

VOLUNTEERING  
INFRASTRUCTURE IN EUROPE  
PUBLICATION

# GERMANY



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## 1.VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

### CONCEPTION DEFINITION

In Germany, volunteering mostly takes place in voluntary organisations, for which the statutory legal form is the registered association (eingetragener Verein, e.V.). Furthermore, the churches, welfare associations and public institutions such as schools and museums, also have volunteering programmes. In a broader sense this can be called the basic infrastructure where volunteering is organised.

In the narrow sense, the concept of “volunteering infrastructure” within the German debate contains organisations and institutions, such as volunteer agencies, volunteer centres or self-help contact points, that have been established over the past three decades. These facilities respond to the growing need of many volunteers for independent advice, matching and placing.

The working paper ‘Defining the Nonprofit Sector: Germany’ by Anheier, H. K and Seibel, W. (1992) has identified the four main types of organisations that engage volunteers and that make up the non-profit sector in Germany:

- Associations (‘Vereine’ and ‘Verbände’);

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- Public benefit organisations (‘gemeinnützige Organisationen’ i.e. organisations that promote the public good), including ‘free welfare associations’;

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- Communal economic corporations (‘gemeinwirtschaftliche Unternehmen’);

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- Organisations with non-commercial character (‘Organisationen ohne Erwerbszweck’).

Over the past three decades many different forms of infrastructure facilities have developed, each with different priorities. Some for example address specific target groups such as senior volunteers (aged 50 and above) or disabled people. All infrastructure facilities have, however, the common aim to act as information hubs and development centres for volunteering and civic engagement.

Overviews and figures of existing infrastructure facilities in Germany include approximately 413 volunteer agencies (Freiwilligenagenturen) according to the bagfa 'Agenturatlas' (bagfa, 2021). The Netzwerk Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Seniorenbüros e.V. (BaS) unites around 450 senior centers (Seniorenbüros) in Germany; There are 347 self-help contact points (Selbsthilfekontaktstellen) and 530 Multigenerational Centres/Houses (Mehrgenerationenhäuser) in Germany which have successfully contributed to society as social centres for the elderly, families and children (mehrgenerationenhaeuser.de, 2021).

In 2006, the Ministry for Family Affairs began to promote multigenerational centres with the idea of transferring the concept of extended family to modern society. The Multigenerational Houses I Action Programme (2006–2011) was followed by the Multigenerational Houses II Action Programme (2012–2016), the Federal Multigenerational House Programme (2017–2020) and the follow up programme launched in 2021. The basic orientation remained the same over the years, the concrete design of the programme was further developed. There are currently 271 community foundations (Bürgerstiftungen) in Germany. Since the establishment of the first German community foundation more than 20 years ago, more than 29,000 citizens' founders have become the largest group of founders in German (Bündnis der Bürgerstiftungen Deutschlands, 2021).

Further types of facilities with similar functions are the local contact points within community administrations or set-up as independent hubs; community offices for citizens - set up in the frame of the ESF programme 'Soziale Stadt' and focus points for local development (often in rural areas), as well as neighbourhood centres (Nachbarschaftshäuser). Additionally, there are socio-cultural centres - local initiatives in the context of the agenda 21 [1], parental and family centres and care centres. Most of these infrastructure facilities are rather small in size and capacity, having 1 to 2 professional staff, with a few of them having up to 20 employees.

The main function of the infrastructure in Germany is to act as information hubs and development centres for volunteering, counsel and to place volunteers into local projects and groups, to explore, develop and transfer innovative projects and new forms of volunteering. Mentoring projects, where senior volunteers support young people at the gateway from school to professional life, have developed in Germany in large numbers.

Besides that, there is a large sector of organisations and associations following well-defined purposes in specific areas that work with volunteers.

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[1] Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organisations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment. Agenda 21 was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. Available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/>

The voluntary fire brigades or rescue services are part of this category. Sports clubs and cultural initiatives such as laity chorales or amateur theatres have also been organised by and with volunteers since the 19th century. Furthermore, there are a growing number of professionally led institutions such as kindergartens, schools, senior residences and hospitals which work with volunteers.

## 2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

Between 1999 and 2002 the Enquete Commission on the Future of Civic Engagement of the German Parliament ('Enquete-Kommission Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements des Deutschen Bundestag') has established a commonly accepted definition of civic engagement/volunteering (*bürgerschaftliches Engagement*) and defines it as including activities that:

- *are oriented towards the common good and benefit*

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- *are voluntary, without an employer-employee-relationship and its legal framework*

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- *take place in the public sphere and address groups outside the familial circle*

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- *are unpaid and not for financial gain, although in certain cases a limited payment as a form of compensation may be acceptable*

To measure volunteering in Germany, the national survey on volunteering (Freiwilligensurvey) (FWS) has been compiled every five years since 1999, based on 15,000 to 20,000 interviews. The survey is a representative survey of voluntary activities of persons aged 14 and older in Germany. Volunteering and the willingness to volunteer are recorded through telephone interviews and can be reported and described among population groups and across regions. The survey is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). Since December 2011 the survey has been scientifically managed and supervised by the German Centre of Gerontology (DZA). The interviews of the fourth wave 2014 and the fifth wave 2019 were conducted by infas – Institute for Applied Social Sciences in 2014.

