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## Monitoring Civil Society

The German Survey on Volunteering 1999–2019\*\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** The German Survey on Volunteering (FWS) is a representative telephone survey of voluntary activities of persons aged 14 and older in Germany. Since 1999, information on volunteering and its context, extent and motives as well as on donations and the willingness to volunteer have been collected every five years. Apart from volunteers, respondents who are not or no longer volunteering are surveyed extensively. A wide range of background sociodemographic characteristics are collected to allow for detailed analyses. The Survey on Volunteering provides a substantial database for the description and analysis of volunteering in Germany. Edited and documented data are currently available for scientific research purposes by the Research Data Centre of the German Centre of Gerontology (FDZ-DZA) but will be hosted exclusively by GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences in the course of 2023. This paper presents the Survey on Volunteering in its research aims, survey design, contents and analytical potential. Furthermore, Scientific Use Files (SUFs) and their wide range of documentation material are presented to potential data users.

**Keywords:** Volunteering; German Survey on Volunteering; Scientific Use Files

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# Monitoring der Zivilgesellschaft

## Der Deutsche Freiwilligensurvey 1999-2019

**Zusammenfassung:** Der Deutsche Freiwilligensurvey (FWS) ist eine repräsentative Befragung zum freiwilligen Engagement in Deutschland, die sich an Personen ab 14 Jahren richtet. Seit dem Jahr 1999 werden im fünfjährigen Abstand umfassende Angaben zu Inhalt, Umfang und Kontext sowie den Motiven des freiwilligen Engagements und zur Spendentätigkeit sowie zur Engagementbereitschaft in telefonischen Interviews erhoben. Auch Personen, die sich nicht (mehr) engagieren, werden ausführlich befragt. Zudem werden zahlreiche sozio-demografische Merkmale aller Befragten erhoben, um detaillierte Analysen zu ermöglichen. Der Freiwilligensurvey ist damit die wesentliche Grundlage der Sozialberichterstattung zum freiwilligen Engagement in Deutschland. Die aufbereiteten Daten sowie die Dokumentation zur Aufbereitung können derzeit für wissenschaftliche Forschungszwecke über das Forschungsdatenzentrum des DZA (FDZ-DZA) bezogen werden, im Jahresverlauf 2023 werden sie exklusiv im GESIS Datenarchiv eingestellt. In diesem Artikel wird der Forschungsansatz, das methodische Design, die Inhalte und das Analysepotential des Freiwilligensurveys ausführlich beschrieben. Außerdem werden interessierten Datennutzer:innen die Scientific Use Files (SUFs) sowie deren ausführliche Dokumentation vorgestellt.

**Stichworte:** Freiwilliges Engagement; Freiwilligensurvey; Scientific Use Files

### 1 Introduction and research aims

For the last two decades the German Survey on Volunteering (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey, FWS) has provided the basis for reporting on the situation and development of volunteering in Germany. The German Survey on Volunteering is a cross-sectional representative survey on voluntary engagement, conducted in 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 with a largely trend-comparable instrument that addresses respondents aged 14 and over living in Germany. The survey data can be used to describe who is volunteering (and who is not) and offers wide-ranging and detailed information on voluntary activities. However, it also considers people who are not involved in volunteering and those who previously volunteered but no longer do so. Furthermore, FWS survey data can be used to examine topics such as distribution of leadership positions in volunteering, interdependencies of civic engagement between volunteering, donation activities, political participation, and social support, or effects of volunteering on well-being. These topics have not yet been adequately examined for the German context and can be analysed against the backdrop of social inequalities. The Survey on Volunteering is an important instrument for social accounting on volunteering and is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family

Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, BMFSFJ). In 1999, 2004 and 2009, the data was surveyed by TNS Infratest Sozialforschung (Infratest). For the fourth and fifth waves (2014 and 2019), the German Centre of Gerontology (Deutsches Zentrum für Altersfragen, DZA) scientifically managed and supervised the collection of survey data, which was undertaken by infas Institute for Applied Social Sciences (infas Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaft).

The survey aims to describe the current state of volunteering in Germany and the dynamics of volunteering against the background of social change. The survey covers various socio-economic characteristics and can be combined with regional indicators from external data sources. The data enables researchers to analyse which people volunteer and how they do so. The survey also includes information on the motives and obstacles to volunteering and the willingness of currently non-committed people to become involved in the future. In addition, the study provides data on further forms of civic activities, such as informal support in the social environment or monetary donations.

The majority of contents has been surveyed in a comparable way over all five survey waves, thus allowing trend comparison to illustrate how volunteering and their organisation have changed over time. Volunteering and other forms of civic activities are closely linked to general social conditions and to changes over time. Various societal developments relevant to volunteering in Germany have taken place over the past 20 years: increased labour force participation by women, continued educational expansion, changes in the life phase of old age and the improved average health of older people (Tesch-Römer et al. 2017) may all have impacted participation in volunteering. Increasing digitisation in almost all societal areas is also enabling entirely new forms of volunteering (Deutscher Bundestag 2020).

