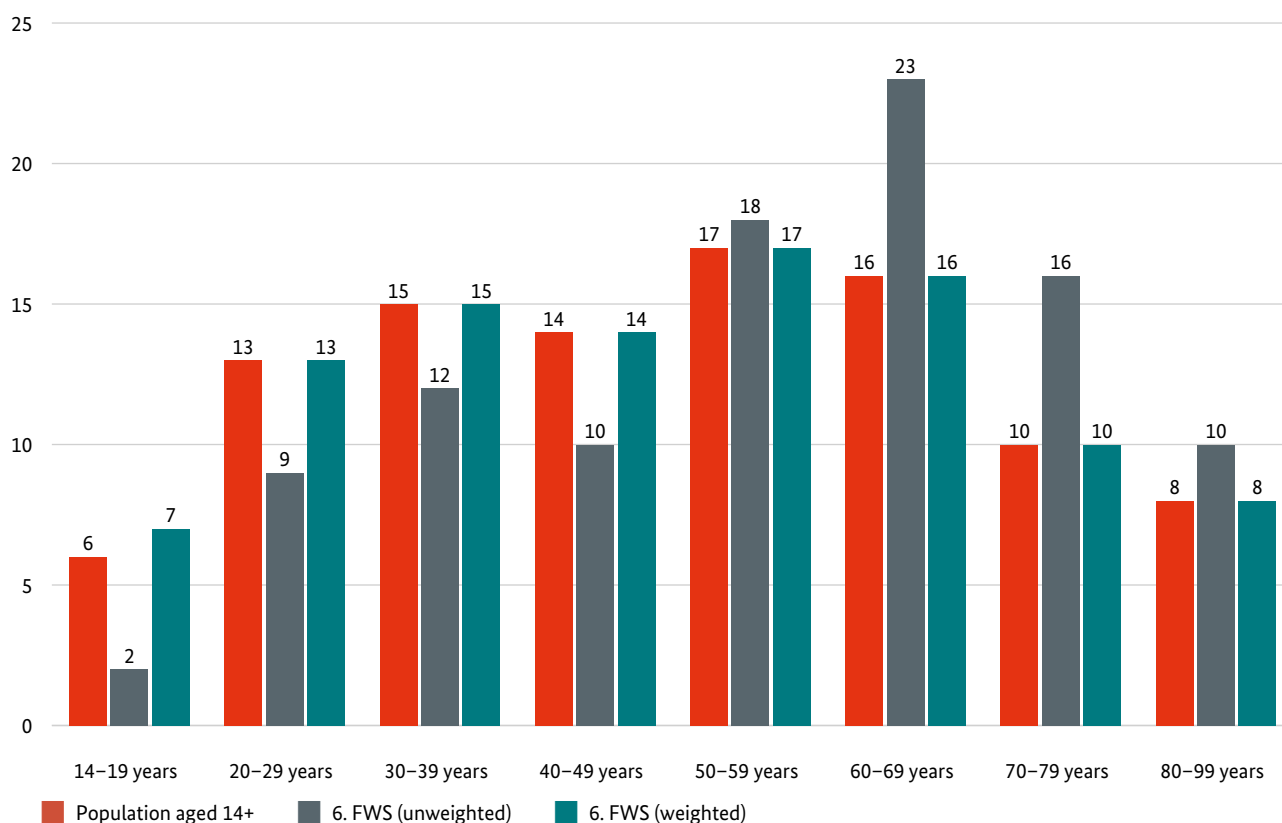
The data was essentially weighted in the same way as for the 2019 Survey on Volunteering. In the first weighting step, the design weighting, the different selection probabilities were equalised according to sample (landline versus mobile phone), household size (one person versus several people in the household), and federal state (disproportionate increase in individual federal states).

A second step takes into account the different willingness of people to agree to the provision of regional information (for example postcode) in telephone interviews (logit drop-out weighting). Analyses using regional variables that are fed in via the postcode (for example urban or rural region) are only possible for people for whom such consent is available. For this reason, a different weighting factor is used for these analyses.

In the third weighting step, the sample was adjusted to the demographic structures of the total population taken from the official statistics (calibration). This step is necessary because what are referred to as “selectivities” occur in every voluntary survey, for example because

younger people or people with a low level of school education are proportionately less likely to take part in telephone surveys. Since such failures are distributed disproportionately to the population and thus cause distortions in the sample, they are equalised with the aid of what are referred to as “calibration weightings”. The current population update and the current micro-census of the Federal Statistical Office served as the data basis. This procedure corresponds to the weighting design used in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering. In this final step of the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, the criteria of federal state, municipality size class (BIK), gender, age group, school education and migrant background were used.