Overall, the survey is a basic instrument for social accounting on volunteering. It aids as an instrument which has been continuously modified and complemented over the years. At the same time, the continuity in the central survey contents has been maintained in order to ensure comparability over time. Two different weighting factors can be used to evaluate the data: One weighting factor including information on gender, age, community size classes (BIK) and federal state and one weighting factor including the above-mentioned characteristics as well as school education. The number of respondents has increased significantly since the first survey ([DZA, 2021](#)):

FWS 1999: 14,922
FWS 2014: 15,000
FWS 2009: 20,005
FWS 2014: 28,690
FWS 2019: 27,762

Microdata of the fifth survey year in 2019 comprise information of 27,762 participants. The method of the survey was a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). Most interviews were conducted in German, but interviewers offered the opportunity to communicate in one of five other languages (Russian, Turkish, Polish, Arabic and English). The interviews were carried out between March and November 2019 and took 29 minutes on average ([DZA, 2021](#)). The results of the German Survey on Volunteering 2019 are available as a compact report (in German).

In 2019, 28.8 million people volunteered - that is 39.7 percent of the population aged 14 and over in Germany. The engagement rate remained stable between 2014 and 2019. The proportion of people who volunteer has increased over the past twenty years. In 2019, 39.7 percent of people aged 14 and over in Germany were doing voluntary work. In 1999 it was 30.9 percent. Over time, one sees similarly high rates in 1999, 2004 and 2009 (30.9, 32.7 and 31.9 percent) and two similarly high rates in 2014 and 2019 (40.0 and 39.7 percent). For the first time, the results for all survey waves of the voluntary survey are shown weighted according to education. This is necessary because people with a higher level of education are most often more represented in survey studies than corresponds to their share of the population, and at the same time they are more likely to be voluntary members. The results now consistently weighted according to education reflect the situation in the population more than before. According to the current weighting, the engagement rates for all survey waves fell by three to four percentage points lower than the rates previously calculated without this weighting. When looking at the engagement rate over time, the level changes, but the trend towards the increase in the engagement rate over the last twenty years remains essentially the same.

### **VOLUNTEERING DIVIDE**

In 2019, for the first time since 1999, women and men did not differ in terms of their engagement rate. While men have always volunteered to a greater extent in the past since 1999, for the first time in 2019 there was no statistically significant gender difference in the volunteering rate (women: 39.2 percent; men: 40.2 percent). This is due to the fact that the proportion of women volunteering has risen faster than the proportion of men doing voluntary work. In addition, the proportion of committed men fell slightly between 2014 and 2019, and the proportion of volunteers has increased in all age groups since 1999. However, the extent of the increase differs between age groups. The increase is particularly pronounced among the 65-year-olds and older, in this age group the commitment rate rose from 18.0 percent in 1999 to 31.2 percent in 2019. The highest proportion of volunteers in 2019 was found among 30 to 49-year-olds at 44.7 percent, among 14 to 29-year-olds the proportion was 42.0 percent and among 50 to 64-year-olds 40.6 percent. The differences in volunteering participation between the educational groups increased between 1999 and 2019. This is due to the fact that the increase in the engagement rates among people who still go to school as well as people with a high level of schooling has been significantly greater than that of people with a medium level of education. For people with a low level of education, on the other hand, there is no statistically significant difference between the volunteering rates from 1999 and 2019. In 2019, 51.1 percent of people with a high level of school education, 37.4 percent of those with an intermediate level of education and 26.3 percent of those with a low level of education are involved.

### **VOLUNTEERING AND DEMOCRACY**

The participation in the engagement of people with a migration background did not change between 2014 and 2019. In both 2014 and 2019, fewer people with a migration background were involved than people without a migration background. While 44.4 percent of people without a migrant background volunteered in 2019, 27.0 percent of people with a migrant background volunteered. In the group of people with a migration background, people without their own immigration experience volunteer proportionally more often than people with their own immigration experience. The proportion of volunteers among people with a migration background who were born in Germany and have German citizenship was 38.7 percent in 2019. The volunteer rates in East and West Germany have gradually converged since 1999. In 2019, the engagement rate in eastern Germany (including Berlin) is 37.0 percent, only 3.4 percentage points lower than in western Germany with 40.4 percent. In 1999, this difference was 7.9 percentage points. Eight percent of volunteers stated in 2019 that they were involved in helping refugees or asylum seekers. For this target group of voluntary work, 8.9 percent, proportionally more women than men (7.2 percent). People from different age groups are equally committed to helping refugees and asylum seekers - there are no statistically significant differences between the age groups.

## EAST/WEST DIVIDE

In 2019, around seventeen percent of volunteers with six or more hours spent a lot of time on their voluntary work. Since 1999, there has been an ongoing trend towards less time-consuming voluntary work: Between 1999 and 2019, the proportion of volunteers who invest a lot of time in their voluntary work with six or more hours per week fell by 5.9 percentage points. In the same period of time, the proportion of those who invest significantly less time in their voluntary work with up to two hours per week rose (1999: 50.8 percent, 2019: 60.0 percent). One in four volunteers has a manager in 2019 or board function in their voluntary work. In a time comparison, those who are committed take on managerial tasks less and less often. In 1999, 36.8 percent of those volunteering had a management or board position, in 2019 the figure was 26.3 percent. A large proportion of volunteers used the internet in 2019 as part of their voluntary work. 57.0 percent of volunteers stated that they used the internet for voluntary work in 2019. This proportion has remained stable since 2009. When Internet use for voluntary work was first recorded in 2004, it was 39.2 percent of volunteers (DZA, 2021).

## RECOGNITION FOR VOLUNTEERING

Since the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001, the public awareness of the value of volunteering and civic engagement has constantly increased. This is visible, amongst others, through the growing number of infrastructure facilities but also through the growing recognition, awards and prizes given to volunteers and outstanding persons. Since 2004 the annual Week of Civic Engagement (Woche des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements) is organised successfully as one of the main instruments for awareness raising and recognition for volunteering by the National Network for Civil Society (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (BBE)) and gathers each year around 1,500 projects and initiatives at the local, regional and national level [2]. Since 2009 a national volunteering award has been in place [3]. Furthermore, there was an increase in the media coverage on volunteering over the past years. In 2009, ARD [4], the main German broadcasting network, designated a whole thematic week to volunteering and in 2021 ZDF became the partner of the volunteer week.

