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## Article

# Trends in Civil Society: The German Survey on Volunteering 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey – FWS)

Schmollers Jahrbuch – Journal of Applied Social Science Studies. Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften

## Provided in Cooperation with:

Duncker & Humblot, Berlin

*Suggested Citation:* Schmiade, Nicole; Vogel, Claudia; Lux, Katharina; Simonson, Julia (2014) : Trends in Civil Society: The German Survey on Volunteering 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey – FWS), Schmollers Jahrbuch – Journal of Applied Social Science Studies. Zeitschrift für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften, ISSN 1865-5742, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, Vol. 134, Iss. 2, pp. 249-259, <https://doi.org/10.3790/schm.134.2.249>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/292441>

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## **Trends in Civil Society: The German Survey on Volunteering 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey – FWS)**

By Nicole Schmiade, Claudia Vogel,  
Katharina Lux and Julia Simonson

The German Survey on Volunteering (FWS) is a cross-sectional survey of voluntary activities of persons aged 14 and older living in Germany. It is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). Volunteering and the willingness to volunteer can be reported and described among population groups and across regions. Data of the waves from 1999, 2004 and 2009 as well as documentation material are available for researchers at the Research Data Centre of the DZA (FDZ-DZA, [www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de)). The fourth wave will be carried out in 2014 under the scientific supervision of the DZA. The main report of the German Survey on Volunteering 2014 and the scientific use file will presumably be available in 2016.

### **1. Introduction**

The German Survey on Volunteering (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey: FWS) is a cross-sectional representative survey of voluntary activities of persons aged 14 and older living in Germany. Volunteering and the willingness to volunteer can be reported and described among population groups and across regions. Additionally, volunteers as well as former volunteers and persons who have never volunteered can be studied. The survey 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).

Since the beginning of the 1990ies public and political interest in volunteering has steadily grown. The lack of systematic studies on voluntary activities and volunteering led to the initiation of the first Survey on Volunteering in 1999 (Gensicke, 2011). In 2002, the Enquete-Commission on the Future of Civic Engagement published their recommendations and the leading policy-oriented characterisation of volunteering (Enquete-Kommission “Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements”, 2002). Since then, research and social ac-

counting on civil society and volunteering have been continued on the basis of the FWS (BMFSFJ, 2010a; BMFSFJ, 2006; Rosenblatt 2001). In 2012, the first Civic Engagement Report was compiled by an expert committee and published by the BMFSFJ (2012).

Up to now, data of the Survey on Volunteering was recorded in 1999, 2004 and 2009 by TNS Infratest Sozialforschung (Infratest). Since December 2011 the survey is scientifically managed and supervised by the German Centre of Gerontology (Deutsches Zentrum für Altersfragen: DZA). The data collection of the fourth wave will be conducted by infas Institute for Applied Social Sciences (Institut für angewandte Sozialwissenschaft) in 2014.

Data of the three completed surveys as well as documentation material are available for researchers at the Research Data Centre of the DZA (Forschungsdatenzentrum des DZA: FDZ-DZA, [www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de)). The FDZ-DZA has been accredited by the German Data Forum (Rat für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsdaten: RatSWD). Its main purpose is to process data of the German Survey on Volunteering and the German Ageing Survey (Deutscher Alterssurvey: DEAS) into user-friendly scientific use files (SUFs) and to document contents and instruments. Data are made accessible to the research community and users are supported during data use. Further, the FDZ-DZA also pursues own research topics. The Scientific Use File of the German Survey on Volunteering 2014 will presumably be published in 2016.

