

Tracer study 2021

A quantitative study among returnees (2011-2020)

Summary

Ever since the Development Workers Act was passed in 1969, the development service as an instrument of personnel cooperation has undergone constant change. This has affected both the preparation and implementation of the service, as well as the setting for a return. In 2006, the AGdD last examined the opportunities and challenges that professionals face during their professional reintegration into the labour market and the German social environment. In the meantime, the understanding of what a „return from service“ entails needs to be looked at in a broader and more differentiated way. In particular, a „return“ does not necessarily mean a geographical one to the country of origin. In order to capture what returning looks like today and what it means to those affected by it, this tracer study was commissioned.

The aim of the study is to gain an insight into the professional integration after the deployment as well as the social commitment of former professionals of the Development Service and the Civil Peace Service. The results are to be used to strengthen both the social and political recognition of the personnel instrument known as „development service“. In addition, they provide the basis for reviewing and adapting those instruments that serve for accompanying returned development service professionals. This study was commissioned by the AGdD and conducted by IMAP GmbH.

Methodologically, the tracer study is designed as an online cross-sectional survey. Based on an initial structural proposal and the results of a stakeholder workshop with the Development Service and Civil Peace Service providers, the study team developed a draft questionnaire. It was then further developed together with the AGdD and underwent a pre-test with professionals who had returned after 2020 and thus no longer fell into the study population. The final survey comprised 63 questions and was made available online. Based on the response and completion rates, the data quality can be rated as positive. The present data set represents the assessments and experiences of a critical mass of returnees and is therefore appropriate for the purpose of the study.

The professional background of the former professionals is predominantly academic with relevant knowledge ranging up to relevant professional experience in development cooperation. Although a „professional in Development Service / Civil Peace Service“ is not a formal job title, the term nevertheless describes a job profile that many people actively prepare for in their training and career.

With regard to the respondents' motivation for a deployment, it is important to note that „orientation towards the common good“ has a higher priority than „personal challenge“ and „career orientation“. This is true regardless of the time a professional has spent in one or more deployments. In this respect, the results suggest that solidarity-based commitment continues to be a fundamental motivation to be deployed as a professional.

For the majority of respondents in the study period, a „return from service“ predominantly means a return to the country of origin. This is also the case for the majority of those who have been deployed more than once. Only a very small group of less than 10% of the respondents remains in the country of deployment.

A large proportion of the professionals live in partnerships and / or family constellations. When returning, the partner's job search is perceived as particularly stressful. The professionals also experience their own job search as very difficult. For many, the development service is not only a professional but also a profound personal experience. That is why homesickness for the place of deployment as well as feeling foreign after returning home are mentioned as stress factors.

The AGdD's support services are relatively well-known. Services that have only been designed in the last few years, such as the competence assessment or counselling for personal questions regarding the reintegration, are less known. Professionals primarily use the opportunities for reflection on their own experiences and the exchange of experiences with other returned professionals offered by Development Service Providers. They have a strong interest in integrating their experiences closer into the work of the Development Service Providers.

More than two thirds of the respondents stated that they had been job searching after the end of their contract; almost half of them had already started looking for work during their assignment. For 80 % of the respondents, the job search lasted no longer than one year. It became clear that the duration of the job search was related to age (older persons search longer) and not to the duration of the assignment. Reasons for looking for a job for more than 6 months were mainly due to the time-consuming nature of their own professional orientation on the labour market as well as the perceived reticent assessment of their CV by potential employers. The majority of respondents focused their job search on Germany, while over 20% searched for job opportunities either in other European countries or in their country of assignment.

The survey showed that the development service contributes significantly to competence development. The respondents see a positive response on the labour market, especially with regard to the competence characteristics ‚flexibility‘, ‚analytical thinking‘, ‚programme management skills‘ and ‚intercultural competence‘. A job in development cooperation or development policy abroad or at home is of outstanding importance for the professionals compared to other lines of work.

More than two thirds of the professionals surveyed had already been socially engaged before their assignment. Only a very small proportion did not take on any social commitment after their return. The professionals were primarily involved in advising individuals or organisations, performing voluntary tasks and providing financial and / or non-material support. Among the responses, the opinion that the development service promotes the motivation for social engagement is thus predominant. As already noted in earlier surveys, the hurdles to social engagement lie primarily in the time burden of work and family. However, it should not be overlooked that difficulties arising after the end of the contract (e.g., social or professional issues) were mentioned as an obstacle by 20% of respondents. Overall, it can be stated that the development service promotes or strengthens the willingness for social engagement.

The conclusion of the respondents regarding their last deployment is very diverse. Almost two thirds of the respondents would take up a deployment again. Furthermore, half of the respondents stated that their professional situation had

improved two years after their return compared to before their departure, while 25% were of the opinion that their situation had neither improved nor worsened. In contrast, 15 % of the respondents would not want to take up a deployment again and around a quarter of the respondents rate their professional situation 2 years after returning as worse than it was before leaving.

The following overall findings are worth noting:

- When talking about „return“, a return to Germany after development service is still the dominant trend.
- The trend towards professionalising deployment, already recorded in 2006 and 2015, has continued. Despite the undiminished trend towards professionalisation, solidarity-based commitment remains the guiding principle in the decision towards a development service.
- In order to facilitate their re-entry into the labour market, the returned professionals rely above all on their additionally acquired professional and technical knowledge and experience.
- In the whole, the search for a job after returning is experienced as very stressful. The partner's job search is an important part of this stressful situation.
- After all, the job search is successful for more than half within the first six months and for more than 80 % within the first year.
- The AGdD's support services are overall well-known and are claimed accordingly. The survey has provided important information on how the AGdD can further develop its support services in a needs-oriented manner.
- There is a pronounced interest among professionals to integrate their experience closer into the work of the Development Service Providers. However, this corresponds only to a very limited extent with such offers on the part of the Service Providers.
- Even if work and family burdens sometimes stand in the way of social commitment, the returned professionals remain a group with a far above-average level of commitment compared to the population as a whole.