This paper provides a detailed overview on the Survey on Volunteering and its potential benefits for data users. First, it provides information on survey design such as sampling, methodology and response rates, nonresponse bias, weighting factors and examination of self-assessment. The next section introduces the contents of the survey and their instruments. It provides an overview of previous and potential research topics and outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the survey. The final section introduces the DZA Research Data Centre (<https://www.dza.de/en/research/fdz>), data management for Scientific Use Files (SUF), a trend data set, documentation, information on regional analyses, and the conditions of use.

## 2 Survey Design

### 2.1 Sampling

All five survey waves are based on a representative telephone sample of the resident population in Germany aged 14 years and over. The sampling frames were genera-

ted using the Häder/Gabler-method, according to ADM standards. A dual-frame approach was used for the fourth and fifth wave, with a sampling frame being extended to include mobile phone numbers (ADM 2012). All telephone numbers were generated randomly. In 2019, as in 2014, two subsamples were used for data collection: a base and a supplementary sample. The base sample included landline and mobile phone numbers distributed all over the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. In order to gain sufficient cases for more in-depth analyses on the level of federal states, a supplementary sample was financed by the federal states in order to conduct supplementary interviews in less populated states (exclusively using landline numbers).

The net sample size – the number of respondents – ranges from about 15,000 in 1999 and 2004 to about 20,000 in 2009 and nearly 30,000 in 2014 and 2019. These comparatively large numbers of cases allow differentiated analyses, including for subgroups of volunteers and specific regions.

**Table 1:** Net Sample Size by Survey Year

Survey Year	Total Number of Respondents (n)
1999	14,922
2004	15,000
2009	20,005
2014	28,690
2019	27,762

*Source:* FWS 1999, FWS 2004, FWS 2009, FWS 2014, FWS 2019, unweighted.

The interviews in the fourth and fifth waves lasted about 30 minutes on average (previous waves: 20 minutes). From 2014, respondents could choose an interview language: either German, English, Arabic, Russian, Turkish or Polish (conducted by native-speaker interviewers). Apart from German, English (n = 229) was the most frequently used language in interviews in the 2019 Survey on Volunteering. It can be assumed that English was used by respondents whose native language was English as well as by persons with sufficient skills in the language. The third most frequently used language was Arabic (n=154), followed by Russian (n=103), Turkish (n=75) and Polish (n=47). In 2019 a total of 608 interviews were completed in a language other than German (2.2 percent).

## 2.2 Methodology and response rate

The computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) (Steeh 2009) used for data collection were carried out by trained interviewers with a standardised questionnaire in a telephone studio. The interview was not announced in advance and there were no incentives for participation. While the interviews in the first three waves were conducted exclusively via landline, in 2014 and 2019 the interviews took place via both landline and mobile phone. Whether it was a landline or a mobile phone

interview, the interview proceeded identically; only the selection of the respondent differed. For the landline interviews, the target person was selected from the household using the last birthday method; i.e. selecting the person 14 years of age or over in the household who had had the most recent birthday. In the mobile phone interviews, no further selection step was required, as mobile numbers are usually individually assigned. Here, the person who mainly used the telephone was interviewed. Furthermore in the mobile phone interviews, respondents were asked for their primary residences concerning the federal German state. This was not necessary in the landline interviews because the area code was already part of the sample information (Schiel et al. 2020).

The Survey on Volunteering questionnaire is split into several question sets, to be answered either by all respondents or solely by volunteering or non-volunteering respondents. Figure 1 presents an overview of the interview process. The interview began with general questions about the person. First, the gender of the respondent was estimated by the interviewer. In the 2019 survey, for the first time, it was also possible to specify the gender of the respondent as non-binary (for further information see Simonson et al. 2022: 47). Further questions at the beginning of the interview focused on the sociodemographic characteristics necessary for filtering in the further course of the interview, such as age, migration experience, household composition, employment status and educational background. Questions addressing political participation and association memberships have been part of the research instrument throughout, although they are not completely comparable.

