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Labour, Social Affairs, Health,
Care and Consumer Protection
Republic of Austria

VOLUNTEERING
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Volunteering in Austria



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Foreword



Federal Minister
Korinna Schumann

Voluntary engagement is particularly highly valued in Austria. Nearly half – namely, about 48 per cent – of the Austrian population aged 15 and older engages in unpaid voluntary activities or serves as a volunteer in their free time. As such, volunteers are a vital pillar of our civil society. They make a significant contribution to social cohesion and to our high quality of life.

To support and promote this vital civic engagement, further measures have been implemented in recent years at various levels and across a wide range of sectors. The comprehensive amendment to the Federal Law for the Promotion of Voluntary Engagement (Voluntary Act) of 2023 has been particularly instrumental in improving the framework conditions. This amendment established clear definitions of the requirements for supporting, safeguarding, and valuing voluntary and honorary engagement. In collaboration with the Austrian Voluntary Council, the Austrian Volunteering Strategy was developed. This strategy identifies current and future challenges for voluntary engagement and formulates corresponding goals and measures.

This new edition of the brochure is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the social significance, value, diversity, and prospects of volunteering. Various statistics are used to illustrate the vibrancy of the volunteer sector. The additions and updates to the content reflect the dynamic nature of voluntary engagement.

My goal is to continue working with the Austrian Voluntary Council and in cooperation with all stakeholders to secure and further develop the framework conditions for voluntary engagement in Austria. Volunteering is crucial for Austria – but it cannot be taken for granted. I would therefore like to express many thanks to all volunteers for their impressive and important contribution to our social cohesion.

Korinna Schumann
Federal Minister

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The importance of volunteering in Austria

The importance of volunteering in Austria

What is voluntary engagement?

Voluntary engagement has a long and rich tradition in Austria. It is deeply rooted in wide segments of the population. Volunteering is not only an important pillar of our society but also contributes significantly to the quality of life in our country as well as to the volunteers themselves.
Within the welfare state, voluntary engagement meaningfully complements employment. It offers our society great added value, but it is not a substitute for paid work.

Types of volunteering:

- **Formal voluntary engagement or honorary engagement:** This refers to unpaid work carried out within organisations and associations, for example in the voluntary fire service, emergency services, social welfare organisations, sports clubs, cultural associations, environmental organisations, the church, etc. This may involve leadership roles, participation in core tasks (e.g. operations) or support activities (e.g. fundraising). The term 'honorary engagement' is used when a specific role is taken on as part of this commitment (e.g. chairperson of a club's board, fire brigade commander).

- **Informal voluntary engagement or neighbourhood assistance:** This refers to unpaid activities outside the family and one's own household. They are organised privately and take place without the backing of an association or organisation. These include activities such as running errands, providing help with housework or gardening, personal assistance, etc.

High levels of participation

A remarkable 48.2 per cent of the population aged 15 and over in Austria are involved in voluntary engagement. That equates to more than 3.7 million people who volunteer. Around 1.9 million people (24.1 per cent) are involved in formal voluntary engagement within organisations and associations. In the area of informal voluntary engagement (neighbourhood assistance), the number is just under 3 million people.



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The gender ratio is almost even: 51.5 per cent of volunteers are male, 48.5 per cent female. In the informal sector, however, more women (50.3 per cent) are active than men (49.7 per cent).

In recent years, there has been a growing shift in volunteering from the formal to the informal field. For example, the proportion of people engaged in informal voluntary engagement in Austria has risen by almost 9 per cent since 2016, from 30 per cent to around 39 per cent, whilst the number of people involved in formal volunteering has fallen slightly.

Where do most people volunteer?

The highest proportion of volunteers in the formal sector is in sport and physical activity (approx. 516,500 people). This is followed by disaster relief and emergency services (approx. 434,500 people), the arts, culture and leisure sector (approx. 399,600 people) and religion and the church (approx. 329,900 people). Around 269,300 people volunteer in the social and health sectors, around 220,000 in civic activities and community work, and around 187,300 in political work and advocacy. Around 189,900 and 176,100 people, respectively, are involved in voluntary engagement in the education sector and in the fields of the environment, nature and animal welfare.

A significant commitment

The time commitment involved in volunteering is significant: on average, volunteers spend around 6 hours a week on their voluntary engagement. That amounts to a total of around 22 million hours of volunteering per week. The total number of hours spent on formal voluntary engagement amounts to around 6 million per week, whilst the figure for informal activities is significantly higher at around 16 million.

