

AT A GLANCE

Volunteering on the rise: Generation of 1968 more active even in retirement

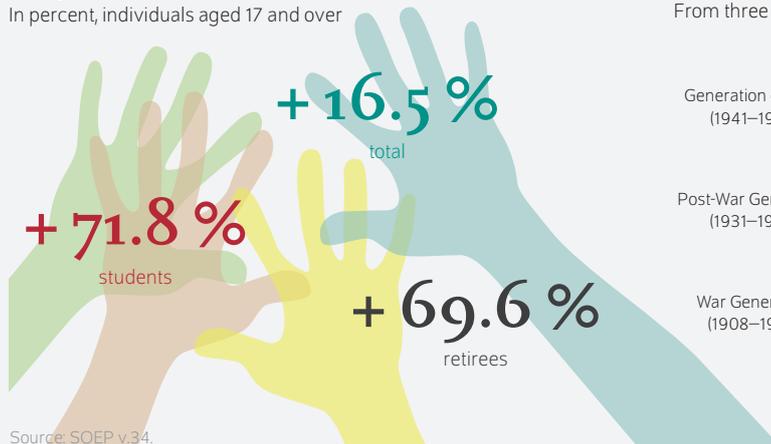
By Luise Burkhardt and Jürgen Schupp

- Empirical study examines the development of volunteer behavior of different generations in Germany since the 1990s
- The share of volunteers has increased over the last 30 years
- Both the Generation of 1968 and "Generation Y" (1983–1999) volunteer more than previous generations at that same age
- People who are more active, healthier, and happier are more likely to volunteer even after retiring
- Flexible and accessible volunteer opportunities and more appreciation of civic engagement are needed

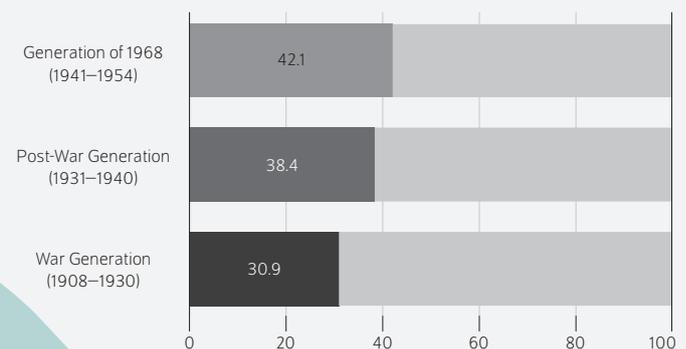
Volunteer rates of students and retirees have increased markedly

Three years before to three years after retirement

Change in volunteer rates from 1990 to 2017
In percent, individuals aged 17 and over



Share of volunteers leading up to and after retirement
From three years before to three years after retirement, in percent



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FROM THE AUTHORS

“Retirement is likely to be an increasingly attractive phase of life for future generations to engage in volunteer work. This offers particular potential for civil society, as older individuals primarily volunteer in the social sphere.”

— Jürgen Schupp, study author —

MEDIA



Audio Interview with Luise Burkhardt (in German)
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Volunteering on the rise: Generation of 1968 more active even in retirement

By Luise Burkhardt and Jürgen Schupp

ABSTRACT

According to representative survey results of the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), volunteer rates have been continually rising in Germany over the past 30 years. Contributing factors include young adults' growing willingness to volunteer as well as an increase in the volunteer behavior of older people, who begin to volunteer more often after entering retirement. A generational comparison shows that the Generation of 1968 (born between 1941 and 1954) volunteers especially frequently during retirement. Twenty-nine percent of respondents in this generation continued volunteering into retirement and 13 percent began volunteering after retiring, making the Generation of 1968 more active volunteers than older birth cohorts. Policies should support this potential resource in the future through flexible and accessible volunteer opportunities.

Civic engagement is currently attracting a great deal of public attention. In its report presented at the beginning of July 2019, the Equal Living Conditions Commission (*Kommission "Gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse"*) acknowledged the importance of civic engagement for social cohesion and established the German Foundation for Engagement and Volunteering (*Deutsche Stiftung für Engagement und Ehrenamt*).¹ It offers services for organizing civic engagement and also supports and promotes volunteering and civil society engagement. Volunteering is defined as a voluntary, non-remunerated activity within an institution or association (Box 1).² Without volunteers, many organizations and associations would not survive and many cultural, sports, and social opportunities would not exist. By analyzing data from the Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), this report examines how the volunteer rates of older population groups are affected by the transition from gainful employment into retirement. It also investigates the extent to which younger generations are willing to volunteer over the last 30 years.³