Since 2008, the Cologne-based private broadcaster RTL has presented the 'RTL Com.mit Award' every year. The honorary award is aimed at young people who, through their charitable work, help to make a positive difference and change things in our society. A different theme is chosen each year.

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[2] <https://www.engagement-macht-stark.de/>

[3] <http://www.geben-gibt.de/>

[4] ARD-Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Consortium of public-law broadcasting institutions of the Federal Republic of Germany) [www.ard.de](http://www.ard.de)

After focusing mainly on students' experiences with integration in the early years, the Volunteer Award was realigned in terms of content in 2014 under the motto "We're looking for young heroes!". Since then, the focus has been on volunteerism. The prominent jury led by RTL presenter Nazan Eckes selects the finalists and the winners.

### 3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

#### LEGAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO VOLUNTEERING

Currently there is no legal framework or definition for volunteering in Germany on a federal level [5]. Instead, the political competence for volunteering policy lays with the German states (Bundesländer). Effectively, there is also no national legal framework for a volunteering infrastructure. The only area in which the national level may constitute legal frameworks is the relatively small area of voluntary services.

#### VOLUNTARY SERVICES IN GERMANY

Voluntary services include the obligation to commit to charitable work for at least 20 hours a week. The aim is to make voluntary services more attractive to teenagers and young adults who want to orientate themselves professionally. The added flexibility of going part-time, introduced in May 2019, is thought to be an incentive for young people. Overall, the law on voluntary services is intended to regulate, among others, the extent and duration of voluntary services, the possibility of training and the amount of subsidy from public funds for the volunteer placements.

With the abolishment of conscription in 2011, the debate on the future of voluntary services has intensified. Until then there were several forms of services: the youth services at state level, "Voluntary Social Year" (Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr) and "Voluntary Ecological Year" (Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr), as well as specific voluntary service programmes led by federal ministries with different target groups and orientations.

In July 2011 a new National Voluntary Service Programme, available for all generations, was introduced. In view of this development, a voluntary service law would apply only to a small group of people, around 80,000 placements including 35,000 placements within the Voluntary Social Year and 35,000 placements in the newly introduced Federal Volunteer Service (*Bundesfreiwilligendienst*) replacing the German Civilian Service (*Zivildienst*) that ended along with the termination of conscription in 2011. In 2021 the Federal Volunteer Service celebrated its 10th anniversary on the 1st of July. To celebrate that over 400,000 people have taken part in the programme, and that around 40,000 people join every year, the Minister of Family Affairs Franziska Giffey announced the start of a new campaign to make volunteering even more known and appealing.

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[5] <https://www.cdu.de/>

Volunteers are encouraged to share their experiences on social media under the hashtag #10JahreBFD. Selected participants are to receive prizes (BMFSFJ, 2021).

However, the Federal Volunteer Service has also been criticised over the years. A main vocal point is that volunteers have to pay for their own travel costs. This is brought in comparison with the abolished German Civilian Service which used to cover travel costs. Consequently, every year on the 5th of December, the International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development (IVD), protests take place which demand free or at least discounted tickets for public transport for volunteers. The hashtag #freifahrtuerfreiwillige has been used to bring awareness to this on social media. German soldiers already travel free with services of Deutsche Bahn since 2020 (Freiwilligendienste Kultur und Bildung, 2019) (Thielen, 2012).

### GENERAL VOLUNTEERING POLICY IN GERMANY

In October 2010 the German Government published a National Strategy on Volunteering that was elaborated following a wide consultation process through the 'National Forum for Engagement and Participation' organised by the BBE [6] (Nationales Forum für Engagement und Partizipation, 2021). The National Strategy issued by the German government has been broadly criticised by civil society as it falls behind already agreed principles. In the eyes of most voluntary organisations and third sector-associations, a comprehensive law for civic engagement would be helpful, but in order to achieve this, a thorough public discussion would be needed. This discussion would have to be led without constraint, time pressure and with all relevant actors in this area included. The mechanisms and results of the National Forum for Engagement and Participation could be used as a starting point for the discussion.

So far, the legal provisions relevant to volunteering can be found in different legal texts. For instance, this includes the Social Codes (Sozialgesetzbücher) II and XII – volunteering by unemployed or welfare recipients, VIII – open youth and street work, the Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch) – public insurance for volunteers, the Income Tax Code (Einkommensteuer Gesetzbuch) – definition of charitable, non-profit status of bodies, rules for tax-free expense allowance for volunteers.

Furthermore, there are several regulations in the federal states, which have the main responsibility for the promotion of volunteering. These include for instance regulations on the exemption from volunteer assignments during work hours, rules for reimbursement of expenses for the volunteer fire department etc.

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[6] <https://www.b-b-e.de/>

Because of the lack of an overarching and comprehensive law on volunteering, the legal regulation is missing a distinction between civic engagement and professional activities like contract and secondary employment exercised to generate income. According to experts there is also a need for a reform regarding the definition of the charitable status of public bodies.

In this case, European law is also concerned (e.g. the European Services Directive). Many non-profit organisations working with volunteers are at the same time market participants and therefore under intense competitive pressure. This makes it important to consider protective mechanisms against the misuse of voluntary activities in profit-oriented organisations. It would be the task of the Federal Government and the Federal Parliament to create a legal basis for this, in coordination and cooperation with the federal states (Bundesländer) and consulting the voluntary sector.