What motivates Austria's volunteers

Volunteering is not only of great benefit to society, but also to those individuals who do it. It offers the opportunity to put one's experience and knowledge to good use, but is also an exciting chance to acquire new skills, develop one's own strengths and take on responsibility.



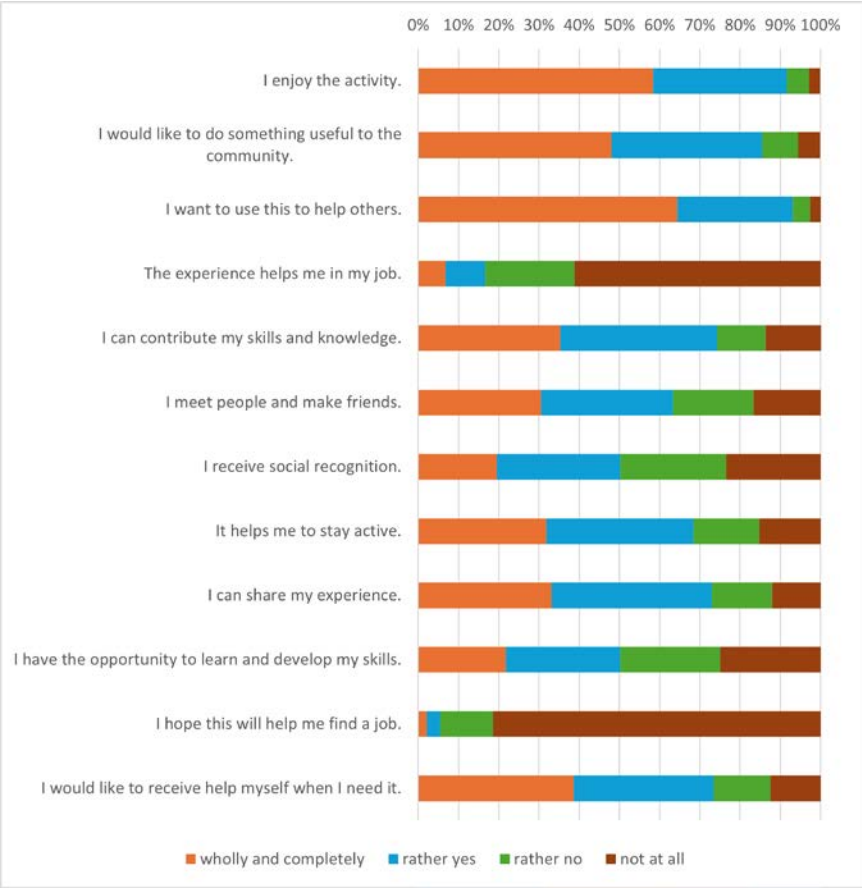
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A wide range of motivations

Austria's volunteers make a big difference. And they do so for a wide variety of reasons. The main motivations for volunteering are: helping other people (93 per cent), enjoying the experience (91.5 per cent), contributing some-

thing useful to the community (85.5 per cent) and putting one's own skills and knowledge to good use (74.3 per cent). By contrast, only a few people wish to use volunteering as an opportunity to find a job (5.4 per cent). This variety of motives and driving forces is reflected in a rich and vibrant culture of volunteering.

Figure 1: Reasons for volunteering (as a percentage)

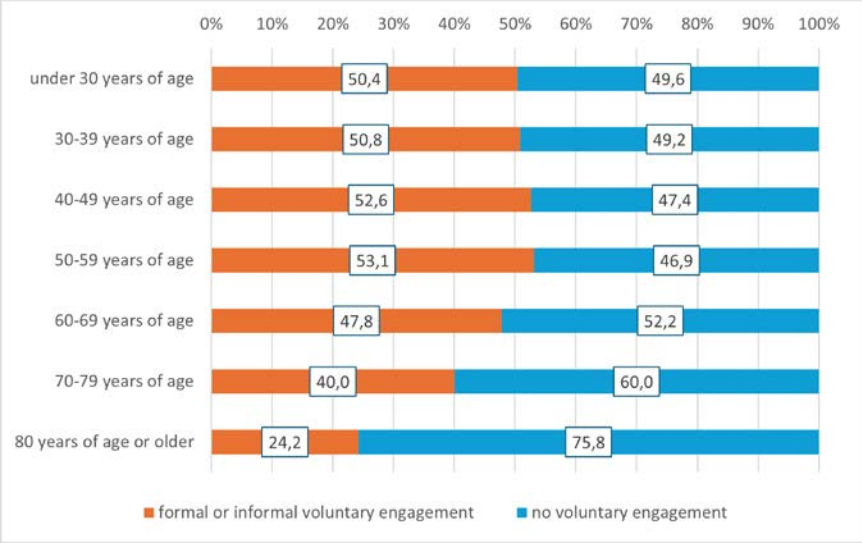


Source: Statistik Austria, Erhebung zur Freiwilligentätigkeit 2025.