Volunteer rates steadily increasing

Volunteering among the German population has increased steadily over the past 30 years (Figure 1). About 27 percent of those aged 17 and over carried out volunteer work in Germany in 1990, and by 2017, the rate of volunteers increased to 32 percent. This corresponds to a total of 22 million volunteers.⁴ In recent years, politicians have improved volunteering conditions to compensate for possible constraints and disadvantages associated with volunteering and to increase societal

¹ Kommissionsbericht 2019, *Unser Plan für Deutschland – Gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse* (in German; available online); accessed on September 24, 2019. This applies to all other online sources in this report unless stated otherwise.

² Harald Künemund and Jürgen Schupp, "Konjunkturen des Ehrenamts – Diskurse und Empirie," in *Produktives Altern und Informelle Arbeit in Modernen Gesellschaften*, ed. Marcel Erlinghagen and Karsten Hank (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), 145–163 (in German; available online).

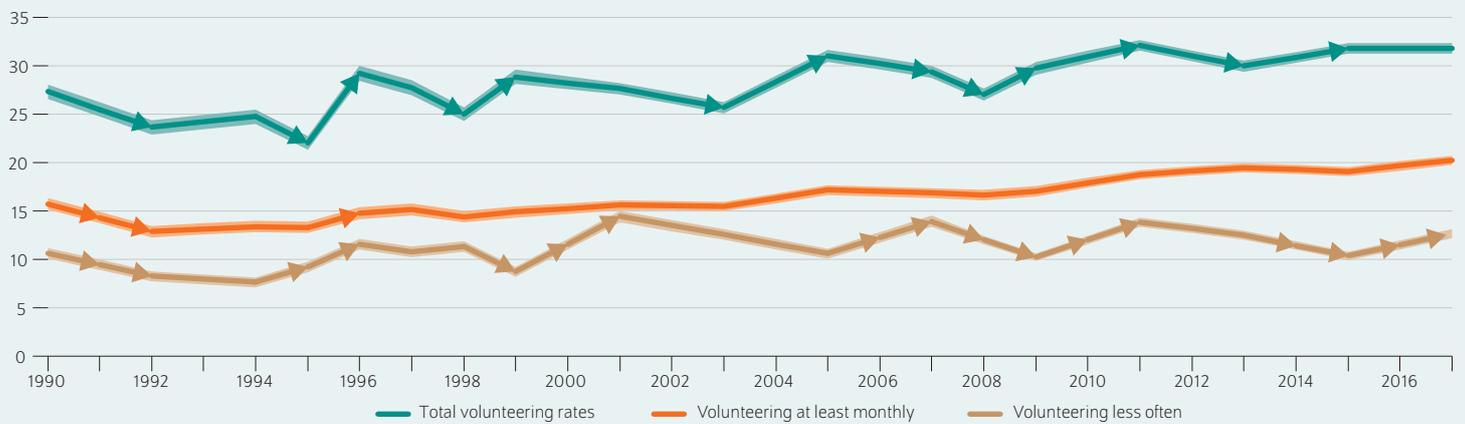
³ Cf. to analysis possibilities to this research question using SOEP: Künemund and Schupp, "Konjunkturen des Ehrenamts."

⁴ The German Volunteer Survey (Deutsche Freiwilligen survey, FWS), which has recorded volunteer rates and the willingness of those 14 and older to volunteer since 1999, reports around 31 million volunteers (in German; available online).

Figure 1

Volunteer rates in Germany since 1990

In percent, individuals aged 17 and over



Note: Line shading indicates 95-percent confidence intervals. Arrows indicate statistically significant change to the previous year.

Source: SOEP v.34, individual weights applied.

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Volunteering on a regular basis in particular has increased in the past 30 years.

appreciation of volunteer work.⁵ The rate of volunteering on a regular basis is growing more strongly and consistently than the rate of occasional volunteering.

Increase in volunteering most prominent among youth, retirees, and in smaller cities

The volunteer rate has increased in both East and West Germany since 1999 (Table). While the share of volunteers in 2017 in East Germany was 28 percent (around 4 million individuals), it was 33 percent in West Germany (around 18 million individuals).⁶

Gender differences in volunteering have also converged over the past 30 years. The share of female volunteers increased from 21 to 30 percent and is now only marginally lower than the share of male volunteers (33 percent). One possible cause is the increased labor force participation of women, who

⁵ In 2007, for example, a volunteer flat rate was introduced in the Income Tax Act. In 2011, the tax-free allowance for sports coaches etc. according to Sec. 3 no. 26 Income Tax Act was introduced as a part of the Annual Tax Act 2010, and in 2013 the Act to Promote Volunteering was passed, which increased the volunteer flat rate to 720 euros. Finally, in 2012, the European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity increased public awareness of volunteering, especially in old age.