## 2. Design of the Survey Programme

### 2.1 Sampling

Three waves of the German Survey on Volunteering were completed up to now. In each of the survey years 1999, 2004 and 2009 a representative landline sample of the resident population in Germany aged 14 and older was drawn (see Table 1 for net sample sizes). The interviews were conducted in German, thus the sample is representative of the German-speaking population. The size

*Table 1*

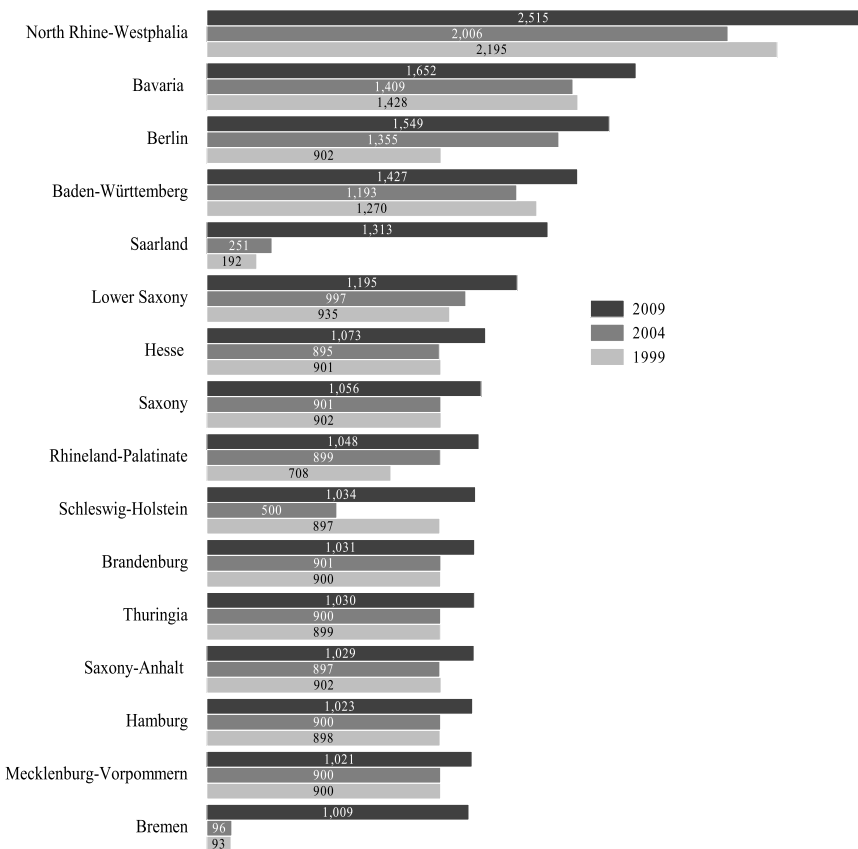
**Net Sample Sizes by Survey Years**

Survey Year	Total
1999	n=14,922
2004	n=15,000
2009	n=20,005
2014	n=28,600 (planned)

*Source:* BMFSFJ, 2010a; 2006; Rosenblatt, 2001; Own planning.

of the samples enables detailed regional analyses. For this purpose the samples have been stratified disproportionately according to the 16 federal states (Länder) and partly stocked up to achieve sufficient sample sizes (Fig. 1). The sampling frames were generated using a Random-Digit-Dialling-Method according to ADM-standard (Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik et al., 2010). This method also allows the regional classification of the landline numbers.

The study allows for describing and analysing the socioeconomic, educational and regional context of the respondents in each survey year on a cross-sectional level. Due to the trend character, i. e. the same sampling procedures and very similar contents, variation in terms of social change can be captured over the time span from 1999 to 2009 (and soon from 1999 to 2014).



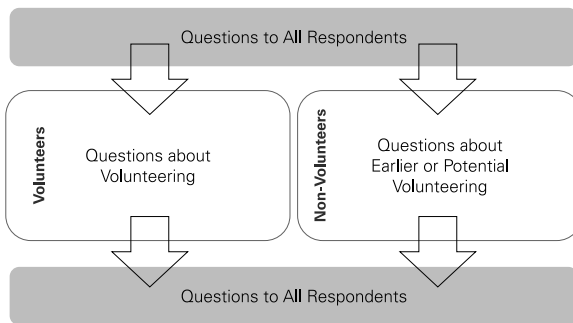
Source: BMFSFJ, 2010a; 2006; Rosenblatt, 2001. Own illustration.