For all generations

Volunteering inspires people of all ages. Everyone can get involved: it brings generations together and shows that everyone can make a difference. Participation in voluntary engagement is highest among the 50-59 year olds at 53.1 per cent, followed by the 40-49 age group (52.6 per cent) and the 30-39 age group (50.8 per cent). The lowest participation rate is found among people over 80: however, a remarkable 24.2 per cent of this group are still actively involved in volunteering.

Figure 2: Participation in volunteering among people aged 15 and over, by age (as a percentage)



Source: Statistik Austria, Erhebung zur Freiwilligentätigkeit 2025.

Breaking down the participation rate further by age and also distinguishing between types of voluntary engagement (formal/informal) reveals only minor differences in distribution between the two forms, apart from the generally higher participation rate in informal volunteering.
Volunteering is not only attractive to all age groups, but also contributes to intergenerational solidarity and thus leads to greater mutual understanding and cohesion between the generations.

Why volunteering pays off

New perspectives

Volunteering pays off. It brings significant benefits not only to society but also to the volunteers themselves. It offers an interesting balance to our usual work or training and an exciting opportunity to acquire new skills, develop strengths or take on responsibility. This opens up many new perspectives.



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More opportunities

Research shows that volunteering helps to develop abilities such as a sense of responsibility, rhetorical skills, organisational talent, the ability to work in a team and leadership qualities. Numerous companies therefore take voluntary engagement into account when assessing job applications. It thus also improves personal chances in the labour market and career opportunities.

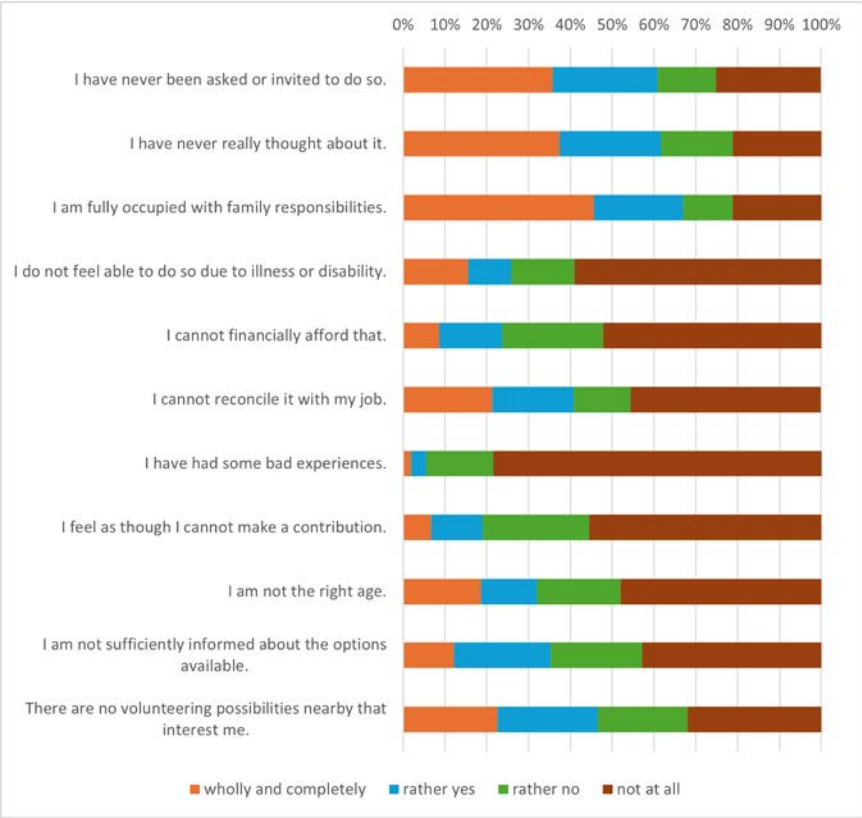
Staying active and fit

Volunteering offers the chance to remain active and fit. It can lead to new social contacts, promote an active social life, reduce loneliness and improve quality of life. Studies document a close link between volunteering and health. Volunteering encourages physical activity and a more active lifestyle. It can have a positive impact on physical and mental health, well-being and self-esteem. Particularly in later life, it differs from other forms of social engagement and has a beneficial effect on self-acceptance, personal growth, independence and the ability to cope with life's challenges.

