



WYSE TRAVEL CONFEDERATION

PROJECT PERSPECTIVES ON THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER TRAVEL

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Title: Project perspectives on the benefits of volunteer travel

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the world's leading trade association for the global work and volunteer abroad industry, WYSE Travel Confederation and its Cultural Exchange Advisory Panel are dedicated to enhancing youth mobility and supporting trusted sending and receiving organisations worldwide and promoting international work and volunteer experiences for young people throughout the world.

The report "Project perspectives on the benefits of volunteer travel," is part of a two-part project examining the benefits of volunteering as perceived by volunteer travellers and volunteer projects. The first part of the project culminated in the 2015 publication "Development through volunteering overseas: Perceptions on personal and project based impact". This report investigates the perceptions of volunteer projects as hosts to volunteer travellers. The project was designed and carried out by the Cultural Exchange Advisory Panel of WYSE Travel Confederation and members of the Panel's Volunteer Working Group:

- Greg Bows, African Impact
- Madeline Townsend, Conservation Volunteers Australia & New Zealand
- Bettina Wiedmann, Experiment e.V.
- Andy Woods-Ballard, Global Vision International (GVI)



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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Economists have estimated that at least 971 million people volunteer each year across the globe, whether through an organisation or other intermediary or directly with persons outside of one's household (Salamon et al). The sheer number of volunteers has led to a comparative reference - 'Volunteerland'. If the world's volunteers were to form a single country, known as Volunteerland, they would form the largest adult population in the world, behind only China. Their total economic value is estimated at more than 1.3 trillion US dollars - making Volunteerland the seventh largest economy in the world, behind the US, Japan, Germany, China, the UK and France.

However, within youth travel, WYSE Travel Confederation estimates volunteer travel as one of the smaller sectors or niches of youth travel as a whole. It accounts for about 2% to 5% of global youth travel or 5.4 to 10+ million arrivals of the 270+ million. The reason for what seems to be an imprecise range is that young travellers typically have multiple purposes for travelling and volunteer activities could be undertaken as part of a trip with other purposes, such as an academic or gap year abroad, language immersion, an internship, or even a hybrid volunteer-holiday trip.

That said, volunteer travel can be viewed as high impact when we look at the benefits for the traveller, the volunteer project, and the local host community. Although there is negative media attention directed toward international volunteering, criticising it as the domain of privileged Westerners, the findings from this survey and other WYSE Travel Confederation research suggest that international volunteering contributes towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, brings tourism spend directly into local economies that might not otherwise benefit from mainstream tourism spending, and fosters mutually-beneficial exchange of cultural knowledge.

Young volunteer travellers consider making a positive impact on the local community the most important aspect of undertaking volunteer travel. While the chance to develop language skills and other useful professional knowledge are also highly valued by volunteer travellers, the opportunity to meet local people featured as the second most important aspect of a volunteer trip.

For communities and projects hosting volunteers, visiting volunteers contribute a considerable number of work days and spend to local economies. WYSE Travel Confederation's past research has found that volunteer travellers are among those travellers staying the longest and spending the most, with the average stay of 69 days and an average trip spend of EUR 3,400.

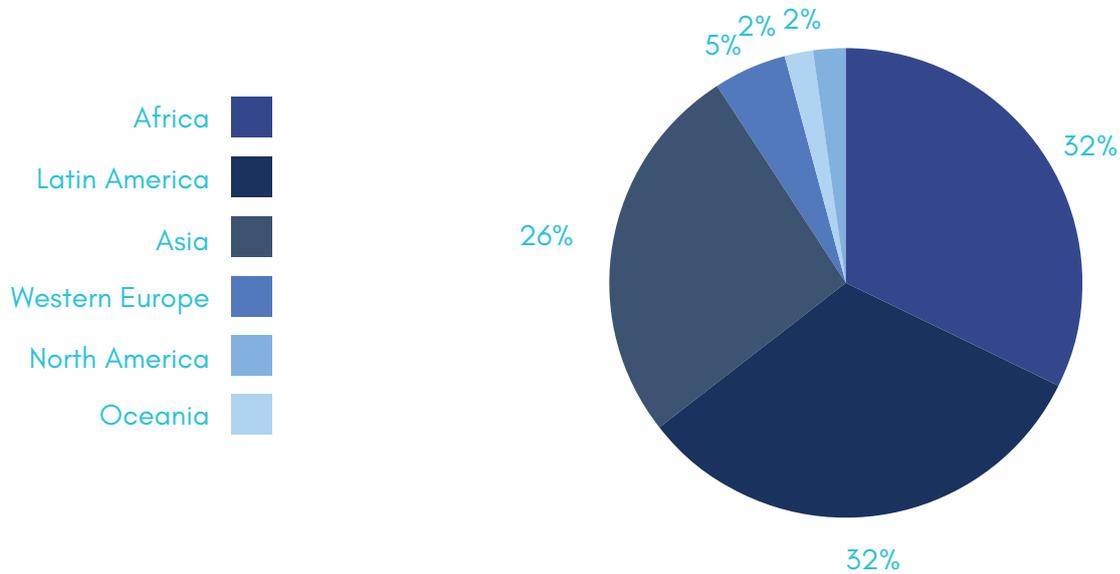
Most volunteer travellers are hosted by a project in the destination, so to identify the effects that volunteer travel has on the projects themselves, the Cultural Exchange Advisory Panel of WYSE Travel Confederation developed a survey titled "The impact of volunteering on projects and communities on the ground". The survey was distributed to the project partners of WYSE Travel Confederation member organisations active in international volunteer travel. The survey collected responses, both online and offline, between April and October 2016. The survey generated a total of 178 responses. Of these, 159 responses were retained for analysis after data cleaning.