Figure 1: Composition of the Samples by Federal States (Number of Cases Unweighted)

The sampling of the fourth wave is outlined as a dual-frame approach, which involves a landline and a mobile phone sample. Further, interviews can be conducted not only in German, but also in five other languages to improve the inclusion of migrants in the net sample. Russian, Turkish and Polish have been chosen to cover the largest migrant subpopulations in Germany. Persons from various national backgrounds can be interviewed in Arabic and English.

## 2.2 Survey Methods: Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI)

Data of the telephone survey has been collected using computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) (Steeh, 2009). They were carried out by trained interviewers with a standardised questionnaire in a telephone studio of the survey agency (see Figure 2 for the interview process). In the first three waves, the average interview duration was about 20 minutes. An extension to about 30 minutes is planned for 2014.



Source: BMFSFJ, 2010a. Own Illustration.

Figure 2: Interview Process

## 2.3 Contents

The survey offers data for a detailed description of volunteering in general and various types of voluntary activities. Trend analyses based on cross-sectional waves give insight into the development of civil society and the achievements of volunteering policies in Germany (BMFSFJ, 2010a). The knowledge of individual, organisational, societal and geographical aspects of volunteering helps to identify areas where political and societal action is needed to improve participation and cohesion in German society.

Overall, respondents have been asked to provide information on the following topics:

- Activity and volunteering in general
  - Activities in 14 societal areas (15 in 1999)
  - Volunteering in 14 societal areas (15 in 1999)
  - Volunteering potential
  - Earlier volunteering
- Most time-consuming voluntary activity
  - Organisational framework
  - Target groups and outline
  - Expenditure of time
  - Expense allowances
  - Motives and expectations
- Context of volunteering
  - Characteristics of the organisation
  - Information and contact offices for volunteering
  - Conditions
- Further characteristics of civic activities
  - Donations
  - Voluntary social year
  - Support in social network
  - Club membership
  - Political activity
- Further information about the person
  - Socio-demographic and socio-economic information
  - Migration background
  - Values
  - Religion
  - Expenditure of time

Many questions from the first survey in 1999 have been retained unaltered in the subsequent waves. In some topics, however, the instrument has been modified, e. g., in the general sections about income, occupational status, child care, and migration background, and in the sections directly referring to voluntary activities as target groups, monetisation, motives, and volunteering potential. The questionnaires of the three completed waves are available in the FDZ-DZA (Vogel/Gensicke, 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014a; 2014b, 2014c). In preparation of the German Survey on Volunteering 2014, the instrument has been

extended to cover changing and new types of volunteering better as well as more details of contexts and differences between volunteers and non-volunteers.

## 2.4 Regional Context Data

As a supplement to the survey data, additional information can be linked to the scientific use files or analysed at a protected workstation at the DZA. These macro-data contain information on the regional context (as, for instance, the unemployment rate, the average household income or the population density) of each respondent at the district level (NUTS-3) (Eurostat, 2011). Regional classification of the data is possible due to the sampling method (Random-Digit-Dialling). In 2014, regional information is complemented by surveying the respondent's post codes. Thus, individual characteristics can be analysed within regional contexts.

## 3. Main Research Areas

Volunteering rates and volunteering potential are the central quota reported from the German Survey on Volunteering. In 2009, 36 per cent of the German population were volunteering. Rising numbers of volunteers were found especially in the group of persons aged 66 and older. It was also shown that the rate of voluntary activities was somewhat higher for men than for women (BMFSFJ, 2010a). The main results of each wave have been published in national reports (BMFSFJ, 2010a, 2010b; BMFSFJ, 2006; Rosenblatt, 2001).