What are the arguments against volunteering?

Those who do not volunteer cite family commitments as the main reason (around 67 per cent). Other key reasons given were that they had never thought about it (around 61.7 per cent) or had never been asked or invited to do so (60.8 per cent). Around 35.3 per cent also cite a lack of information about the opportunities available.
It is reassuring that very few have had negative experiences with volunteering, which suggests a high level of professionalism in the coordination and support of volunteers.

Figure 3: Reasons against volunteering



Source: Statistik Austria, Erhebung zur Freiwilligentätigkeit 2025.

How to find the right volunteering opportunity

Where to start

For anyone who is not yet sure how or where to get involved in volunteering, or who has questions about volunteering, the official volunteering portal freiwilligenweb.at and the website of the Service and Competence Centre for Voluntary Engagement, freiwillig-engagiert.at, are the first places to look. The Service and Competence Centre's directory of organisations provides an overview of organisations where one can get involved. The experts at the Service and Competence Centre and the volunteer centres in the federal states (freiwilligenweb.at) are also on hand to provide interested individuals, volunteers and organisations with expert advice, referral and support.



füruns – Zentrum für Zivilgesellschaft © Sabrina Saltori

The great diversity and variety of the Austrian volunteering landscape offers everyone the chance to find a role that matches their own interests and skills – whilst bringing benefits to both society and themselves.

Making the right choice

It is important to find the right volunteering type for oneself – because personal interest and individual skills play a key role in this. Particularly interesting are activities that are enjoyable and, at the same time, offer opportunities for learning or further training. In doing so, skills can be acquired that are useful in many areas of life beyond the voluntary role itself. However, it is equally important to always maintain a clear distinction from paid work.

Framework conditions – Quality objectives

How to recognise an attractive voluntary organisation

Many organisations are looking for people who are willing to volunteer their time, ideas and skills without remuneration. To ensure this collaboration works well, both the volunteers and the organisation need reliable framework conditions and clear standards. When these standards are taken seriously and put into practice, both sides benefit: the volunteers feel valued and well supported – and the organisation gains motivated, committed contributors.

Job description

Volunteering should be enjoyable and appeal to the needs of the volunteers. A description of the activity helps to highlight the purpose of the role and the personal and social benefits it brings. It should include a brief introduction to the organisation, a description of the volunteer's role(s), the expectations placed on them, the time commitment required, the support services offered by the organisation, and the start date and duration of the placement. A precise and transparent outline of the volunteer's responsibilities (e.g. confidentiality, diligence, etc.) protects both parties from misunderstandings, prevents volunteers from being overburdened, and helps to avoid ambiguities or potential conflicts between staff and volunteers.

Onboarding and orientation period

A successful start to volunteering requires a thorough introduction into the role and an orientation period. This gives the volunteer the opportunity to familiarise themselves with their areas of responsibility at their own pace and to assess whether these match their own expectations and abilities. It is advisable to agree on a probationary period at the start of the role. Once this has ended, both parties can decide whether they wish to continue the collaboration.

Support for volunteers

Volunteers need a contact person who can offer support when they have questions or face challenges. It is therefore important that every organisation working with volunteers has a well-trained volunteer support or coordination team with the appropriate skills and resources. It is equally important to actively encourage communication and contact between volunteers. Where necessary, qualified advice from specialists should also be available to provide the best possible support for volunteers.

Responsibility and participation

From the very start of their involvement, volunteers need clarity regarding their tasks, opportunities and responsibilities. To enable them to identify with the organisation, it is important that they are well informed about its aims, values and working methods. A transparent organisational structure makes it clear where they can contribute their ideas and how they can get involved.

Reimbursement of expenses

To ensure that volunteers' unpaid commitment does not become a financial burden, the organisation should cover all expenses necessary for their work (e.g. costs of materials, travel or postage).

Insurance

To protect both the volunteers and the organisation, it is essential to ensure adequate insurance cover. Accident insurance for volunteers is particularly important and should therefore always be provided. In addition, the organisation should have public liability insurance to cover any damage caused in the course of the volunteers' activities.

Basic and advanced training

The continuous professional development of staff is central to maintaining and further developing the organisation's quality standards. This applies equally to volunteers, for whom it opens up valuable opportunities for personal development. Furthermore, targeted training programmes foster a sense of appreciation and can lead to a stronger sense of identification with the organisation.