⁶ The sharp decline in volunteering in East Germany between 1990 and 1999 was probably not only a consequence of the transformation of the political system in the former GDR, but also due to the associated organizational changes and changes to the environment of civic clubs and organizations (Vereine) during the German reunification. Cf. Eckhard Priller and Gunnar Winkler, "Struktur und Entwicklung des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements in Ostdeutschland," in *Enquete-Kommission Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements*, ed. Deutscher Bundestag (2002), 17–144 (in German).

Box 1

Definition and measuring volunteer work in the Socio-Economic Panel

This Weekly Report analyzes the development of formal volunteer work. Volunteer work is a voluntary, non-remunerated activity in the context of clubs or organizations, including community service but excluding private care of family members or duties that would count as neighborly aid.

Since 1985, the SOEP has been collecting data on volunteer work of the population aged 17 and over living in Germany using the following questions:

Which of the following activities do you take part in during your free time? Please check off how often you do each activity: at least once a week, at least once a month, less often, never.

Data is collected using the SOEP individual questionnaire for seven to twelve different leisure activities. Respondents can indicate multiple activities.

Volunteer behavior was divided into three subcategories for the purpose of the empirical analysis. Individuals who indicated they volunteer at least once a month were labeled as regular volunteers. Those who volunteer less often are categorized as infrequent volunteers. Those who have never volunteered are non-volunteers.

Table

Evolution of individual characteristics of volunteers

In percent, individuals aged 17 and over

	1990	1999	2009	2017
Total volunteering	27.3	28.9	29.7	31.8
Region				
West	27.5	30.2	30.4	32.6
East	26.6	23.1	26.6	27.9
Gender				
Male	33.7	33.8	32.3	33.3
Female	21.5	24.2	27.2	30.4
Level of education				
Lower secondary school-leaving certificate	23.8	25.0	24.5	24.7
Intermediate secondary school-leaving certificate/ Specialized upper secondary school-leaving certificate	30.9	31.4	32.4	33.9
Upper secondary school-leaving certificate	39.1	40.5	40.3	42.4
Still in school	27.0	31.7	34.9	46.4
Employment status				
Employed	32.0	32.9	33.7	34.7
Not employed	24.0	28.0	24.8	24.0
Vocational training	27.5	29.5	34.9	32.9
Retired	17.0	22.0	24.0	28.8
Churchgoing/participation in religious events				
Regularly (at least monthly)	39.7	45.4	48.3	52.9
Community size				
Over 20 000 inhabitants	32.4	33.7	34.5	37.0
Over 20 000 to 100 000 inhabitants	24.1	28.2	27.9	32.3
100 000 or more inhabitants	23.6	23.3	25.3	25.9
Age groups				
17–29 years	25.7	29.3	31.7	33.1
30–39 years	31.0	29.0	30.0	28.0
40–49 years	38.0	35.0	34.0	35.0
50–59 years	30.0	33.0	32.0	34.0
60–76 years	22.0	27.0	28.0	33.0
Over 76 years	9.0	12.0	16.0	23.0
Observations	13,808	13,985	20,632	26,728

Source: SOEP v.34, individual weights applied.

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The share of volunteers is particularly large among people who regularly attend religious events, students, and people with a higher education degree.

frequently work participation, which entails potential volunteering opportunities.⁷

A higher level of education goes hand in hand with increased involvement in volunteering. While the share of volunteers without a degree or with a lower secondary school-leaving certificate remains at one quarter, the share of people with a school-leaving certificate who are involved is significantly higher at 42 percent. The share of students volunteering has

increased in particular, from 27 percent in 1990 to 46 percent in 2017.⁸

When comparing the share of volunteers in terms of the population of the place of residence, there are striking differences between cities and rural areas. While the share of those volunteering in smaller municipalities between 1990 and 2017 increased from 32 to 26 percent, only 23 to 26 percent of those living in big cities were volunteering.⁹

⁷ However, just like higher rates of employment, an increase in women's participation in volunteering does not automatically imply gender equality in volunteering. Cf. Julia Simonson et al, *Freiwilliges Engagement in Deutschland, Empirische Studien zum bürgerschaftlichen Engagement* (2017) (in German; available online).