### FUNDING PROVISION IN THE LEGAL CONTEXT

In the federal structure of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*), that distinguishes between federal-national level, state level and municipal level, it is primarily the local level (municipalities, cities and counties), which funds the infrastructure of volunteering permanently. The municipalities cooperate with many local independent actors such as charities and associations. The federal and the state level public authorities give significant pushes regarding the construction of infrastructure through pilot projects. For example, the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, BMFSFJ*) funded a large pilot programme *Mehrgenerationenhäuser*: The new federal program *Mehrgenerationenhaus*. With each other - For each other of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) to promote multigenerational houses in Germany replaces the federal program *Multigenerational House (2017-2020)*. In the 8-year program, measures will be funded between January 01, 2021 and December 31, 2028. The grant is awarded as project funding in the form of fixed-amount financing on an expenditure basis. The funding consists of a non-repayable grant of up to 40,000.00 euros per year per multigenerational house from the federal government. The prerequisite for this is co-financing of 10,000 euros each from the municipalities, districts and/or states. Earlier programmes of this Ministry were relevant to infrastructure, such as the 1990s funding of offices for elderly people [7] and empowerment, self-help agencies [8].

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[6] <https://www.b-b-e.de/>

[7] <http://www.seniorenbueros.org/>

[8] <https://www.seko-bayern.de/>

They were the start for major infrastructure developments. Since then, the BMFSFJ has promoted the Service Centre “Initiative for Community Foundations” [9] to advance the nationwide establishment of community foundations. At the moment, the federal government focuses as planned, on multi-generational housing and community foundations as types of infrastructure, while other infrastructures, such as volunteer agencies, will only be marginally funded. Beyond that, the BMFSFJ supports the national coordinating structures for the volunteer agencies (BAGFA, see below) with annual subsidies.

To overcome the dilemma that the federal government is not allowed to directly fund and support volunteering activities and structures on local or regional level, the German government set up a national foundation for volunteering in July 2020 called **Engagement Stiftung**. Through this public foundation federal grants shall reach the local and regional volunteers in the future (for more information see section 4).

Other funding schemes can be found at state level.

All 16 federal states make a significant contribution to the promotion of volunteering. The spectrum of their activities ranges from the promotion of infrastructural facilities (volunteer agencies and centers, senior citizens' offices, self-help contact points and others), to the development of volunteer cards, the strengthening of the culture of recognition for commitment or the expansion of insurance coverage for committed persons, to the promotion of qualification measures for committed persons. Some states also support state networks for the promotion of engagement. The oldest state network is in Baden-Württemberg; it celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2010.

The state of Bavaria promotes the establishment of 40 voluntary agencies [10] in lagging rural areas. The state of Lower-Saxony supports one elderly citizen service office [11] in every county and every district town, which is aimed primarily at winning the civic engagement of the generation above 50. At the moment the Hanseatic City of Hamburg [12] is considering establishing up to 40-50 neighbourhood offices.

In the coming years, the federal and the state level as well as the municipalities have committed to better coordinate the promotion and funding policy for infrastructure development.

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[9] <https://www.stiftungsindex.de/buergerstiftung/>

[10] <https://bagfa.de/>

[11] <https://bagfa.de/>

[12] <https://www.hamburg.de/ehrenamtliches-engagement>

In any case, all government levels want to sustainably secure and fund permanently, rather than initiating any new pilot programmes. In order to reach this goal they have to revise their strong preference, as seen in the last two decades, for short-term pilot projects.

However, it is very difficult to merge the various developments, initiated in recent years by the Bund, Bundesländer and local authorities. In addition, civil society actors must be involved because they are the most notably responsible body for infrastructure facilities. One can criticise that, the federal level has to learn how actors communicate at every level with stakeholders from civil society.

#### 4. STRUCTURE OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING

##### VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

In Germany there is no centralised national volunteer centre, but many associations which represent the types of infrastructure at the federal level. There is the National Association of Volunteer Centres and Agencies (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freiwilligenagenturen, BAGFA) as the national coordinating body of the volunteer agencies. Also, at state level there are some associations of volunteer centres [13], for example in North Rhine-Westphalia and Bavaria.

The National Clearing House for the Encouragement and Support of Self-Help Groups (Nationale Kontakt und Informationsstelle zur Anregung und Unterstützung von Selbsthilfegruppen, NAKOS [14] ) is the national umbrella organisation of self-help organisations. Other relevant associations at national level are the Federal Association of Senior Citizens Offices (Bundesverband für Seniorenbüros, BaS), the Federal Association of Socio-Cultural Centres (Bundesvereinigung Soziokultureller Zentren eV [15] ). The Federal Association of German Foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen [16] ) is coordinating the initiative for community foundations and currently trying to find contacts at the regional level, for community foundations.

The funding of these networks, foundations and associations is organised differently. Usually they are associations, of which the individual infrastructures are in fact members. However, there are also associations under the umbrella of large charity organisations such as the Caritas Network of Volunteer Centres (Verbund Freiwilligen-Zentren im Deutschen Caritasverband [17] ).

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[13] <https://lagfa-bayern.de/>

[14] <https://www.nakos.de/>

[15] <https://www.soziokultur.de/bsz/>

[16] <https://www.stiftungen.org/startseite.html>

[17] <https://www.caritas.de/>

### NETWORKS OF SPECIFIC INTERESTS, FOUNDATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

In addition to these organisations, who represent certain types of infrastructure of civic engagement on state and federal level, there are national associations aiming at specific issues, some of which are closely linked to infrastructure developments; these include the Stiftung Mitarbeit [18] and the Association of Active Citizenship [19], who support the development of community foundations and is supported by the cooperative banks in Germany.