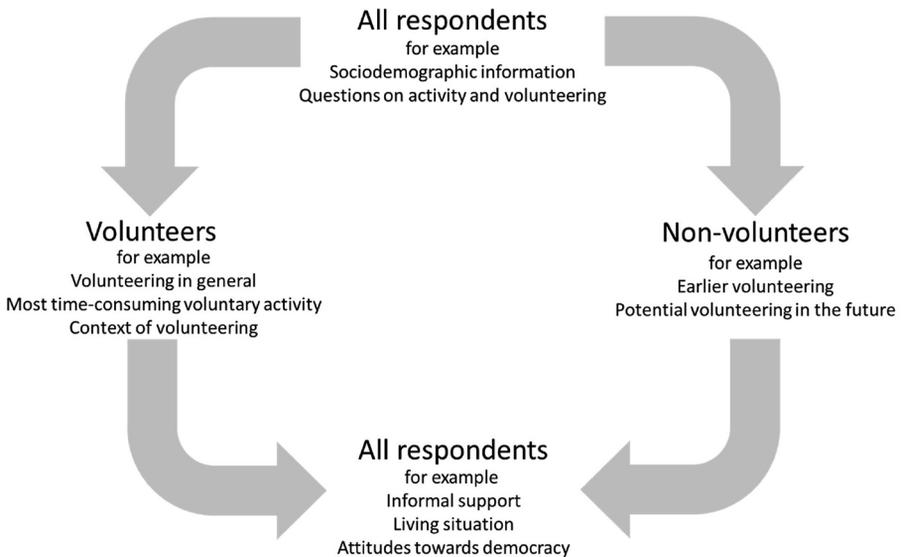
In all the survey waves, respondents were asked about volunteering in two stages. In the first step, they were asked about activities outside of work and family. To identify these public community activities, the survey named fourteen areas of society where people can join in or actively participate. For each of the areas in which a person indicated that they were active, respondents were then asked whether they had undertaken tasks or work there in the previous twelve months in a voluntary and unpaid capacity or in exchange for a small reimbursement of expenses.<sup>1</sup> If the respondent answered in the affirmative, they were asked three further questions on the content of each individual voluntary activity, with open response options. If the respondent had done voluntary or honorary tasks or work, they were regarded as volunteers for the rest of the interview.

After the two-step query on volunteering, the further course of the interview depended on whether the respondent indicated that they were volunteering or not. The follow-up questions referred either to the voluntary activities (for those who were engaged in volunteering) or to previous volunteering, to the reasons for stopping

1 The time window “in the last twelve months” was added for the 2014 and 2019 surveys. In the first three survey waves, there was no such time reference point. For an assessment of the effects of this time frame on self-reported volunteering in an experimental study, see Kelle et al. (2021).

volunteering or obstacles to voluntary commitment, and to the willingness to become involved in the future (for those who were not engaged in volunteering). A major part of these questions has remained comparable over survey waves, though some alterations have been applied throughout. The list of variable correspondence (Karnick et al. 2021) gives detailed information on which variable has been surveyed in which survey year. Since 2014, questions on informal support as well as health have been newly included, and since 2019, questions on attitudes toward democracy and trust in institutions.

**Figure 1:** FWS Interview Process



Source: FWS. Own presentation (DZA).

Table 2 shows sample coverage for all survey waves, for 2014 and 2019 corresponding to AAPOR-classification (AAPOR 2016).<sup>2</sup> Documentation on sampling processes and sampling coverage for the first three survey waves differs significantly, thus only very basic information for these surveys are reported. As an example, the gross sample in the 2019 FWS comprised 1,557,784 randomly generated telephone numbers. Of these numbers, 83.3 percent did not belong to the target group: for example, they were fax numbers or numbers that did not exist (“NE”). 5.3 percent could not be used for other reasons: for example, interviewers could only reach an answering machine or got a “number busy” response (“UE”). The other 11.4 per-

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the response rates in the various subsamples see Simonson et al. (2021).

cent of the numbers belonged to the target group ( $n = 177,703$ ), i.e. individuals from the resident population of Germany aged 14 and over.

Of the 177,703 numbers belonging to the target group, not all persons contacted could be interviewed. These included 0.3 percent of persons who could not be interviewed for reasons such as ill health (“NR-RA”) and 15.9 percent who could not be reached (“NR-NC”); 83.9 percent of the target group could be reached ( $n = 149,053$ ).

**Table 2:** Sample Coverage in FWS waves 1999-2019

	1999*	2004*	2009*	2014	2019
Gross sample (n)	39,763	--	98,212	967,906	1,557,784
Gross sample (percent)	100.0	--	100.0	100.0	100.0
of which:					
Not target group (percent)	--	--	--	73.4	83.3
Unknown selection (percent)	--	--	--	8.4	5.3
Remains: Target group (percent)	--	--	--	18.2	11.4
Target group (n)	26,731	--	--	176,045	177,703
Target group (percent)	100.0	--	--	100.0	100.0
of which:					
Non-response: not able to be interviewed (percent)	--	--	--	0.4	0.
Non-response: not reachable (percent)	--	--	--	15.2	15.9
Remains: target group reached and eligible to be interviewed (percent)	--	--	--	84.4	83.9
Target group reached and eligible to be interviewed (n)	26,731		37,492	148,668	149,053
Target group reached and eligible to be interviewed (percent)	100.0		100.0	100.0	100.0
of which:					
Non-response: refusal (percent)	--	--	--	78.7	78.9
Initiated interviews (percent)	--	--	--	21.3	21.1
of which:					
Interview completed and able to be analysed (percent)	54.7	52.0	50.7	19.3	18.6
Target group reached and surveyable, interviews completed and able to be analysed (n)	14,922	15,000	19,006	28,690	27,762

Note: \*For FWS 1999-2009, sampling coverage and non-response categories have been documented differently than in FWS 2014 and 2019, thus comparisons are hardly justifiable.