⁸ At the same time, the reduction of length of schooling up to Abitur and the simultaneous increase in weekly school hours as a result of the G8 led to less volunteering by young people affected by the education reform. Cf. Christian Krekel, "Can Raising Instructional Time Crowd Out Student Pro-Social Behavior? Unintended Consequences of a German High School Reform," *CEP-Discussion Paper 1495* (2017) (available online).

⁹ The recently presented Commission report pointed to the lack of important infrastructure especially in rural areas. Thus, higher volunteer rates in rural areas often also play a compensatory role.

Individuals do not volunteer consistently throughout their lives. Those in middle age (between 30 and 59 years old) show the highest volunteer rates. On the one hand, the rising trend among young adults is striking. The share of volunteers between 17 and 29 years old increased from 26 percent in 1990 to one third in 2017. The significant increases in this age group occurred in 2009 before the abolition of compulsory military service in 2011.

On the other hand, the increase in the oldest age group is considerable. The volunteer rate among individuals who are about to retire or have just exceeded the statutory retirement age (60 to 76 year olds) increased by more than ten percentage points during the observation period to 33 percent.¹⁰ For those 77 years or older, an ever growing group due to longer life expectancies, the share has risen by 14 percentage points since 2009 to 23 percent.

Overall, individuals 65 and older volunteer more today than they did 20 to 30 years ago. This is reflected in an increase from three million in 1990 to seven million in 2017. The share of this age group of all volunteers has also increased.

Different post-retirement volunteer rates amongst older generations

Volunteer rates well beyond retirement have been on the rise due to improved health in older age, an increase in the level of education among the population, and the positive social and political discourse on aging and productivity in old age. A further explanation lies in the respective generation affiliation. Members of the comparably large Baby Boomer Generation, born between 1955 and 1969, will gradually reach retirement age and resign from gainful employment in the years ahead. This large group is of particular interest to civil society, as it represents a potential resource of volunteers who could invest their leisure time in benefiting the common good.¹¹

The increasing volunteer rates of the older age groups will be examined in detail in the following section. So far, the literature has found no significant correlation between entering retirement and an increase in volunteer rates.¹² Furthermore, no research results are yet available on starting volunteer work after retirement that also consider the generational

¹⁰ The regulations on the statutory retirement pension are formulated in sections 35 and 235 of the Sixth Social Code. (in German; § 35 SGB VI; § 235 SGB VI).

¹¹ Gertrud M. Backes and Jacqueline Hölzge, "Überlegungen zur Bedeutung Ehrenamtlichen Engagements im Alter," in *Produktives Altern und Informelle Arbeit in Modernen Gesellschaften*, eds. Marcel Erlinghagen und Karsten Hank (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), 277–299 (in German).

¹² For an overview of the research results of international studies on the relationship between employment and volunteering in retirement, cf. Susanne Maurer, "Der Einfluss Der Früheren Erwerbstätigkeit Auf Freiwilliges Engagement Im Ruhestand," in *Arbeit im Alter. Altern & Gesellschaft*, eds. Simone Scherger und Claudia Vogel (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018), 195–215.

Box 2

Generations according to Karl Mannheim

The concept of generation applied here is based on the work of Karl Mannheim.¹ According to Mannheim, a generation consists of people who were born in the same year or during the same period and therefore grew up under similar political, economic, and social circumstances. They share similar experiences, attitudes, and behavioral patterns.

In the SOEP, seven generations can be identified in more than 30 survey years (1984–2017):

Year of birth	Generation name	Observations	Year of statutory retirement age
1908–1930	War Generation (Kriegsgeneration)	4 451	1973–1995
1931–1940	Post-War Generation (Nachkriegsgeneration)	7 202	1996–2005
1941–1954	Generation of 1968 (68er-Generation)	13 557	2006–2019
1955–1962	Early Baby Boomers (Frühe Babyboomer)	11 028	2022–2029
1963–1969	Late Baby Boomers (Späte Babyboomer)	12 657	2030–2036
1970–1982	Reunification Generation (Wiedervereinigungsgeneration)	19 212	
1983–1999	Generation Y	14 420	

¹ Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works, Volume 5*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York: Routledge, 1952), 276–322.

affiliation.¹³ Presumably, in recent years generations have retired who were influenced early in their lives to become involved in volunteer work in old age, such as the Generation of 1968, whose members were greatly influenced by the civic protests in this era.¹⁴ Hence, we assume that this generation shows a higher volunteer rate in old age.