Furthermore, there are a few foundations that are particularly devoted to the promotion of civic engagement and its infrastructure, such as the Robert Bosch Foundation [20], Alfred Toepfer Foundation [21] or the Generali Future Fund [22]. Eventually, there are thematic networks, such as the Centre for Corporate Citizenship Germany (Centrum für Corporate Citizenship Deutschland, CCCD [23] ) or UPJ [24] that are active in the field of corporate volunteering and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as well as voluntary agencies, who serve as intermediary organisations to their members.

The largest association in terms of individual membership is the German Olympic Sports Federation (Deutsche Olympische Sportbund, DOSB [25] ), with over 27 million (as of 2021) members. Almost 30% (up from 25% in 2012) of all volunteers engage in sports. In addition there are the two main churches (Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran) and associated with them the largest two charity associations: Caritas [26] (Catholic) and Diakonie [27] (Protestant), with tens of thousands of facilities such as homes for the elderly, nursery schools and other social services, where people volunteer. 7.6% of the population over 14 years is involved in church and religious associations (Simonson et al., 2017). 3.6% are engaged in political interest groups (above all in the parties), 2.5% in professional interest groups, especially in the unions (Simonson et al., 2017). In recent decades, these large organisations have steadily lost members. At the same time, however, many small initiatives and associations have grown, and their number continues to increase.

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[18] <https://www.mitarbeit.de/>

[19] <https://www.aktive-buergerschaft.de/>

[20] <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de>

[21] <https://www.toepfer-stiftung.de/>

[22] <https://www.generali.de/ueber-general/>

[23] <https://www.cccdeutschland.org/>

[24] <https://www.cccdeutschland.org/>

[25] <https://www.dosb.de/>

[26] <https://www.caritas.de/spendeundengagement/engagieren/ehrenamt/ehrenamt>

[27] <https://www.caritas.de/spendeundengagement/engagieren/ehrenamt/ehrenamt>

Thus, from 1990 until 2003, the number of organisations almost doubled from 300,000 to 574,000. Between 2001 and 2003 the number grew by 30,000, but it has to be noted that growth took place primarily within the new federal states of the former East Germany.

The newly created (in the last four decades) volunteering infrastructure cooperates on many levels with traditional associations and organisations in sports, culture, education and social issues. Together they develop projects and promote volunteering in their organisations. However, these contacts could be even more intense. Sometimes the traditional organisations, such as volunteer fire departments or charities, consider the new infrastructural facilities as competitors. However, the new infrastructure facilities are also partly linked organisationally with the charities. For instance, Caritas, the biggest German charity, started to find and fund volunteer centres in 1996. As such, 53 out of the 300 voluntary agencies in Germany belong to the Caritas network of Volunteer Centres [28].

Despite these connections and cooperation, the main challenge of the further development of volunteering infrastructure will be to bridge the gap between voluntary agencies and the traditional German associations with their history dating back to the 19th Century. The traditional associations have certain needs for support: they have difficulties in recruiting new voluntary trustees and board members and they face funding problems. In order to take a closer look at this phenomenon the Robert Bosch Foundation aims to start a new research programme; it is planned that volunteer centres will support traditional associations in organisational development and in the search for suitable candidates for board members.

### CROSS-CUTTING NETWORKS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In Germany cross-communication and cooperation structures of the different types of infrastructure are not very pronounced yet. There are some networks at state level, such as the *Network for civic engagement in Bavaria* [29]. Their members are volunteer agencies, senior offices and self-help agencies. In order to prevent overlapping fields of work as well as competition in fund-raising and in the allocation of public resources, an improvement of cross-cooperation forms is urgently needed. However, at the local level there are some networks where all local types of infrastructure are involved. These include the *Network for Civic Engagement in Berlin* [30], the *network Aktivoli Hamburg* [31], *Förderung von Bürgerschaftlichem Engagement (FöBE)* or the *Round Table Civic Engagement Nürnberg*.

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[28] <https://www.caritas.de/spendeundengagement/engagieren/ehrenamt/ehrenamt#Bayern>

[29] [www.wir-für-uns.de](http://www.wir-für-uns.de)

[30] <https://www.berlin.de/buergeraktiv/>

[31] <https://www.aktivoli.de/>

In June 2002 the National Network for Civil Society (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement, BBE [32] ) was founded. BBE acts as national network-structure for all organisations involved in the promotion of volunteering, linking associations from the Third Sector, business and work life and federal and community institutions. BBE consists of 280 member organisations including the Churches, unions, corporations, foundations and governmental institutions as well as the full scope of the German civil society associations on national level (most of them being sectoral umbrella organisations representing millions of members) as well as the infrastructure associations. It's different working groups formulate and publish statements and advisory opinions. They address topics like education and civic engagement, local engagement policy, corporate volunteering and civic engagement policies in Europe. Over the past two years the BBE has organised the consultation process to develop the National Strategy for Volunteering recently published by the German government.

The German Foundation for Civic Engagement and Volunteering (Deutsche Stiftung für Engagement und Ehrenamt – DSEE) is being set up as a public foundation on the initiative of three Federal Ministries which began to operate in July 2020.

Legal basis for this foundation is German federal law and its formation as of 23 June 2020 (Gesetz zur Errichtung der Deutschen Stiftung für Engagement und Ehrenamt). The annual budget is at around €60 million, which is dedicated to improving and supporting civil society organisations and volunteering, especially in laggard and underdeveloped regions in Germany. The improvement of digital means for civil society activities and the development of a volunteering infrastructure in response to the Covid-19 pandemic is a focus point for the foundation. For this plan to succeed, it is necessary for the already existing civil society infrastructure to cooperate with the foundation's contributions. Civil society networks, such as the National Network for Civil Society (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement BBE) or the Alliance for Public Benefit (Bündnis für Gemeinnützigkeit) can contribute to the establishment of the necessary cooperation mechanisms.

