



VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRIA

What do volunteers do?

How do volunteers and society benefit from this?

How does the Ministry of Social Affairs support voluntary engagement?

5

December

International
Volunteer Day

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FOREWORD

Volunteering in Austria enjoys privileged status. A total of 46 % of the Austrian population over the age of 15 – a considerable proportion – carries out some form of unpaid voluntary activity and thus makes an indispensable contribution to social cohesion and to our high quality of life. Alongside a successful employment policy and an effective welfare state, volunteering is an essential element of our social model.

In recent years, measures have been taken at a wide range of levels and in a wide range of fields in order to support and promote this voluntary unpaid engagement. These measures serve to continuously improve the framework conditions for the realisation of this engagement. In the form of the Federal Act on the Promotion of Volunteer Commitment (Volunteers' Act), for the first time a legal framework was also created to support these important and valuable efforts for the benefit of society.

This brochure is intended to provide a compact overview of the value, the significance and the diversity of volunteering in Austria.

It shows that there are a wide range of motives for people to become active. For the individual involved, volunteering can not only represent an interesting change from professional or occupational obligations or training, but also constitute a good opportunity to acquire new skills, to develop own strengths, to take on responsibility, or to remain active throughout life.

With a clear strategy, innovative projects, and above all with intelligent cooperation, we want to safeguard and guarantee the future basis and conditions for volunteering in Austria. This is an important contribution towards ensuring that the social quality of life in our country continues to be high. And that is why I would like to offer my warmest thanks to all Volunteers in Austria.

With best wishes

Alois Stöger

WHAT VOLUNTEERS DO IN AUSTRIA

A long tradition

Volunteer and honorary services can look back on a long and great tradition in Austria. The commitment to such activity is deeply rooted in wide sections of the population. Austria owes its high quality of life not least to volunteers working in the areas of welfare, health, culture and sports, disaster relief as well as rescue and ambulance services.

A strong commitment

A total of 46 percent of the population over the age of 15 carries out voluntary activity – a tremendously high figure. That means there are more than 3.5 million people in Austria engaged in voluntary activities. In organizations and associations

there are around 2.3 million people who are active voluntarily. About 2.3 million people are active in the field of neighbourhood assistance. In comparison to 2012 there are actually 150,000 more people carrying out voluntary work today. This means that voluntary engagement provides added value for our society – but it does not replace paid work.

Great efforts

The amount of time invested in voluntary engagement is considerable: the majority of those involved in voluntary work are active for up to 30 days a year. The majority of volunteers carry out these activities regularly, and many are active – often additionally – in temporary projects.

Volunteering not only offers an opportunity to contribute one's experience and skills in a useful way, but also represents a chance to acquire new competences, to develop one's own strengths and to take on responsibility.



KNOWLEDGE:

What defines volunteer work or voluntary engagement?

One can differentiate between two forms of voluntary work or voluntary engagement:

- **Formal voluntary work and/or honorary positions:**

This refers to unpaid services rendered in organizations and associations (e.g. a voluntary fire brigade, emergency services, social welfare institutions, sports clubs, cultural clubs or societies, environmental groups etc.).

- **Informal voluntary work and/or neighbourhood assistance**

This is also unpaid but takes place in private settings outside one's own household. It includes things like running errands, providing help with housework or gardening, personal assistance etc.