Figure A-2: Sample 6th FWS vs. population – age groups



Source: Microcensus (2023), 6th FWS (unweighted/weighted percentages)

For the first time, the 2024 Survey on Volunteering was also weighted according to the criterion of migrant background. The percentage of people with a migrant background in the German population has risen from

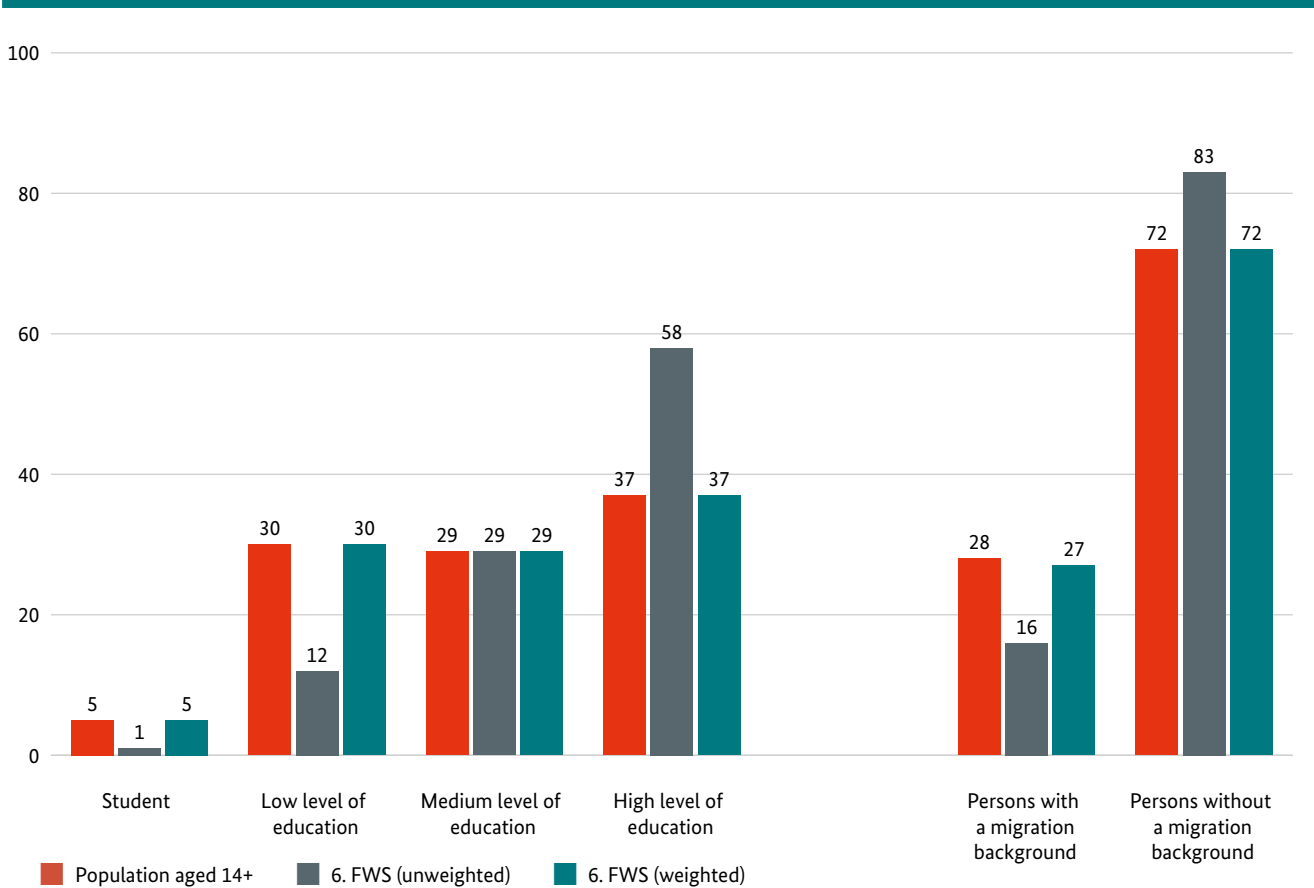
18 per cent in 2005 to 28 per cent in 2023. At the same time, interviewing this population group as part of social science surveys poses a challenge, as these people are proportionately less likely to take part in telephone

surveys (Martin et al. 2016). The percentage of people with a migrant background in the unweighted net sample of the 2024 Survey on Volunteering is 16 per cent (2019 Survey on Volunteering 17 per cent). Adding the additional characteristic of migrant background to the weighting in five evaluation groups of the 2024 Survey on Volunteering ensures that these groups are represented in the weighted data set and in the analyses according to their occurrence in the population. The data sets from the previous waves of the Survey on Volunteering were not reweighted retrospectively, as the percentage of people with a migrant background in the weighted data from the previous waves deviates less strongly from the population figures than in 2024. As such, comparability in the trend remains guaranteed.