Source: Methodological reports of individual waves: FWS 1999: von Rosenblatt 2001; FWS 2004: Gensicke et al. 2005; FWS 2009: Gensicke & Geiss 2010; FWS 2014: Schiel et al. 2015; FWS 2019: Schiel et al. 2020; own presentation (DZA). See also Simonson et al. 2017 and Simonson et al. 2022

Interviewers had a variety of options to persuade target respondents to participate in the survey if they were initially reluctant. These included a help page with all the relevant information about the study and the option to provide information about the study via email. Interviewers could also arrange preferred dates for the interviews.

Of the 149,053 people in the target group who were reached and were eligible to be interviewed, 78.9 percent refused to participate (“NR-R”). In addition to these refusals, some target persons only wanted to be interviewed in person and not by telephone or did not have time. 21.1 percent of the interviews were initiated (“IP”) while 18.6 percent of the interviews were completed (“I”). This corresponds to a total sample of 27,762 persons.

For the 2014 survey wave, a similar sample coverage of 19.3 percent was achieved. Participation rates for the first three survey waves were calculated in a different way, so the figures are not comparable (Simonson et al. 2017).

### 2.3 Non-response bias

Table 3 shows the sample distribution by gender, age and educational attainment for all survey waves. A comparison of the distribution of population groups in the Survey on Volunteering with official statistics (German Microcensus) reveals that an initial slight overrepresentation of women and older people in the unweighted data could be compensated by the weighting (for more information on weighting factors see section 2.d). In addition, an educational bias within the unweighted sample has also been obvious in the FWS data: in general, people with medium and higher levels of education tend to be more willing to participate in surveys than people with lower levels of education (Engel/Schmidt 2019). Even though this educational bias is not completely compensated for, weighting significantly mitigates the issue; the weighted distribution of educational qualifications approaches the “real” distribution relatively well in all survey waves. In addition, although migration background was not considered in the weighting (since the information required for this was not collected in a comparable manner in the first three survey waves), weighted results clearly approximate the migration background distribution in the official statistics.

**Table 3:** Distribution of Central Sociodemographic Characteristics in FWS 1999-2019, Age 15 and Older, Compared to Official Statistics (Microcensus, MC, 1999-2019)

	FWS 1999*	MC 1999	FWS 2004*	MC 2004	FWS 2009*	MC 2009	FWS 2014*	MC 2014	FWS 2019*	MC 2019
<b>Gender**</b>										
Women	51.5	-	51.4	51.1	51.2	51.0	51.3	51.0	50.9	50.8
Men	48.4	-	48.6	48.9	48.8	49.0	48.7	49.0	49.1	49.2
<b>Age groups</b>										
15*–29 years	21.3	22.6	21.1	21.8	20.7	21.5	19.6	21.0	20.1	19.4
30–49 years	37.1	35.6	35.8	34.8	33.2	32.3	31.6	29.4	29.1	29.3
50–64 years	22.3	22.5	22.0	21.6	22.3	22.3	25.1	25.3	25.6	26.7
65 years and over	19.2	19.3	21.1	21.8	23.8	23.9	23.8	24.2	25.2	24.6
<b>Education***</b>										
Still at school	4.4	-	5.5	-	4.4	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.5
Lower educational attainment	50.5	-	45.2	-	42.5	42.7	34.1	37.6	30.5	34.0
Medium educational attainment	25.3	-	26.8	-	27.7	28.2	31.2	29.7	28.1	28.8
Higher educational attainment	19.8	-	22.5	-	25.4	25.5	30.9	28.9	37.6	33.6
<b>Migration background****</b>										
With migration background	-	-	-	-	-	-	22.3	20.4	25.2	23.8
Without migration background	-	-	-	-	-	-	77.7	79.6	74.8	76.2

Note: \*The German Microcensus sample includes the population in Germany from 15 years onwards. Accordingly, FWS distributions are also displayed for respondents of 15 years and older. \*\*Data on gender is not available in Microcensus year 1999. \*\*\*Data on educational level is not available in Microcensus years 1999-2004. \*\*\*\*Data on migration background is not available in FWS and in Microcensus years 1999-2009.

Source: FWS 1999-2019, weighted; Microcensus 1999-2019; own presentation (DZA). FWS weighting includes: household size, number of landline phones per household, number of mobile phone numbers, federal state, regional size class, gender, age group, level of school education. Deviations in percentage values are due to rounding.