What motivates Austrian volunteers

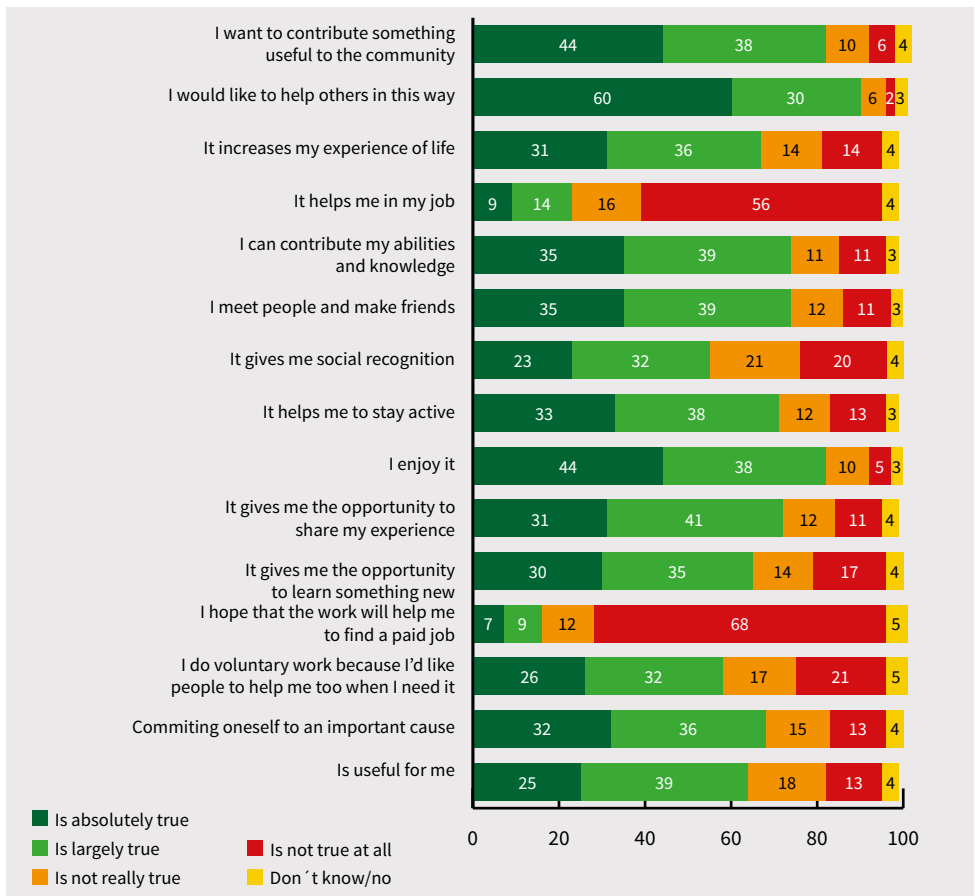
A wide range of motives

Austrian volunteers do a lot. And they do it for a wide variety of reasons. The most important motives for voluntary engagement are: helping other people (90 percent), enjoying the commitment

and making a useful contribution to the community (82 percent each), getting into contact with people and contributing one's own abilities and knowledge (74 percent each), remaining active in later years (71 percent),

committing oneself to an important cause (64 percent), learning something new (65 percent), or benefiting oneself (64 percent). The variety of motives are reflected in a multi-faceted and diverse volunteer culture.

Figure 1: Reasons for voluntary engagement (in %)



Source: IFES - Institute for Empirical Social Research, 2016

WHAT VOLUNTEERS DO IN AUSTRIA

” *I do voluntary work because I enjoy helping others, making a contribution towards society and at the same time remaining fit and active.*”
Markus W.