Using the SOEP data, seven distinct generations were identified (Box 2).¹⁵ The activation potential for beginning to volunteer after entering retirement likely differs between generations due to differing socialization, volunteering policies, and differing social discourse on productive ageing.

¹³ However, Saka researched the influence of cohort membership on volunteerism at age 50+ using SOEP data and has shown that volunteerism in those over 50 has steadily risen due to a complex interplay of cohort membership, period effects, and composition effects. Saka also showed that high volunteer rates were identified when controlling for composition effects for the Pre-War Generation, War Generation, and Post-War Generation compared to the Adenauer Generation. Belit Şaka, "Einfluss der Kohortenzugehörigkeit auf das ehrenamtliche Engagement im Alter Ab 50 Jahren," *Arbeit im Alter* (2018): 269–293.

¹⁴ In the USA, this would be the Long Civic Generation, for example. Cf. Thomas Rotolo and John Wilson, "What Happened to the 'Long Civic Generation'? Explaining Cohort Differences in Volunteerism," *Social Forces* 82, no. 3 (2018): 1091–1121 (available online).

¹⁵ With his Generation Approach, Karl Mannheim provides the theoretical framework for this assumption (see Box 2). Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations."

Figure 2

Generation-specific volunteer behavior in retirement

Three years before to three years after retirement, in percent



Note: Individuals aged 60 to 76.

Source: SOEP v.34, individual weights applied.

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The Generation of 1968 shows higher rates of volunteer work in retirement compared to previous generations.

Three of the seven generations observed have already reached the statutory retirement age of 65.¹⁶ Information for the War Generation, the Post-War Generation, and the Generation of 1968 can be used for the ages of 60–76 years. It is examined whether their volunteer rates increase in old age. A look at the generation-specific changes in volunteering around retirement (encompassing the period three years before retirement until three years afterwards) confirms the well-known result for all the generations examined here: volunteer behavior around retirement tends to remain consistent (Figure 2).¹⁷ On average, a quarter of those entering retirement continue to volunteer while slightly less than half remain non-volunteers. Only a quarter of individuals begin or stop volunteering in the first few years of retirement. In regards to the activation potential of retirement, the oldest cohort, the War Generation, shows decreasing volunteer rates overall, as more people are ending volunteer work (22 percent) than beginning it (9 percent). Somewhat less than a quarter of this generation volunteered consistently during the observation period around the entry into retirement. In contrast, volunteering has increased in both the Post-War Generation

and the Generation of 1968. In both birth cohorts, the number of individuals beginning to volunteer during retirement exceeded the number of individuals who quit volunteering at the same time. In addition, in both generations, the share of individuals volunteering both before and after retirement was significantly higher than in the War Generation (about 30 percent).

More active, healthier, and happier people are more likely to start volunteering during retirement

There are many reasons an individual decides to volunteer during retirement. For the three generations discussed previously, a panel econometric model is applied to examine if entering retirement has an effect on volunteer behavior. Considering the increased volunteer rates for people aged 65 and over and the political support and greater recognition for volunteer work, we assume that the generations that will gradually leave the labor force and enter retirement over the next few years will increasingly take up volunteer work as retirees.

The model's independent variable indicates if a person is beginning (value 1) or ending (value 0) volunteer work. In order to explain the changes in volunteer behavior through various characteristics, a logistic regression with person-specific fixed effects is estimated.¹⁸ This enables the identification of changes in volunteer behavior around retirement and, at the same time, to control for unobserved individual differences that do not change over time, such as intrinsic motivation. The key explanatory variable indicates if a person is entering retirement. Since the analysis focuses on beginning or ending volunteer work, those who have consistently volunteered or never volunteered during the observation period are excluded. To identify generation-specific effects, generational affiliation was interacted with a binary variable that takes on value 1 for retirees and value 0 for the employed. The underlying assumption is that generational affiliation enhances or reduces the effect of retirement on volunteering.

The regression results show that entering retirement has no significant genuine effect on the probability of beginning or ending volunteer work (Figure 3).

However, there is a significant interaction effect for the Generation of 1968, which underpins the descriptive result of a higher likelihood to start or restart volunteering in retirement in this generation. Age, on the other hand, does not seem to be important regarding changes in volunteer behavior for all three generations.