## 2.4 Weighting factors

In order to adjust for non-random selection processes in sampling and responses, all waves include weighting factors. They consist of two elements: a design weighting and a weighting with regard to the sample distribution. When weighting factors are implemented in analyses, conclusions about the entire resident population of Germany aged 14 years and over can be drawn on the basis of this cross-sectional survey. In the design weighting, a person's selection probability is taken into account. For this purpose, the information on household size, the number of landline phones in a household and, for survey years 2014 and 2019, the number of mobile phone numbers, are included in the computation of the weighting factors. Three different weighting factors have been generated for each of the FWS survey waves.

In the first four survey waves (from 1999 to 2014), the results of the survey were published using a weighting variable adjusting for federal state, community size class, gender and age group. For the reports on the Survey on Volunteering 2019, the weighting procedure was optimised by including the level of school education as an additional weighting factor. Both weighting factors are provided in the Scientific Use Files for data users; however, we recommend using the second one for any analyses.

A third weighting variable is included for the purpose of regional analyses below the federal state level, for a specific subsample that contains only respondents that have explicitly given consent to match external regional data to the interview data on the basis of their postal code<sup>3</sup> (Kelle et al. 2021: 80f.). Overall, 98 percent of all respondents gave their consent in 2019. This third weighting variable was generated to compensate for the non-random failures in respondents' consent. It includes information on federal state, community size class, gender, age group, level of school education, and whether or not consent for regional data linkage was given. A detailed explanation of the weighting procedure in the Survey on Volunteering 2019 can be found in the methodological report of infas (Schiel et al. 2020: 48ff.). The methodological reports for previous survey waves (Gensicke et al. 2005; Gensicke/Geiss 2010, Schiel et al. 2015; von Rosenblatt 2001) are also available for download free of charge from the DZA Research Data Centre website, in German only ([www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de)).

## 2.5 Examination of self-assessment of volunteering

Open-coded questions on each voluntary activity were asked almost identically in all five survey waves. Respondents briefly described the type of group or organisation, their task or job, and the designation of the voluntary activity. In the first three waves, interviewers were able to re-code respondents from “volunteering” to “non-volunteering” in the course of the interview, and additional re-coding was undertaken after interviews. Unfortunately, detailed documentation on these processes is not available for the 1999, 2004 and 2009 survey waves.<sup>4</sup> For the 2014 and 2019 data, the Survey on Volunteering project team checked these sets of three open answers against the definition of volunteering used by the Enquete-Kommission “Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements” (Commission of Inquiry “The Future of Civic Engagement” – Deutscher Bundestag 2002). Following independent examinations by two FWS project team members, some individual cases were deemed to contradict this definition, and subsequently the respondents' status was re-coded as “non-volunteering”. The main principle applied here was that the

<sup>3</sup> In case consent was given, respondents were asked for their postal code (in 2019: 27,762 cases). If the reported postal code was not valid, it was derived from the landline telephone number.

<sup>4</sup> However, for comparability to 2014, the “Data and Methods” chapter of the FWS 2014 report lists the numbers and percentages of recoded cases in 1999-2009 (Simonson et al. 2017).

respondent's self-assessment had priority. The respondent's self-assessment of their activity as volunteering was maintained if information were ambiguous or there were no open responses, for example if a person was not willing to give further information about the activity. The specific test criteria to assess whether an activity should be regarded as not volunteering were: if the activity is professional or paid, if it takes place within working hours or exclusively within family or among friends, and if it is a hobby without a co-operative team character or passive membership. Overall, the checking procedure resulted in 96 (in 2014) and 55 (in 2019) respondents being re-coded from "volunteering" to "not volunteering".

A detailed description of the examination and correction process, including a comparison with previous waves of the Survey on Volunteering, is presented in the "Data and Methods" chapter in the main report on the Survey on Volunteering 2019 (Simonson et al. 2021).

### 3 Contents and instruments

Over the course of the five waves, the content of the questionnaire has largely remained constant to allow for meaningful trend comparisons. However, some changes were introduced, especially between 2009 and 2014, such as the questions concerning informal support, social inclusion or parental volunteering in 2014/2019 or questions concerning volunteering for refugees in 2019. The basic structure of the operationalization of volunteering status has been maintained throughout, and sociodemographic characteristics have been expanded. The process of further developing the questionnaire while preserving continuity is overseen by a scientific committee.

Table 4 gives a rough overview of questionnaire content in each wave. In the table x indicates highly comparable variables (i.e., very similar question or item wording and comparable reply categories), whereas the (x) indicates that topics or items were surveyed with some deviation from each other (i.e., diverging question content or wording of similar content, change in number or wording of reply categories). More details on all variables surveyed in every survey year is provided in the list of variable correspondence (Karnick et al. 2021).