Sample description

In the unweighted net sample of the 2024 Survey on Volunteering, the percentage of people from younger age groups under 20, people with a low level of school education, and people with a migrant background lags behind the proportions in the population. Reaching these groups of people with telephone surveys is a particular challenge and is well known among survey methodologists and survey practitioners. As in previous survey waves, deviations from the structures in the overall population were equalised as part of the weighting. Figure A-2 and A-3 show the extent to which the structure of the net sample deviates from the population and how well the weighted sample approximates the population.

Figure A-3: Sample 6th FWS vs. population – school education and migrant background



Source: Microcensus (2023), 6th FWS (unweighted/weighted percentages)

### Data analysis in this report

In this report, the numerical results are generally given as percentages rounded to whole numbers. The rounding is done to avoid false expectations of precision. For values measured in population surveys on the basis of samples, statistical margins of error must be taken into account, which become larger the smaller the number of cases when analysing two or more variables. The results are only reported with one decimal place in the presentation of the volunteering rates in chapters 1, 4 and 8. These results are based on high case numbers. As such, the decimal place may be relevant in reporting. In addition, the volunteering rates are also given as extrapolations to millions of people by transferring the calculated figures to the total population aged 14 and over with one decimal place.

All differences between subgroups or survey waves were tested for statistical significance (z-test, significance level  $p < 0.05$ , based on weighted data). Statistical significance means that a difference between two subgroups is highly likely to exist in the population and is not random. In other words: it can be assumed with a very high probability (95 per cent) that the observed effect exists not only in the analysed sample, but also in the population. In this report, the results of the significance test are not listed individually in order to make the diagrams easier to read. However, the significance was taken into account in the interpretation and description of the results in the report. If values differ between two subgroups, for example, but are not described in the text, they are generally not statistically significant.

If characteristics are analysed according to several criteria (for example, the rate of volunteering by employment of the person), the results for individual subgroups are only presented in the report if at least 80 people remain in this group. If people gave the answers “Don’t know” and “No response”, they were included in the calculations. This approach differs from the reporting on the last two waves of the Survey on Volunteering. In 2014 and 2019, people who answered “Don’t know” or “No response” were excluded from the

respective analyses. For this reason, there may be slight deviations in the number of cases and in the results compared to previous reports.

The following differentiating features are used in the analyses in this report:

**Gender** – For the first time in 2024, the telephone interviews asked directly about gender, with the answer options “male”, “female” or “diverse”. Only two genders are shown in the report, “male” and “female”, as the number of cases for the “diverse” category was not high enough to ensure anonymity in a separate presentation of this subgroup (n=44 people categorised themselves as “diverse”). If the results were presented in more detail in combination with other characteristics collected in the survey (for example volunteering, area of involvement, age, federal state, size of municipality, etc.), the gender “Diverse” would be an indirect identifying characteristic. In order to be able to include the interviews of the 44 people with the gender “diverse” in the analysis (instead of deleting them), these interviews were randomly assigned to the categories “male” and “female”. Such a procedure is usually chosen by the statistical offices in Germany (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, n.d.; GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, n.d.).

**School education** – As in the last two waves of the Survey on Volunteering, a distinction is made between four groups: firstly, “Still a school pupil” are persons attending a general school; secondly, “Low school education” are persons with educational qualifications up to and including primary and lower secondary school and a school-leaving certificate in the GDR after the eighth grade; thirdly, “Intermediate school education” are persons with a school-leaving certificate equivalent to an intermediate school-leaving certificate, i.e. a secondary school leaving certificate, a certificate after the tenth grade in the GDR, or a certificate from a compulsory school abroad; and fourthly, “High school education” are persons with an entrance qualification for universities of applied sciences, a school-leaving certificate, a certificate from an extended secondary school in the GDR or a secondary school abroad.

**Migrant background** – According to the Federal Statistical Office’s definition, a person has a migrant background if they were either not born with German citizenship themselves or have at least one parent who was not born with German citizenship (Federal Statistical Office 2025). For reasons of comparability, the 2024 Survey on Volunteering is analysed by migrant background in the same way as the 2014 and 2019 Survey on Volunteering, whereby the group of people with a migrant background is divided into four subgroups: people with personal experience of migration without German citizenship; people with personal experience of migration with German citizenship; people with a migrant background who were born in Germany but do not have German citizenship, and people with a migrant background who were born in Germany and have German citizenship.

**East/West** – For the East/West comparison, the following federal states are categorised as East German states: Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia.

**Urban/rural** – An indicator from the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) was used to categorise the urban and rural region types. All urban centres and urban districts are classified as urban areas, while all rural districts are classified as rural areas. The analysis is carried out using a separate weighting factor.

### Use of data

The data on which this 2024 report is based is made available free of charge for scientific use in the GESIS data archive ([www.gesis.org](http://www.gesis.org)) as a scientific use file.

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