¹⁶ Persons are classified as having entered retirement when they have reached the statutory retirement age of 65 or older, are not employed, indicate an actual work time of "zero," and receive a pension. The self-employed are not included in the analyses. The statutory retirement age of 65 years applies to all generations considered in the analyses.

¹⁷ Karsten Hank and Marcel Erlinghagen, "Dynamics of Volunteering in Older Europeans," *Gerontologist* 50, no. 2 (2010): 170–78 (available online); John Wilson, "Volunteerism Research: A Review Essay," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 41 (2012): 176–212 (available online).

¹⁸ These models are an appropriate tool in empirical social research to model causal relationships between time-varying variables, although in a non-experimental design certain assumptions have to be made about possible endogeneity. This means that it is assumed that the decision to begin volunteering to three years before retirement is not considered to be the cause of choosing to retire earlier or later. Cf. Marco Giesselmann and Michael Windzio, *Regressionsmodelle zur Analyse von Paneldaten* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012).

The regression model also takes into account various time-varying characteristics. Thus, alternative leisure activities of the respondents are considered as control variables. Such activities include regular attendance of religious services, participation in sports or local politics, regular social activities, and informal assistance given to friends and relatives. Estimates show that these newly begun or resumed regular leisure activities are significantly positively related to volunteering at the age of 60-76. Thus, individuals who are regularly active in other areas are more likely to volunteer. Individuals between the ages of 60 and 76 who report better health and life satisfaction since the last survey period are more likely to be volunteers in old age.

Volunteer behavior of the younger generations

In order to draw conclusions for the future volunteer behavior of younger birth cohorts' based on the conducted generation-specific analyses, it is worth taking a closer look at the volunteer rates of those generations in four selected survey years (1990, 1999, 2009, 2017).

The Generation of 1968 had the highest volunteer rates in 1990 but was overtaken by the Early Baby Boomers (1955–1962) in 1999. Ten years later, the Late Baby Boomers (1963–1969) showed the highest volunteer rate of 35 percent (Figure 4). As of the most recent observation year, 2017, the Late Baby Boomers still exhibit the highest volunteer rate.

The volunteer rates of both the Late Baby Boomers and the Generation of the German Reunification (1970–1982) steadily increased during the observation period. The youngest generation observed, Generation Y, enters the comparison with a high proportion of volunteers in 2009, amounting to around one third of this generation. Expectedly, volunteer rates among members of the War and Post-War Generations are decreasing as they age.

The Generation of 1968 accounts for the largest share of all volunteers in three out of four years; in 2017, Generation Y had the largest share at 24 percent (Figure 5).

The Early and Late Baby Boomers will be approaching retirement age over the next few years. In light of their comparatively high proportion of the total population and their already above-average volunteer rates, they will probably continue to make up a large share of volunteers for many years to come.