Leaving

A distinctive feature of voluntary engagement is that it can be ended at any time. However, an 'exit mode' should be agreed upon right from the start, enabling a smooth and frictionless exit for all parties involved.

Certificates

Volunteering can be significant and beneficial when applying for apprenticeships or jobs. Volunteers should therefore be issued with a certificate detailing the time spent volunteering, the nature of the work, any training courses attended and the skills acquired. The Austrian Volunteer Passport serves this purpose. It is available both in paper form and as a digital Volunteer Passport online (freiwilligenpass.at).

Recognition

Volunteering makes a significant contribution to the community and therefore deserves special recognition and appreciation. This should be demonstrated through various measures and also be evident in everyday interactions with one another.

Source: IGFÖ – Interessensgemeinschaft Freiwilligenzentren Österreich

How the Ministry of Social Affairs supports volunteering

Responsibility for volunteering policy

Responsibility for volunteering policy at a federal level is concentrated in the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (BMASGPK). The BMASGPK supports Austria's vibrant culture of volunteering through a wide range of activities, measures and services. A clear strategy, an appropriate legal framework and constructive cooperation create a strong foundation for volunteering in Austria. Our aim is to further improve these conditions.

Volunteering Act

The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection administers the Voluntary Act. This federal law regulates the framework for formal voluntary activities in the public interest, with the aim of supporting these activities and encouraging participation. It also contains provisions on the implementation of the Voluntary Social Year, the Voluntary Environmental Protection Year and the Holocaust Memorial, Peace and Social Service Abroad.

‚Voluntary service years'

‚Voluntary service years' refer to the Voluntary Social Year and the Voluntary Environmental Protection Year in Austria, as well as the Holocaust Memorial, Peace and Social Service programmes abroad, in accordance with the Voluntary Act. These are special forms of voluntary engagement that are subject to specific legal frameworks. In addition to promoting voluntary social engagement, they aim to support career guidance and personal development. Participants spend between 6 and 12 months volunteering at a placement as part of a

training arrangement, take part in an educational support programme and are covered by social security. They also receive pocket money and family allowance up to the age of 24. For further information, visit freiwilligenjahr.at.

Counting towards civilian service

Since 2013, it has been possible to count a Voluntary Social Year, a Voluntary Environmental Protection Year or a Holocaust Memorial, Peace or Social Service programme completed abroad under the Voluntary Act towards the civilian service. One of the requirements for this is to have completed ten months of continuous service with a recognised organisation. All other requirements can be found at freiwilligenweb.at.

Voluntary Council

The Austrian Voluntary Council is based at the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. Its aim is to promote volunteering as a cornerstone of the community and to further improve the framework conditions for voluntary engagement. The Austrian Voluntary Council is an institutionalised forum for dialogue and serves, in particular, to provide advice, promote networking, represent interests and further develop voluntary policy. Its members include representatives of the federal government, the federal provinces, towns and local communities, the social partners, political parties, as well as representatives from all key areas of voluntary engagement.

Volunteer Report

Every five years, the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, in cooperation with the Austrian Voluntary Council, produces a report on the state and development of volunteering in Austria. Nationwide surveys provide up-to-date figures, data and facts on volunteering

in Austria. These are supplemented by specialist contributions from experts, resulting in a well-rounded overall picture. The latest report on volunteering in Austria is available at freiwilligenweb.at.

Freiwilligenweb

freiwilligenweb.at is Austria's official internet portal for volunteering. The website serves as a central information platform for official publications relating to the Austrian voluntary sector. Its aim is to provide general and clearly structured information on volunteering policy and voluntary engagement in Austria.

Service and Competence Centre for Voluntary Engagement in Austria

The Service and Competence Centre for Voluntary Engagement in Austria, together with freiwillig-engagiert.at, complements the existing services offered by Freiwilligenweb. It acts as a central point of contact for anyone in Austria who wishes to get involved and make a difference. Those interested can find information there on volunteering opportunities, areas of activity and training programmes. Should there be a need for personal advice, the service centre puts people in touch with regional volunteer centres and advisory services.

The service centre supports voluntary organisations and initiatives by providing information, networking opportunities and forums for the exchange of knowledge. Through freiwillig-engagiert.at, organisations also gain an additional platform to showcase their activities and projects. People wishing to volunteer can contact the organisations listed in the database directly. The range of services is constantly being expanded.