## 5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

### PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

As the "Volunteering Ministry", the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth encourages civic engagement through favourable framework conditions, supports it over the long term and further strengthens the culture of recognition.

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[32] <https://www.b-b-e.de/>

In enhancing civic engagement on an ongoing basis, das Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) sees itself as a partner of civic society supporting the millions of volunteers, clubs, associations, businesses and private foundations.

The Ministry's civic engagement policy is largely based on the 'Civic Engagement Strategy', which was launched in 2016. The Engagement Strategy can be seen as a framework that defines guidelines for a coordinated civic engagement policy. According to the Strategy the Ministry's priorities with regard to civic engagement rely on a participatory and dialogue-oriented approach with its partners, tri-sectoral cooperation as well as on strengthening and pursuing a culture of recognition and appreciation for the millions of volunteers in Germany. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth organizes den Deutschen EngagementTag (the German Civic Engagement Day) in order to offer a widely recognized platform for discussion, knowledge transfer and networking as well as to strengthen cooperation with the civic engagement sector.

The Civic Engagement Day takes place around the "Internationaler Tag der freiwilligen Helfer für die wirtschaftliche und soziale Entwicklung" (International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development) at the beginning of December of each year. In cooperation with the Bundesnetzwerk für Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (National Network for Civic Engagement, BBE), the Ministry organizes an annual "Woche des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements" (Civic Engagement Week) to inform the public about the many and varied services performed by over 30 million volunteers in Germany. By awarding the annual "Deutscher Engagementpreis" (German Prize for Civic Engagement), the Ministry recognizes the outstanding achievements of volunteers from all around the country as a contribution to society that promotes social cohesion (Deutscher Engagementpreis, 2021).

The BMFSFJ also funded image campaigns for civic engagement, such as in 2009, the public campaign "Geben gibt". The Ministry also supports the Week of Civic Engagement organised by the BBE that takes place since 2004 every year in September. The week has been honoring the commitment of more than 30 million volunteers with the campaign "Engagement macht stark!" The focus is on people who get involved on their own initiative or in companies, foundations, associations or institutions for a good cause. Innovative projects as well as imaginative actions and examples from all areas of commitment, such as education, sports, culture, environmental protection, international understanding, health or migration, are presented.

Each federal state has offices or departments concerned with the promotion of volunteering. Usually, they are attached to the prime minister's office or to specific ministries.

In recent years much has been achieved: for example, improving the insurance protection for volunteers and the culture of recognition through VolunteerCards and certificates. Furthermore, currently, processes of good governance (civic municipality) appear to be gaining importance and are funded by several states.

Local administration of medium and big-sized cities but also of counties have employed more and more paid full-time coordinators for volunteers and fundraising in recent years. The responsibilities of these coordinators are, among other things, to open the different agencies and departments of public service for civic engagement. This includes offering internal training and coaching towards a citizen-oriented administration, which sees itself as a facilitator enabling civic engagement. These full-time coordinators address directly the citizenry. They organise for example, participatory processes in important issues of community development. These organisational forms of citizen participation (Agenda-Commissioner) can be traced back to the proposals of the local Agenda 21. Due to the development of municipal governance these forms of citizen participation have grown in recent years.

There is a special situation in the state of Baden-Württemberg [33], where there are volunteer centres within local authorities. Therefore, the volunteer managers are employees of the city or county.

### OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The foundation sector in Germany is a very significant sector for civil society with almost 24,000 foundations. Many private foundations in Germany promote volunteering and have set up various funding programmes. Foundations however mainly intend to initiate projects and innovative approaches; rarely there are long-term funding schemes available for civil society organisations. Strategic dialogue and exchange of those foundations active in promoting volunteering take place within the forum “Arbeitskreis engagement fördernde Stiftungen” at the German Association of Foundations.

The political foundations of the major parties, i.e. the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation [34] (Social Democrats) and Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation [35] (Christian Democrats) have become important fora for the discourse on civic engagement. They organise conferences and publish discussion papers on a regular basis.

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[33] <https://sozialministerium.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/soziales/buengerengagement/>

[34] <https://www.fes.de/>

[35] <https://www.kas.de/de/home>

There is no widespread programme on service-learning, but within recent years schools have become increasingly important partners and stages for volunteering. One reason lies within the rise of full-time schools in Germany. The voluntary work that traditionally took place in organised youth sports, cultural clubs, outside the school, now has to be integrated into the school life. Secondly there are more and more voluntary mentoring arrangements relating to schools. Here, people who are in business or already have a working life behind them, are supporting pupils on their way to choose a profession. Thirdly there is a lively debate on the subject and importance of informal and social learning, in which experts keep pointing to the importance of strengthening civic engagement opportunities. In addition, better opportunities for participation are required to make the school a place where democratic attitudes and a civil discussion culture are practiced [36].

The National engagement strategy of the Federal Government has highlighted in particular schools as an important reference point of the engagement policy. However, the responsibility of the school system lies not within the federal government, but with the states.

Some states such as Baden-Wuerttemberg initiated extensive programmes integrating civic engagement in school. Approximately 1,000 schools already have voluntary youth guides. Many other states are hesitating here. Since its founding in June 2002, 'Education, Schools and Civil Society' has been a main focus for the BBE. The focus is on the question of what contribution civic engagement can make to modern education.