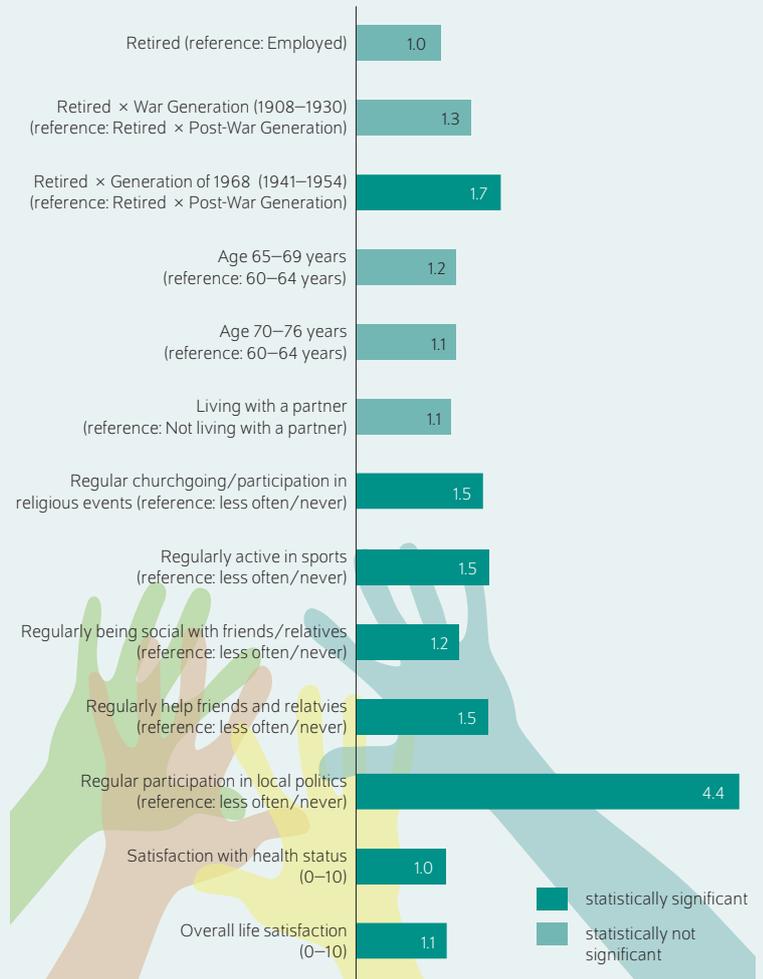
Conclusion and outlook

For over 20 years, the population in Germany has been becoming increasingly willing to volunteer their time. This development is driven by both rising volunteer rates among young adults as well as older people's increased desire to volunteer during retirement; the Generation of 1968 shows especially high volunteer rates once retired.

Retirement is likely to be an increasingly attractive phase of life for future generations to engage in volunteer work. This

Figure 3

Volunteer behavior change determinants around retirement Regression coefficients



Notes: Logistic regression with fixed effects, 1992–2017, individuals aged 60 to 67. Dependent variable (0/1) indicates change in volunteer behavior. Darker shades show statistical significance at a 5-percent level. "Retired × War Generation" denotes the interaction, that is, the joint effect of the variables "Retired" and "War Generation". Observations: 2533.

Legend: The bar for the "retirement" variable is a light green, indicating that retirement itself is not statistically significantly related to the probability of volunteering. If retirement is considered together with generational affiliation (second and third bar), there is a significant positive effect for the Generation of 1968 (dark green bar). Consequently, individuals from the Generation of 1968 are significantly more likely than individuals from the Post-War Generation to begin volunteering before and after retirement.

Source: SOEP v.34 (1992 to 2017) data.

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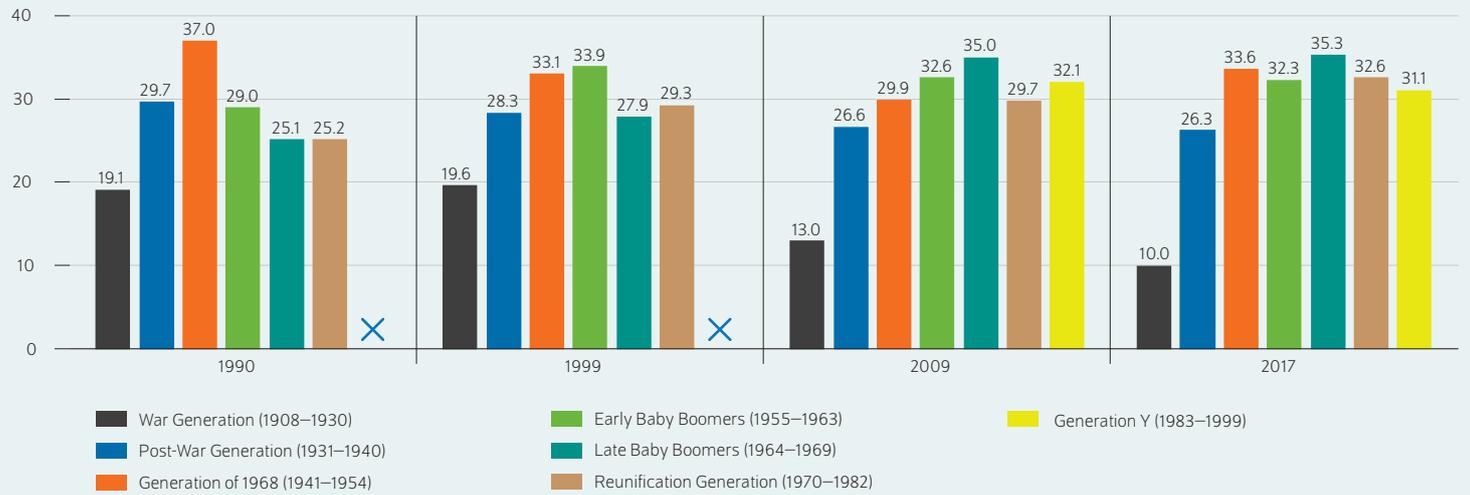
At retirement age, the Generation of 1968 volunteers at higher rates compared to previous generations.

VOLUNTEERING

Figure 4

Volunteer rates by generation

In percent, individuals aged 17 and over



Source: SOEP v.34, individual weights applied.