“

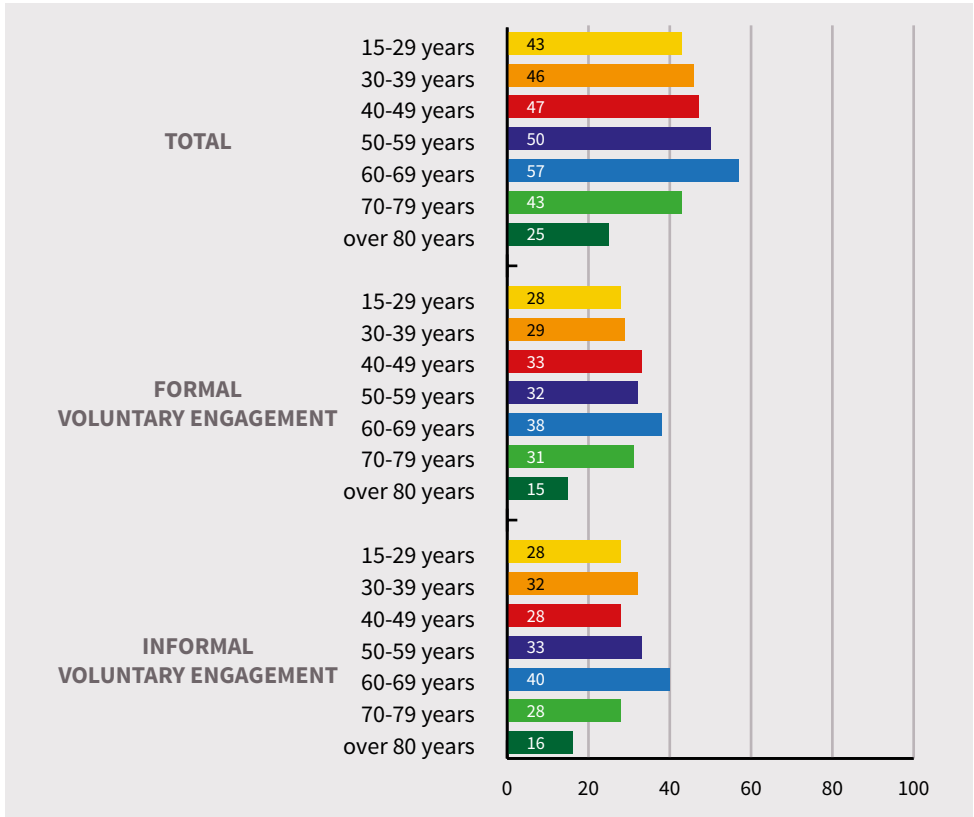
For all generations

Voluntary engagement is attractive for all age groups. Everyone can make a contribution. That is why participation levels are high in all age groups. Among 15-29 year olds, the

proportion of volunteers is 43 percent. The most active are 50-69 year olds (57 percent). Even in the age group of those over 80, more than a quarter are committed to voluntary activities.



Figure 2: Participation rates according to age



Source: IFES - Institute for Empirical Social Research, 2016

Voluntary engagement is not only attractive for all age groups – it also contributes towards solidarity between the generations and thus leads to a better mutual understanding and social cohesion.



KNOWLEDGE:

Where are people involved most

The largest proportion of volunteers are active in sports clubs and associations (approx. 588,000 persons). This is followed by disaster relief and emergency services (approx. 515,000), the arts and culture and leisure (approx. 440,000) and the social and health care sectors (approx. 367,000). Between three and four percent of the population, in other words 294,000 and 220,000 respectively, carry out voluntary activities in the environmental and church sectors as well in education and politics or in interest groups. Around 2% (147,000 each) are involved in supporting refugees or local community activities.

WHY VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT PAYS OFF

New perspectives

Voluntary engagement is not only of great benefit to society, but also to those individuals who do it. It's worth becoming part of the Austrian volunteers' family. Voluntary work is not only an interesting change from your usual work or training, but also an exciting chance to acquire new

competences, to develop one's own strengths, or to take on responsibility. That opens up new perspectives for many people.

More opportunities

Research shows that in voluntary work, abilities such as rhetorical skills, organisational talent, the ability to

work in a team or leadership qualities are trained. Numerous companies take voluntary engagement into account when considering job applications. For younger people, voluntary work therefore also improves their personal chances in the labour market and their career opportunities.

Staying active and fit

For older people, voluntary work is an opportunity to remain active and fit.

Voluntary engagement can lead to new social contacts, promote an active social life and increase one's quality of life in general. Studies have established a close connection between voluntary work and health. Voluntary engagement can have a positive effect on health, well-being and one's self-esteem. People who do voluntary work are simply making more of their lives.