**Table 4:** Overview of Data Content in FWS 1999–2019

	2019	2014	2009	2004	1999
<b>General information</b>					
Respondent ID	x	x	x	x	x
Weighting factors	x	x	x	x	x
Extrapolation factors	x				
Interview information	x	x			
Regional information	x	x	x	(x)	(x)
<b>Sociodemographic information</b>					
Age & Gender	x	x	x	x	x
Country of birth	x	x	x	x	x
Household constellation	x	x	x	x	x
Marital and partner status	x	x	(x)	(x)	(x)
Employment information	x	x	x	x	x
Educational information	x	x	(x)	(x)	(x)
German citizenship	x	x	x	(x)	(x)
Military/community service	x	x	x	x	x
Social network	(x)	x	x	x	x
Religion	x	x	x	x	x
Residence information	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Membership &amp; political activity</b>					
Membership of clubs, associations, organisations	(x)	(x)	x		
Political activity	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Activity and Volunteering</b>					
Active participation in societal areas	x	x	x	x	x
Volunteering in societal areas	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Volunteering details</b>					
Volunteering for refugees in last five years	x				
Motives for volunteering	x	x	x	(x)	
Temporal structure	x	x	(x)	(x)	(x)
Target region and group	x	x	(x)	(x)	(x)
Support for volunteering			x	x	
Organisational framework			x	x	x
Management or board position	(x)	(x)	x	x	x
Requirements	x	x	x	x	x
Training and knowledge acquisition	x	x			
Internet usage	x	(x)	(x)	(x)	
Further education	x	x	x	x	x
Expenses and reimbursement	x	x	x	x	x
Proximity to employment		(x)	x	x	x
Expectations			x	x	x
Impetus for starting volunteering	x	x	x	x	x
Support from employer	x	x	x	x	
Improvements	x	x	x	x	x
Information on 2nd activity			x	x	x
<b>Previous and potential volunteering</b>					
Previous volunteering	x	x	x	x	x
Ending of previous volunteering	x	x	x	x	x
Reasons for not volunteering	x	x			x
Potential future volunteering	(x)	x	x	x	x

	2019	2014	2009	2004	1999
<b>Informal support</b>					
Providing childcare	x	x		(x)	
Providing care	x	x	(x)	(x)	(x)
Providing help	x	x	(x)	(x)	(x)
<b>Living situation</b>					
Donations	x	(x)	(x)	(x)	(x)
Social inclusion	x	x			
Parental volunteering	(x)	x			
Parental citizenship	x	x	(x)	(x)	
Leisure activities		(x)	x		
Trust	x	(x)			
Attitude to democracy	x				
Self-efficacy expectations		x			
Life satisfaction		x			
Health status	(x)	x			
Values		(x)	x	x	x
Financial situation	x	x	x	x	x

Note: x indicates highly comparable variables between waves, (x) indicates that topics or items have been surveyed with some deviation from each other.

The DZA Research Data Centre offers a very detailed table of variable correspondence, complete with German and English variable and value labels, available for download at [www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de). All research instruments are provided there as well.

## 4 Previous & Further Research

### 4.1 Previous Research

Data from the Survey on Volunteering have been used to analyse voluntary engagement and volunteering potential in Germany. The results of the fifth wave (FWS 2019) have been published in a detailed report (Simonson et al. 2021; for a short report in English see Simonson et al. 2021). The findings highlight social differences and inequalities in access to voluntary work, for example, with regard to age or education. Social inequalities within the voluntary sector are addressed with regard to issues like filling volunteer leadership positions or digital divide in volunteering by education and socio-economic status. Political participation and the attitudes of volunteers and non-volunteers towards democracy and democratic institutions are also covered in the report. Additionally, a recent fact sheet using 2019 data focuses on voluntary engagement by the elderly in different societal areas of volunteering (Arriagada/Simonson 2021).<sup>5</sup>

Survey on Volunteering data has also been used in scientific publications; a full overview of publications using FWS data is provided on the website of the DZA Research Data Centre ([www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de)). Some studies have looked at volunteering and migration background (Greenspan et al. 2018; Schlesinger et al. 2020; Vogel et al. 2019). This research builds on the finding that people with a migration back-

<sup>5</sup> All fact sheets are in German and can be found at <https://www.dza.de/en/publications>.

ground are less likely to volunteer than those without such a background, focusing on the differences in volunteering between groups of migrants. Findings suggest that social capital (e.g., social network, interest in politics) and organisational membership are the most important determinants of migrant volunteering. Furthermore, factors such as migration experience or time since migration are relevant. Furthermore, studies using FWS data provide evidence of discrimination against people with a migration background when it comes to filling volunteer leadership positions (Schlesinger et al. 2020); the same also applies to gender. Women are significantly less likely to hold volunteer leadership positions than men are, even after controlling for important socio-demographic, socio-economic and volunteer-specific determinants. The gender gap is particularly pronounced in clubs, churches, and institutions such as municipal bodies or foundations (Erlinghagen et al. 2016).