In 2004, the BBE established a series of conferences on the topic of 'School and Civic Involvement' that has been a platform for different actors from the fields of education and civic engagement to engage in professional dialogue and to agree on joint projects. Stakeholders from schools, the administration and civil society developed joint strategies for better education through participation and engagement. A nationwide symposium was held with the participation of the BBE in October 2010 at the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development in Hamburg [37] on the topic of 'Civic Engagement - Education through Participation'. The focus was on student engagement and the further development of education and school through participation.

In recent years the number of volunteer agencies that provide service-learning programmes for public schools and day care centres for children has increased significantly. Particularly popular are voluntary reading projects to improve the language skills of children. According to the Volunteer Survey 2014, 9,1% of all volunteers are active in kindergartens and schools (Simonson et al., 2017). Similarly, infrastructures such as voluntary agencies (see above) are equally active in cooperation with companies.

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[36] [www.wir-fuer-uns.de/landesnetzwerk/i1702.htm#school/](http://www.wir-fuer-uns.de/landesnetzwerk/i1702.htm#school/)

[37] [http://www.freiwilligen-agentur.de/download/Bildung\\_Hamburg.pdf](http://www.freiwilligen-agentur.de/download/Bildung_Hamburg.pdf)

### 6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Most of the infrastructures of civic engagement depend on funding from public budgets. Usually the funding is not permanent but tied to pilot programmes ending after a few years. There is no existing overview of the sum invested by the public sector (federal, states, local level) in infrastructures of volunteering. In the multi-generation houses programme (*Mehrgenerationenhäuser*) for example, 500 facilities are each funded with 40,000 EUR per year by the federal government. Other types of infrastructure receive far less funds.

The municipalities (cities and counties) are mainly responsible for the sustainable promotion of volunteer agencies and centres. Sometimes charities themselves finance volunteering agencies. Additional permanent funding opportunities exist for individual types of infrastructure like nursing centres (promoting volunteer work in nursing care), counselling services for family caregivers (for example, in the care of people who have dementia) and self-help contact centres (solely health self-help groups) receive money from the nursing care insurance funds.

In part, funds also flow from funds and programmes of the European Union such as the urban development promotion programme [38] or from the development of rural areas programme, especially LEADER [39], in infrastructure development for volunteer work. Overall however, EU funding is not significant for the volunteering infrastructure landscape in Germany.

In addition there are resources, for example from particular services (corporate volunteering programmes with private partners), from foundations and donations. One prominent example for the contribution of private foundations is the programme “Engagierte Stadt”. Initiated by a.o. Bertelsmann Foundation, Körber Foundation, Robert-Bosch-Foundation and in cooperation with the German Ministry for Family, Women, Senior Citizens and Youth, this programme supports civil society networks in communities to foster volunteering and civic participation. More than 100 cities have received funding since 2015.

However, the contributions of foundations as well as donations and sponsorship-programmes mainly play a role in individual projects; they are not involved in permanent funding of infrastructures. The share of financing from public funds is estimated at three quarters of the total revenue of the infrastructures of civic engagement.

Many of the volunteering infrastructures hope to increase revenue from enterprises in the coming years, for example, by the organisation of Caring Days. In recent years, the expenditure of public funding for civic engagement has increased continuously. However, Germany is still far from sustainable public funding for volunteering infrastructures.

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[38] [https://www.staedtebauforderung.info/DE/ProgrammeVor2020/programmefor2020\\_node.html](https://www.staedtebauforderung.info/DE/ProgrammeVor2020/programmefor2020_node.html)

[39] <https://www.stmelf.bayern.de/landentwicklung/>

## 7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

In Germany there is quite a broad research landscape on volunteering and civil society. Many universities and colleges as well as private institutes have units researching on various issues such as social impact, trends in volunteering, organisational development and many others. Research institutions and academics interested in volunteering related issues regularly meet and exchange in the frame of the Working Group on Civil Society Research of the BBE.

The two most significant regular surveys in Germany are the Freiwilligensurvey and ZiviZ-Survey. The national survey on volunteering (Freiwilligensurvey) has been funded by the German government since 1999 to measure individual volunteering in Germany (DZA, 2021) (FWS) (as can be seen above). To explore the development and state of civil society organisations and volunteering infrastructure, “Zivilgesellschaft in Zahlen” (ZiviZ) has been making significant contributions over the past years: The ZiviZ Survey is a representative survey covering associations, foundations, charitable limited liability companies as well as cooperatives. The survey was last implemented in its third edition in 2020 including investigations on volunteering for education as well as for the integration of migrants and refugees.

## 8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS

### FOR VOLUNTEERING

There is a growing number of training and formation services for volunteer management (e.g. Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit e.V.) addressing central issues and standards on how to work with volunteers, culture of recognition, participation and training. BAGFA has developed a comprehensive “seal of quality” for volunteer agencies. The certification process is undertaken by an independent expert group. At the moment, 43 agencies have received this seal. This is down from 54 agencies in 2012. For the multi-generation houses a comprehensive self-evaluation instrument has been developed. Each house has to undergo an intensive self-evaluation analysis on a regular basis. Future funding depends on this analysis.

## 9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Over the past years many regional and local online databases have been created, which give an overview of facilities and volunteering possibilities. Up until now however no national standard could be established, so there is no nationwide outline of the total number of available places. The first attempt for a nationwide database was funded by the BMFSFJ in 2009 but failed due to technical problems.

Since the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001 the public awareness of the value of volunteering and civic engagement has constantly increased. This is visible, for instance, through the growing number of infrastructure facilities but also through the growing number of awards and prizes for volunteers and outstanding people. Since 2004 the annual Week of Civic Engagement (Woche des bürgerschaftlichen Engagement) is organised successfully as one of the main instruments for awareness raising and recognition for volunteering by the National Network for Civil Society (Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement – BBE) and gathers each year around 1,500 projects and initiatives at local, regional and national levels [40]. Since 2009 a national volunteering award has been proclaimed [41]. Furthermore, an increase in the media coverage on volunteering can be recognised over the past years as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

### 10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFITIES

The promotion of the welfare state traditionally plays the most important role within Third Sector funding policy. This also counts for the volunteering infrastructure. For development of the infrastructure, it will be important to secure sustainable funding through the public sector in order to achieve a broad-based extension of facilities. National, state and local level will have to cooperate more closely.