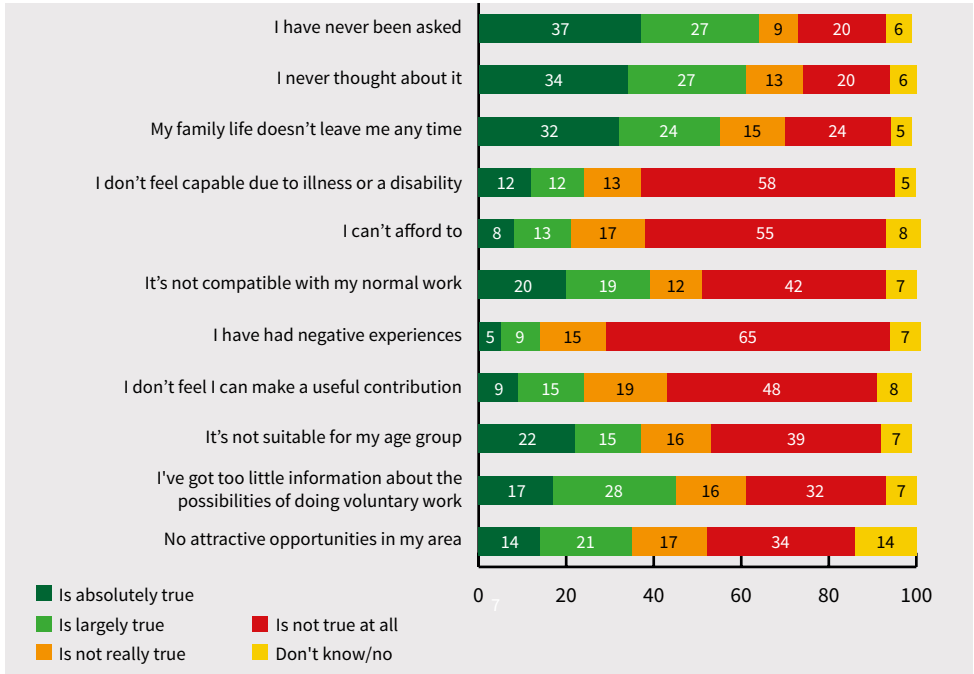


INFO:

What speaks against voluntary engagement

People who have not done any voluntary work until now frequently explain this by saying that they have not been asked yet, or that there was no requirement for it in their personal surroundings. Another major reason is their lack of time, for example due to their obligations towards their families. A lack of information also plays an important role: just under four out of ten people surveyed stated that they know too little about the existing opportunities to carry out voluntary work.

Figure 3: Reasons not to do voluntary work



Source: IFES - Institute for Empirical Social Research, 2016

How one can become part of the Austrian volunteers' family

First point of contact

For those who do not yet know how or where they can do voluntary work, the volunteers' portal

www.freiwilligenweb.at is the first point of contact. Freiwillegenweb's list of organizations provides an overview of places where one can become in-

volved. The experts of the Volunteers' Centres in Austria are available to provide advice and support for interested individuals and organizations.

The right choice

It is important to find the right type of voluntary work for yourself. Then you benefit most from your engagement.

It is also important that the borders to paid work are clearly demarcated. Voluntary activities which you enjoy and which are connected with education/training or further training are particularly interesting. This not only makes the work easier, it also provides valuable abilities which one can make use of in other fields of life.

Thanks to the variety and diversity of the Austrian volunteers' family, everyone can find an activity which appeals to them and which combines usefulness for oneself as well as for society as a whole.



KNOWLEDGE:

How does one recognize an attractive voluntary work organization

Numerous organizations look for people to take on certain tasks on a voluntary and unpaid basis. And people who work on a voluntary or honorary basis donate their time and efforts. Both of these parties – the person who commits themselves and the organization for which he or she does it, have to be able to rely on certain standards. Taking note of them and adhering to them pays – for volunteers and for organizations.

Framework conditions – quality goals

▪ **Description of activities**

Voluntary engagement should be enjoyable and appeal to the needs of the volunteers. A description of the activity should reveal the meaning of the engagement and the non-material benefits and personal advantages it provides. It should contain a short description of the organization, a description of the activities to be performed by volunteers, what is expected from the volunteer and his or her skills, the amount of

time involved, what the organization has to offer, and the start and duration of the volunteers' engagement. An accurate description as well as clarity regarding the obligations of the volunteer (e.g. confidentiality, duty of care) protect both sides from misunderstandings and the volunteer from being overwhelmed, and can avoid confusion or possible conflicts between employees and volunteers.

▪ **Beginning and introductory period**

For a good start in voluntary activity, an introductory period to get to know each other is necessary. In this way, the volunteers have the opportunity to have a

closer look at their tasks and to decide whether it corresponds to her or his wishes, expectations and abilities. For this purpose, when the activity begins it makes

sense to agree upon a trial period after which both sides can decide

whether they want to continue working together or not.

▪ **Support for volunteers**

Volunteers need a contact person who is always available so that they are not left alone in case of problems. This is why every institution enlisting the services of volunteers needs to appoint a contact person with the required competences and

resources (volunteers' coordination service). Alongside this support, opportunities for interaction between the volunteers themselves should also be promoted, and if required clinical supervision should be offered to volunteers.

▪ **Responsibility and participation in decision-making**

Right from the beginning of their activities, volunteers need clarity about what they can do and their obligations. In order to be able to identify themselves with the organization where they are

volunteering, they need to have sufficient information about it. A transparent organizational structure makes it clear where they can contribute their ideas and how they can have a say.

- **Reimbursement of costs**

In order that their unpaid engagement does not lead to unwelcome costs for them, it should be ensured that costs

which arise in carrying out their tasks (materials, travel expenses, postage etc.) are assumed by the organization.