Rüber et al. (2020) have analysed the association between participation in cohort-specific training within the context of volunteering and the average duration of volunteering. The findings suggest that an increase in rates of training participation within volunteer engagement has a positive impact on both participants and non-participant volunteers. Kausmann et al. (2021) have created a typology of volunteering using a cluster analysis and show clear differences in participation in the different types (classic hands-on volunteering, administrative volunteering, and newer forms of volunteering) according to sociodemographic characteristics. Moreover, newer forms of volunteering seem to have a greater potential to mobilise people to volunteer than the other two types.

Other studies focus on contextual factors and show that voluntary engagement varies depending on regional conditions: voluntary involvement is higher in economically stronger regions, in settings with a strong participatory culture, and in regions with a high density of voluntary associations (Simonson/Vogel 2018). Further, some studies address particular contexts that may affect people differently depending on their involvement in volunteering. Research carried out by Kleiner (2021a, 2021b, 2021c) focuses on civic participation and shows that for participants, high macro-level participation on the sub-national regional level is associated with a higher number of friendships and a higher expectation of receiving support. However, it is also associated with fewer friendships and a lower expectation of support for non-participants. Therefore, a high level of civic participation does not guarantee social cohesion.

## 4.2 Further Research

Aside from the published results of the Survey on Volunteering, there are many other ways to use data for further research purposes. The Survey on Volunteering has been developed thematically with each new survey wave. This allows researchers to look at new topics. An under-researched area with Survey on Volunteering data is

the detailed information on informal support. Here, informal support for relatives, friends or the local neighbourhood can be analysed in depth. Since 2014, detailed information has been collected on childcare, informal care services and other instrumental help and on the amount of time respondents spend on these activities (Kausmann et al. 2017; Vogel/Tesch-Römer 2017). This information can be used to tackle research questions dealing with time use. Time spent on these civic activities, as well as on gainful employment or voluntary engagement, can be linked to respondents' background information, such as their income or household constellation. This offers opportunities to conduct research on the compatibility of and potential conflicts between different areas of life.

In 2019, a question item on the subjective assessment of the compatibility of work and family life was added. Likewise, on the topic of voluntary engagement by and for refugees, new data analysis options are available for 2019 (Kausmann et al. 2022). These data make it possible to analyse volunteering to support refugees in detail. They also enable analyses of the extent to which and way in which people who come to Germany as refugees or asylum seekers participate in volunteering or provide informal support such as informal care or childcare. Furthermore, the data allow researchers to account for information on the timing and origin of immigration in addition to background information such as income or level of education.

In 2019, new items on attitudes towards democracy and trust in institutions were also integrated (Karnick et al. 2022). These allow for a more detailed analysis of the attitudes of both volunteers and non-volunteers and their correlations with volunteering characteristics, political participation or other forms of civic participation.

## 5 Strengths and weaknesses

Data from the Survey on Volunteering has much to offer those analysing volunteering. The rich and detailed information on voluntary activities makes the German Survey on Volunteering a unique study in the field of voluntary engagement in Germany. In addition, the vast sample size enables detailed analyses: for example, for specific societal areas of volunteering, differentiated age groups, or among regions. The cross-sectional design, measuring trends over 20 years, allows social change to be mapped over a long period of time. The methodological adaptations introduced in 2014 – sampling via mobile phones and interviewing in six different languages – have enhanced the representativeness of the data and allowed for adaptation to technological progress as well as for better inclusion of people with a migration background.

Although the study is repeated at regular intervals, the five-year gaps mean that important social events which might correlate with volunteering cannot be captured. For example, the Survey on Volunteering 2014 could not consider the increased arrival of refugees to Germany in 2014 and 2015, so this major social event was only captured retrospectively in 2019. The same is true for the COVID-19 pande-

mic, which started in early 2020 and thus was not part of the 2019 survey. Again, a retrospective survey might be an option for a future wave. However, collecting data on previous events in hindsight is associated with a decrease in topicality and potential recall errors.

In addition, while the study's cross-sectional design can be used for trend comparisons across 20 years, it does not allow for panel data analysis. Nevertheless, trend comparisons are enabled by the relative continuity of the survey's contents.

## 6 DZA Research Data Centre: data edition, service, and usage

### 6.1 DZA Research Data Centre

The DZA Research Data Centre (Forschungsdatenzentrum DZA, FDZ-DZA) is a facility of the German Centre of Gerontology and has received accreditation by the German Data Forum (RatSWD). Its main task is to make data from the surveys of the DZA (in particular German Survey on Volunteering, FWS, and German Ageing Survey, DEAS as well as Old Age in Germany, D80+) accessible to researchers. This task is fulfilled by providing user-friendly Scientific Use Files (SUF), documentation of the contents and instruments, a user service, and user meetings.

The FDZ-DZA provides access and support to scholars interested in using Survey on Volunteering data for their research. Data from the five completed survey waves are available in Stata and SPSS format, with German and English variable and value labels. A wide range of documentation material (see chapter 6.c) in the German and English languages is available for download. In the course of the year 2023, the FWS data and documentation will be hosted and provided by GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences.