In recent times a new protest movement within civil society can be noted on all political levels (train station in Stuttgart, campaign against nuclear technologies, climate protests such as Fridays for Future etc.). This growing political discontent of the citizens indicates the necessity for new governance structures and political participation at all levels.

### 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the past years volunteering infrastructure has grown significantly in Germany. However, the facilities are mostly insufficiently and insecurely financed. Very rarely they have more than one or two full paid staff members. This leads to a great diversity on the one hand, and to a growing insecurity on the other hand. It will be one of the main tasks of volunteering policy in the years to come to ensure greater stability. The federal structure in Germany marks one problem in this direction. A profound coordination between the federal and state levels is needed taking into account the reality and needs of the municipalities. Despite declarations of intent however no complementary and sustainable programmes are in sight. One can doubt whether they would be realisable at all.

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[40] <https://www.engagement-macht-stark.de/>

[41] [www.geben-gibt.de](http://www.geben-gibt.de)

Also, the National Strategy on Volunteering, passed by the Federal government in October 2010, does not yet include strategic solutions for the coordination and funding of the volunteering infrastructure. The federal government should explore how a basic core funding of infrastructure facilities could be realised through the federal budget. The funding should be part of a national instrument for the promotion of civic engagement and should contain the following components: basic funding of infrastructure facilities; specific programmes directed to different target groups, such as elderly, migrants; innovative schemes, transfer of good practice. It needs to be seen whether the newly established National Foundation on Volunteering can make a difference in future.

For the establishment of a strategic approach to the promotion of volunteering a reliable analysis of the reality at place is necessary. In this respect an evaluation of the instruments and the quality management is needed.

The EU, with its influential programme funding, could be helpful in promoting a volunteering strategy aimed at the public welfare. Programmes such as Erasmus+ and Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values, for example, set the course. From the German perspective, a first step would be to understand and learn more about volunteering programmes and funding schemes in other European countries especially with view to volunteering infrastructure and new developments such a voluntourism of family volunteering. Mutual learning can be a good starting point to reform the volunteering infrastructure landscape and its promotion in future.

### **EAST AND WEST DIVIDE**

The new (eastern) federal states have historically grown differently than the old (western) states, which is seen in civic engagement and civil society organisations. The volunteering rate in Germany in 2014 was at 38.5% in eastern Germany and 44.8 percent in western Germany (Simonson et al., 2017, p. 577). Looking at state specific rates, such as Saxony-Anhalt (31.1%) and Baden-Württemberg (48.2%) (Simonson et al., 2017, p.591), it becomes evident that thirty years after the reunification of Germany, more support for eastern states is absolutely needed. This corresponds with the overall development of the new federal states, where resources and the density of civil society organisations are lower than in the old federal states which can trust on western Germany's traditional volunteering structure (BPB, 2020). Although the reasons for the lower volunteering rates in East Germany are complex, it can be said that the collapse of the GDR resulted in high levels of unemployment, which has possibly had a discouraging effect on the individual willingness to get involved in volunteering (BPB, 2020). Additionally, many organisations were reformed after the collapse of the GDR which led to the disappointment of some committed volunteers and ultimately, the distrust in some institutions (BPB, 2020).

### CHANGING VOLUNTEERING ENVIRONMENT

However, change in civic engagement can be seen throughout Germany which has been increasingly evident throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. While in East Germany organisations cannot rely on a traditional social-cultural structure, West Germany can no longer solely rely on its traditional socio-cultural structure. There are signs that forms of informal civic engagement are becoming increasingly vital on top of the already existing formal methods of engagement. It is likely that with generational change, civic engagement will be shaped more through digital communication and less by decision-making processes in formal structures (BFSFJ, 2020). This can be seen in the Fridays for Future movement, for example. Although digitalised and less formal forms of civic engagement tend to appear spontaneously and are usually flexible, they can also be unreliable and temporary. This is important to keep in mind as the environment of civic engagement keeps changing. Nevertheless, formal organisations of civic engagement will continue to be, which is necessary for long-term volunteering. However, the trend towards individualisation, informality and digitalisation needs to be considered by formal organisations. The city of Berlin has been proactive about this changing landscape and funded the research on digital volunteering which was recently published by *Technologie Stiftung Berlin*. The aim of the publication is to identify how digitalisation can help organise voluntary work efficiently (Erbstößer, 2020).

### BERLIN VOLUNTEERING CAPITAL 2021

It is this proactivity that led to the decision to honour Berlin as the European Volunteering Capital of 2021. With this title, the Centre for European Volunteering honours Berlin's achievement in terms of volunteering and civic engagement. Berlin aims to use its visibility gained through the award and bring attention to the existing opportunities to get involved in the city. At the same time, Berlin wants to create even more attractive offers around civil engagement, targeted at people who possibly have not considered volunteering before. Throughout 2021, engaged citizens are shown as role models and existing formats for networking as well as further education are publicised, and new forms of exchange are created. This is taking place through public events such as discussion events, action forums, campaigns and awards, presented through the hashtag #EntdeckeDasWirInDir. Overall, the aim is to show that volunteering strengthens democracy and social cohesion. Additionally, the areas of innovation, digitalisation and diversity and Europe are four key points addressed in relation to civic engagement.

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