- **Insurance**

In order to protect both the volunteers and the organization, care should be taken to provide sufficient insurance. Concluding an accident insurance for the volunteers should be a matter of

course. In addition, liability insurance taken out by the organization should cover all damage caused by volunteers during their activities.

- **Basic and advanced training**

In order to maintain and improve the quality standards of an organization (also in comparison to others), further training of staff is indispensable. This is of course also true for volunteers and constitutes an opportunity for their

personal development. In addition, further training programmes for volunteers contribute towards them feeling that they are being taken seriously and can lead to a stronger sense of identification with the organization.

▪ **Leaving**

A special feature of voluntary engagement is that it can be ended at any time. However, an ‘exit mode’ should be agreed

upon with them right at the beginning which enables a smooth and frictionless exit for all those involved.

▪ **Certificates**

Voluntary work can be of use and significance for future job applications etc. Volunteers should therefore be issued with a certificate indicating the time of service, the type of activity

and the further training attended or skills and qualifications acquired. To this end, there is an Austrian volunteers’ pass (see: www.freiwilligenweb.at).

▪ **Recognition**

Voluntary engagement should be recognized and appreciated. This should be shown in various

ways and in everyday dealings with each other.

(Sources: IGFÖ – Association of Austrian Volunteers’ Centres; ULF – Independent Provincial Volunteers’ Centre).

”

My voluntary work enabled me to get an insight into the occupation which I could imagine carrying out in the future, while at the same time benefiting from a legal framework and social insurance. - Elisabeth K.

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Objectives

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Team

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Volunteers' family

ces

Volunteers' centres

Recognition

Volunteers' pass

fire service

voluntary work

port

honorary

HOW THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS SUPPORTS VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT

Responsibility for voluntary work policy

Responsibility for policy on voluntary engagement at a federal level is concentrated in the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection. With a variety of activities, measures and services, it supports Austria's lively volunteers' culture. A clear strategy, an appropriate legal framework, smart co-operation, a broadly-based dialogue and operational readiness create a solid basis and a framework for voluntary engagement in Austria. It is our ambition to optimize these conditions further.

Voluntary Act

The Ministry of Social Affairs administers the Federal Law for the Promotion of Voluntary Engagement (Freiwilligengesetz). This federal law

regulates the framework conditions for formal voluntary activities, stipulates the framework conditions for formal voluntary activities serving the public interest with a view to promoting such activities and fostering participation in voluntary engagement. It also contains conditions on the carrying out of the Voluntary Social Year (FSJ), the Environmental Protection Year, the Holocaust Memorial Service and the Peace and Social Service Abroad as well as the Voluntary Integration Year.

„Voluntary years“

This refers to the Voluntary Social Year (FSJ), the Voluntary Environmental Protection Year, the Holocaust Memorial Service, and the Peace and Social Service Abroad as well as the Integration Year – all of these are

carried out in accordance with the Voluntary Work Act. Among other things it regulates conditions such as the recognition of organizations (as provider), fields of deployment, the obligations of organizations and places of deployment, the duration of the FSJ, the detailed rules under which it is carried out, and quality assurance. It also includes social insurance cover for participants, the payment of pocket money, educational support and guidance, and the payment of family allowance to young people.

Credits for alternative civilian service (as an alternative to military service)

The entry into force of the amendment to the Civilian Alternative Service Act on 1 October 2013 made it possible to count the following towards statutory civilian alternative service: a Voluntary Social Year, a Voluntary Environmental

Protection Year, Holocaust Memorial Service or Peace and Social Service Abroad. This is based on the fact that they comply with the Voluntary Act and is conditional on the voluntary work lasting for a continuous ten months and being carried out with a recognized organisation (provider).

Austrian Voluntary Council

The Austrian Voluntary Council is based at the Ministry of Social Affairs. It has the objective of raising the perceived value of voluntary engagement as a cornerstone of the community, and to further improve the framework conditions for voluntary work. The Austrian Voluntary Council is an institutionalised forum for dialogue, and is particularly involved in providing advice, promoting networking, and representing the interests of voluntary engagement and furthering its development. Its members - for a period of office of five years - are

representatives of the federal government, the federal provinces, the towns and local communities, the social partners, the political parties as well as representatives of all significant areas in which voluntary activities take place. The Austrian Voluntary Council according to the Voluntary Act was formed on 14 December 2012.