Volunteer centres

Austria's volunteer centres act as intermediaries, provide advice and offer support and guidance in matters relating to volunteering. They serve as a point of contact for people wanting to volunteer and for organisations offering volunteer opportunities. Together with local volunteer networks, they ensure that supply and demand in the field of volunteering are matched. The volunteer centres offer or organise initial training and further education opportunities for volunteers and volunteer coordinators, facilitate the transfer of knowledge and provide information. The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection promotes networking amongst them and supports them in their projects.

Volunteering Strategy

Under the leadership of the Federal Ministry and as a result of cooperation between the federal government, the provinces, local authorities, social partners and civil society, the Volunteering Strategy 2023 was drawn up. The aim of the Volunteering Strategy is to maintain and expand diverse voluntary engagement in Austria through modern framework conditions, to enhance the standing and recognition of volunteering, and to facilitate the contributions of voluntary engagement to the common good across a wide range of areas. To this end, significant steps have already been initiated or continued (e.g. the establishment of the Service and Competence Centre for Voluntary Engagement in Austria, the further development of the Digital Volunteer Passport).

Volunteering fairs

The Federal Ministry supports volunteers' fairs in the federal states. These fairs provide a popular platform for providing targeted information about and promoting voluntary engagement. They connect interested individuals with organisations, highlight current social issues and make it easier to get started with volunteering. Requirements, opportunities and the framework conditions for voluntary engagement can be clarified directly at these events.

Projects

The Federal Ministry funds various volunteering-specific projects of national significance, as well as pilot projects run by voluntary organisations. It also supports measures for training and further education, as well as quality assurance in the volunteering sector.

Recognition Fund for Voluntary Engagement

The Recognition Fund for Voluntary Engagement has been established by the Federal Ministry and offers additional support for projects and initiatives. The fund is aimed in particular at innovative and structurally sustainable measures that contribute to the further development and (long-term) safeguarding of volunteering in Austria. The maximum grant amount is 30,000 euros for legal entities and 1,000 euros for individuals. Further information and documents can be found at freiwilligenweb.at.

Volunteers' Pass

Volunteering is an important setting for learning and personal growth, where people can further develop their personalities and acquire new skills. The Austrian Volunteer Passport helps to highlight these skills and document one's own development process – a real asset, for example, when applying for jobs or pursuing career development. The Austrian Volunteer Passport is also available in digital form at freiwilligenpass.at.

Further Development of the Digital Volunteering Passport

As part of the Volunteering Strategy 2023, the Voluntary Council commissioned the further development of the Digital Volunteer Passport. Three research projects are therefore investigating how the passport can be developed from a tool purely for recording skills and activities into a comprehensive digital platform that offers, amongst other things, networking, documentation and skills

validation for volunteers and organisations. Research is also being conducted into the extent to which such a platform can be used for the rapid, organised integration of informal, spontaneous helpers in the event of a crisis or disaster.

Initial and further training

It is more important than ever for voluntary organisations to offer attractive opportunities for volunteers. They are challenged to provide professional support for volunteers from the moment they join right through to the end of their involvement – so that volunteers can quickly settle in, are deployed in line with their motivations and skills, and experience a sense of purpose and satisfaction in the process.

This requires designated contact persons, such as volunteer coordinators, who are professionally and personally qualified and responsible for integrating and supporting the volunteers. The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection provides a 'Guide to Curricula for Training Courses for Those Responsible for Working with Volunteers' for the training of volunteer coordinators. This enables training to be delivered on a standardised basis and to a high standard. In this way, the Ministry makes a significant contribution to safeguarding and further developing the quality of voluntary engagement in Austria.

Recognition

The Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection is particularly committed to raising public awareness and highlighting the extraordinary social significance of the outstanding services carried out by volunteers. Through various initiatives, such as events and award ceremonies, this remarkable commitment is celebrated and honoured – but above all, gratitude is expressed for it.

Since 2023, a State Prize for Voluntary and Community Service in Austria has been awarded by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection and the Federal Chancellery as a sign of recognition and appreciation for voluntary and civic engagement. Outstanding initiatives and activities in the field of voluntary and community engagement are recognised in various categories (such as: innovation, inclusion, intergenerational engagement, disaster prevention and emergency aid, and a special prize for volunteer coordination).



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Almost half – around 48 per cent – of the Austrian population aged 15 and above spend their free time volunteering or carrying out honorary engagement. In doing so, volunteers make a significant contribution to the social cohesion and to our high quality of life.