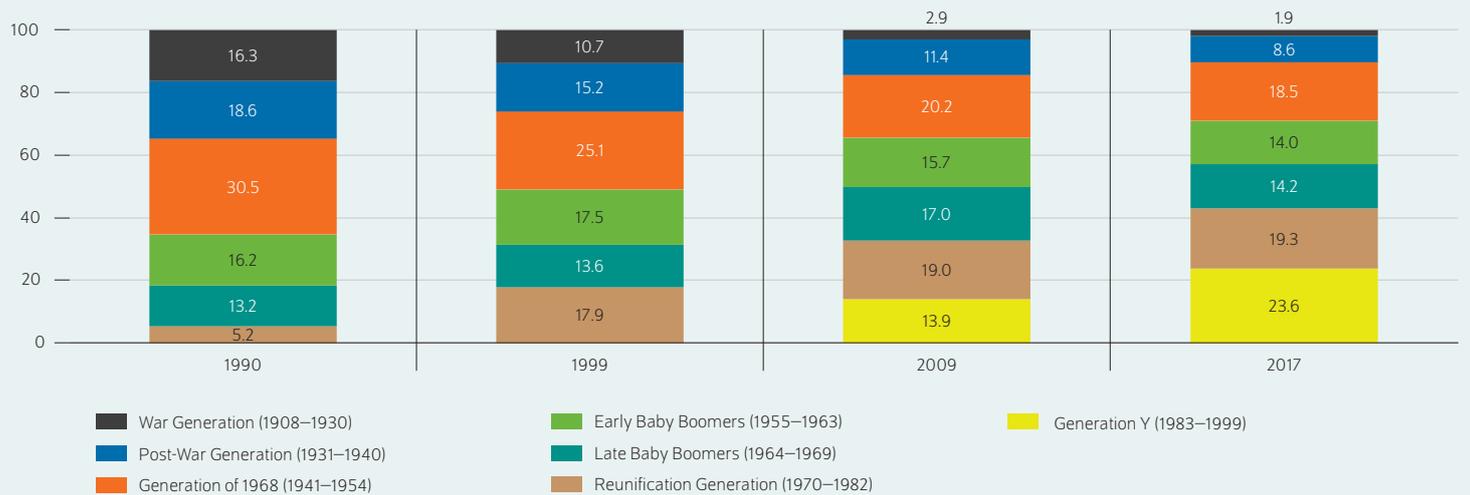
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The volunteer rates of the younger generations have increased significantly since 1990.

Figure 5

Share of individual generations of all volunteers over time

In percent, individuals aged 17 and over



Source: SOEP v.34, individual weights applied.

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In three out of four years, the Generation of 1968 provided the largest share of volunteers.

offers a particular potential for civil society, as older individuals primarily volunteer in the social sphere.¹⁹

In recent years, volunteer rates have been on the rise and volunteers have contributed significantly to tackling the societal challenges posed by an increased flow of refugees into Germany.²⁰ This led to a greater appreciation of the value of volunteer work and thus to the expansion of potential subsidies for volunteer work by politicians. The ongoing “Fridays for Future” protests since August 2018 also indicate a generation increasingly committed to civic engagement is growing

up. With this in mind, mandatory civic engagement for young adults, a favored topic among politicians, does not seem to be productive.²¹ In order for all generations and social classes to be able to engage in volunteer work, it is recommended that volunteer opportunities remain flexible and easily accessible and that project funding for successful initiatives is not cut. In addition, policies should focus on expanding volunteer opportunities in ways that would benefit society and provide volunteers with adequate support and information. New forms of volunteering should be promoted as well, such as digital civil engagement.

19 Claudia Vogel, Corinna Kausmann, and Christine Hagen, “Freiwilliges Engagement Älterer Menschen. Sonderauswertungen Des Vierten Deutschen Freiwilligensurveys,” in *Freiwilliges Engagement in Deutschland. Freiwilligensurvey 1999* (2009), 209–301 (available online).

20 Cf. Jannes Jacobsen, Philipp Eisenecker, and Jürgen Schupp, “In 2016, around One-Third of People in Germany Donated for Refugees and Ten Percent Helped out on Site—yet Concerns Are Mounting” *DIW Weekly Report*, no. 17 (2017): 97–108 (in German; available online; English version available online).

21 An alternative to compulsory service that is more compatible with employment or educational training appears to be a part-time option in youth voluntary services for young adults under 27, which came into force on May 6, 2019.

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