Report on voluntary engagement

The Voluntary Act lays down that a report on the status and development of voluntary engagement in Austria has to be drawn up jointly with the Austrian Voluntary Council at periodic intervals. The Second Report on Voluntary Engagement in Austria was published in 2015 (see www.freiwilligenweb.at). A national survey carried out in 2016 provides current figures, data and facts about voluntary engagement in Austria (see www.freiwilligenweb.at).



Freiwilligenweb

www.freiwilligenweb.at is Austria's first internet address for voluntary engagement. Freiwilligenweb functions as a central hub and networking platform for interested individuals and organizations. It aims to provide general and clearly structured information on voluntary engagement in Austria. For volunteers' organizations, Freiwilligenweb represents an additional platform via which they can present themselves. If someone wishes to do voluntary work, there is the opportunity to make direct contact with organizations which are registered in the database. The range of offers is being continuously extended.

Volunteers' centres

Austria's volunteers' centres find places where people can do voluntary work as well as providing advice and

guidance on the issue of voluntary engagement. They are a point of contact for people who want to engage in voluntary activities – and at the same time for organizations which want to offer voluntary work. Together with local hubs they ensure that supply and demand in the field of voluntary engagement come together.

Volunteers' centres offer initial and further training for volunteers and volunteers' coordinators or organise it. They also support the transfer of expertise and carry out information work. The Ministry of Social Affairs promotes their networking and supports their projects.

Projects

The Ministry promotes projects which are specifically related to voluntary engagement that are of national significance as well as pilot schemes organised by volunteers' organiza-

tions, and supports educational and quality assurance programmes.

Volunteers' fairs

The Ministry supports volunteers' fairs in the federal provinces. Volunteers' fairs are a good, successful and popular platform for the promotion of voluntary activities in general and for people to inform themselves about voluntary engagement. At a fair of this kind, it is possible to find out directly about the demands, opportunities and conditions of voluntary engagement, and to express one's interest.

Creating incentives for voluntary engagement

In the form of the Recognition Fund for voluntary engagement, there exists an additional opportunity for support for voluntary engagement since 3 July 2013. The fund promotes activities and initiatives which con-

tribute towards the development or realisation of innovative measures, particularly activities or initiatives designed to guarantee the future of voluntary engagement in Austria in the long term. The maximum subsidy for such activities or initiatives amounts to € 15,000.

Volunteer's pass

Voluntary engagement is about learning and education. It is about personal development and the acquisition of skills. The Austrian volunteer's pass provides the opportunity to officially record competences which have been acquired during voluntary engagement. In this way, a volunteer's pass records a personal development process. This can provide advantages in the world of work for younger volunteers and those in employment – such as when they are applying for a job or developing their careers.

The Austrian volunteer's pass can be downloaded from: www.freiwil-ligenweb.at.

Initial and further training

Organizations based on voluntary work need to increase their efforts to be attractive for voluntary engagement. They need to provide guidance to volunteers from the very beginning of their time with an organization to the end so that the volunteer can find his or her way within the structures and processes of the organization and become a part of it. And above all so that the volunteer can work according to his or her motivation and skills and experience a high level of satisfaction and meaningfulness. In order to fulfil these high demands, volunteers need to have contacts who are responsible for supporting them and their integration into the organization. The functions of vol-

unteer coordinator and volunteer manager demand a lot in terms of the specialist and person abilities of these persons.

In order to ensure that the training of the persons responsible for voluntary engagement is carried out on a standardised basis and at as high a level as possible, the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection provides a manual for the curricula of courses for persons in charge of volunteers. In this way the ministry is making a contribution towards quality assurance and improvement in the field of voluntary engagement in Austria.

Recognition

The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection is particularly interested in emphasising the excellent work carried out by volunteers and underlining its indispensability and significance for society. In various settings, such as events and the presentation of awards, this great commitment is brought out from behind the curtain so that we can appreciate it and say thank you.



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PUBLISHING INFORMATION

Media owner and publisher:

Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Stubenring 1 1010 Vienna

Place of publication and production: Vienna

Editing: Dept. V/A/6

Layout and printing: Ministry of Social Affairs

Title photo: © DOC RABE Media – Fotolia.com

ISBN: 978-85010-472-2

The brochure can be obtained free of charge from the Brochure Service of the Ministry of Social Affairs on the number 01 711 00-86 25 25 or online from www.sozialministerium.at/broschuerenservice.

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