### 6.2 Data Management

Data editing of the Scientific Use Files prior to publication included a variety of checks: the open-coded information on volunteering was examined to assess whether the described activities contradict the criteria of "volunteering" (described in 2.e). In addition, the data was tested for plausibility and consistency, filter information was tested, and sensitive responses were anonymised.

#### *Testing for plausibility and consistency*

For the 2014 and 2019 waves, the FWS team and the FDZ-DZA tested the plausibility of singular information and the logical consistency of several combinations of respondents' information.

Values in certain variables were changed if they were implausible, such as the number of weekly working hours which was cut off at 80 hours. Other variables that contain plausible information but were implausible in combination with other

information were not changed, as it was not clear which part of the original information contained the measurement error. A full account on plausibility and consistency checks is reported in the user manual (Hameister et al. 2021), and data users should check for these and possible further inconsistencies before beginning their analyses.

### *Editing of data to ensure factual anonymity*

In order to maintain respondents' factual anonymity, information on certain variables was edited if cells had less than five cases. For metric variables, this was attained by categorising maximum or minimum values – for categorical variables, missing values were assigned. Specific information on data editing in the 2014 and 2019 waves is available in the respective user manuals (FWS 2014: Kausmann et al. 2017; FWS 2019: Hameister/Schwichtenberg-Hilmert 2021).

## 6.3 Trend Data Set

Data distribution also includes an integrated data sets for user-friendly trend comparisons between the survey waves 1999-2014. They are based on the wave-specific SUFs, but they do contain a specific selection of variables. Variables in the trend data sets have been checked for consistency in terms of wording (and quantity) of questions, items, answer options and filters. Variable content has been retained in its original state and not harmonised, but the labels include information on the level of harmonisation. More information on the selection and system of the trend variables can be found in the respective user manuals (Schmälzle et al. 2021 and Hameister/Schwichtenberg-Hilmert 2021).

## 6.4 Documentation

To support external users' work with the data, a range of documentation material is available for the Scientific Use Files for the Survey on Volunteering. Almost all documentation is published in German and English.

- **Research instruments** contain the original survey instruments in an edited, user-friendly version.
- The **user manuals** provide detailed information on the sampling procedure, the classification scheme of the variable names, and explanations for the generated and constructed variables. In addition, editing procedures are documented in detail.
- In order to facilitate time-series analyses, the FDZ-DZA provides a list of **variable correspondence** (with English and German variable labels). This chart is a useful reference showing which information has been surveyed in which year and the corresponding variable and value names and labels.

- **Codebooks** report every variable of the survey year with their individual categories (including missing values), labels and overall unconditional frequencies.
- **Methodological reports** from the interview agency contain detailed information on the sampling and weighting procedure as well as the survey field work (for 2014 and 2019, by infas, for 1999-2009 by Infratest). They are available in German only.
- **Stata code** of how each of the additional user-friendly variables was generated are available for registered data users.

DOIs (digital object identifiers) have been registered for all Scientific Use Files as well as for Research Instruments of the Survey on Volunteering. They are permanent and distinctive identifiers used for citation and linking to electronic resources (e.g. texts, research data or other contents) and are backed up with leads to up-to-date, structural meta data.

## 6.5 Regional Analyses

The Scientific Use Files contain an identifier for the federal state (Bundesland) and some variables regarding the regional structure of a respondent's district, such as the demographic size of the municipality or the degree of rurality/urbanity. However, for data protection reasons, the district identifier (Kreiskennziffer, corresponding to the NUTS3 level,<sup>6</sup> Eurostat 2021) is not provided in the SUFs. Following widespread interest of users, a dataset containing NUTS-3-level specific volunteering rates will be published in the course of 2023. However, regional specific volunteering rates are not available for all NUTS 3 regions: One major restriction when calculating volunteering rates at the district level (NUTS 3) is the insufficient number of cases in up to 65 percent of German districts – fewer than 50 respondents. However, case numbers are sufficiently high for most regions one level up (NUTS 2, Raumordnungsregionen), thus those will be published too. Updates on the publication and download details will be provided on [www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de)

## 6.6 Data Usage

Microdata from the Survey on Volunteering is currently available free of charge to scientific researchers for non-profit purposes only from the DZA Research Data Centre. For data protection reasons, a data distribution contract must be signed before data can be obtained. As the DZA no longer manages the FWS surveys, data and documentation will be provided by GESIS Data Archive for the Social Sciences in the course of 2023. Details on the migration of FWS data and documentation will be updated regularly on [www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de).

6 The NUTS classification (nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU. At NUTS 3 level, the average size of the corresponding regions lies within the population thresholds of 150,000 to 800,000. More information can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/regions-and-cities/overview>.

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