Regional information are given in reports for all federal states such as Baden-Württemberg (Zentrum für Zivilgesellschaftliche Entwicklung, 2011) or Brandenburg (Staatskanzlei des Landes Brandenburg, 2010) as well as in publications focussing on volunteering in West and East Germany (e. g., Olk/Genzicke, 2014). Information on volunteering by societal area was mainly provided on the most common fields such as sports (e. g., Braun, 2013) and religion (e. g., Seidelmann, 2012).

There are additional reports on specific groups of volunteers such as older individuals, families and pupils. For studies on volunteering among the youth see, for example, Braun et al. (2013) and Picot (2012). For studies on older volunteers see, for example, Nowossadeck and Vogel (2013), Simonson (2013), focussing on nursing care and health, and Dathe (2011). Hagen and Vogel (2012) report on volunteering by older individuals, which is also directed at other generations, but mostly provided within the own age group. Klocke and Stadtmüller (2011) describe volunteering provided by families for families.

Values as correlates of volunteering have been investigated, for example, by Emmerich (2012). However, research based on FWS-data has been mainly descriptive. Systematic analyses of determinants and correlations of volunteering and reasons for starting and ending voluntary activities are lacking. An apparent research gap is seen in regard to population groups such as migrants. They are underrepresented in the sample due to the bias of telephone surveys in German. Furthermore, data was rarely used in international studies in the past.

#### 4. Data Access

Data from the completed waves (1999, 2004 and 2009) were extensively edited and anonymised before they have been published. These data sets (SUFs) as well as documentation material are available at the Research Data Centre of the DZA (FDZ-DZA, [www.fdz-dza.de](http://www.fdz-dza.de)). Usage is permitted free of charge in scientific, non-profit contexts for scholars working at a university or a research institution as well as students aiming at an academic graduation (Bachelor, Master, PhD). For reasons of data protection, a data distribution contract is required to receive the data. Registered users access the micro-data via a protected download area. Further details as well as the application form can be obtained from the website of the FDZ-DZA.

#### 5. Documentation

For each survey year, a number of documentation objects are available online. The FDZ-DZA is currently working on expanding our documentation in English.

- In the ‘Survey Instruments’, edited and user-friendly versions of the questionnaires resp. CATI-templates are documented. The original versions as given in the main reports are provided as well.
- The ‘Short Description’ (Kurzbeschreibung) of the Scientific Use Files gives detailed information on the sampling procedure, the classification scheme of the variable names and explanations for the user-friendly generated and constructed variables. An English version of the short description will soon be available.
- Registered users can also receive the Stata-syntax used to generate the constructed variables.
- In order to facilitate longitudinal and time-series analyses, the FDZ-DZA offers a ‘Variable Correspondence List’ (with English and German variable and value labels) for all FWS waves. This chart shows which information has been surveyed in which year and how the respective variables are named.



- In the ‘Codebooks’ we compiled every variable of each survey year with their individual categories (including missing values), labels and overall frequencies.

## 6. Outlook

The fourth wave of the German Survey on Volunteering will be carried out from April to October 2014 and will gather information of approximately 28,600 respondents. With this new data, analyses of the characteristics of voluntary activities, different types of volunteering and reasons, why individuals engage in voluntary activities or not, are possible over a period of 15 years. Micro-data of this survey will be made available free of charge to the scientific community in 2016, as soon as the final report to the BMFSFJ has been published.

Information on volunteering and participation is also offered by the German Ageing Survey (e. g., Simonson et al., 2013.), which is also designed and administered by the German Centre of Gerontology. The DEAS is a representative cross-sectional and longitudinal survey of the German population aged 40 and older – funded by the BMFSFJ. The comprehensive examination of people in mid- and older adulthood provides micro-data (available in the FDZ-DZA) for social and behavioural scientific research and reporting on social developments. Survey waves took place in 1996, 2002, 2008, and 2011. The next wave will be surveyed in 2014. Both DEAS and FWS offer information for policy-makers, the general public and researchers.

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