This survey and report form the second half of a larger project examining the benefits of volunteering as perceived by volunteer travellers and volunteer projects alike. The first half of the project culminated in the 2015 publication "Development through volunteering overseas: Perceptions on personal and project based impact". This report investigates project perspectives on volunteers.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

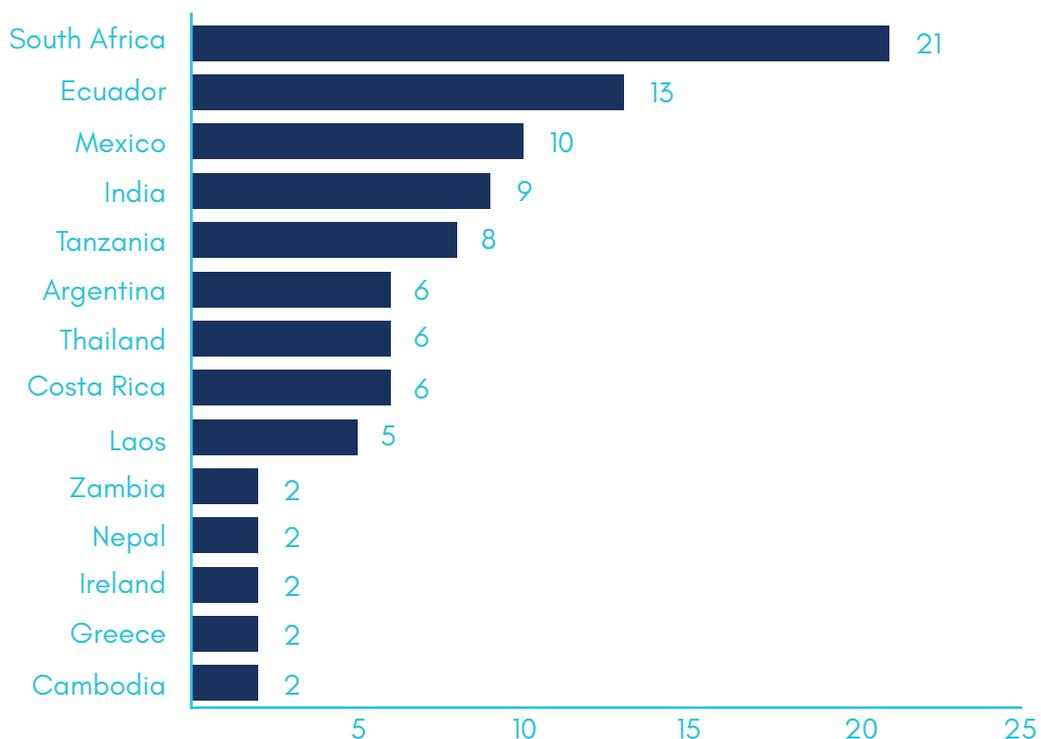
The distribution of volunteer projects emphasises their concentration in the Global South, with Africa, Latin America and Asia accounting for over 90% of reported projects. Although Africa and Latin America were also the most frequent destinations for volunteer travellers in our survey, Asia was also frequently mentioned.

Projects by region



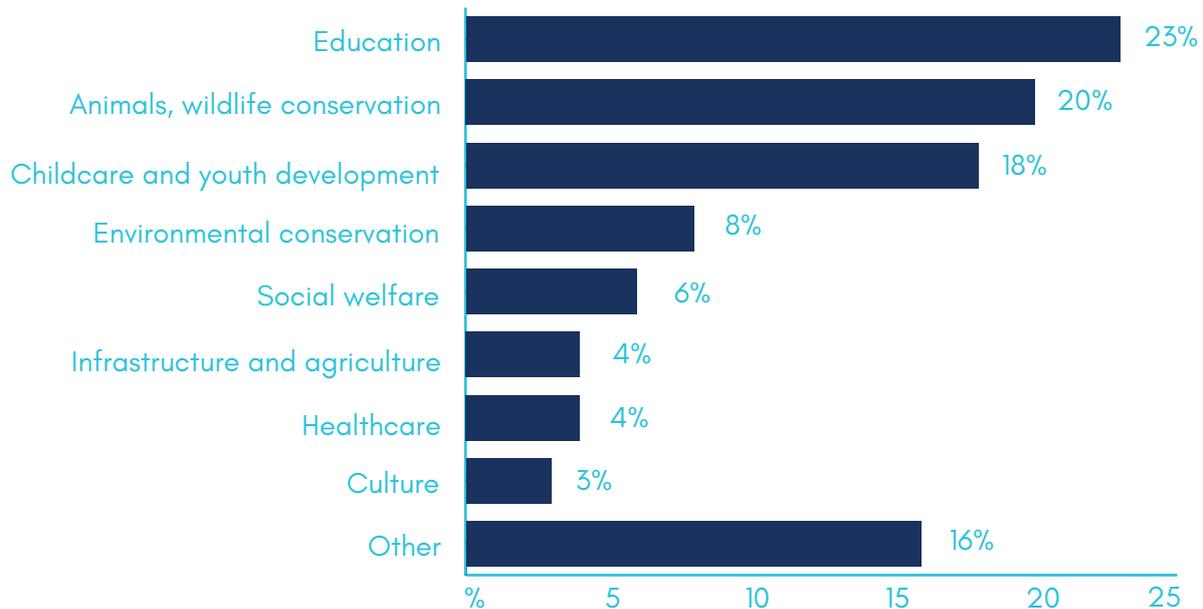
In terms of the specific countries with volunteer projects, South Africa, Ecuador and Mexico were the top three. South Africa and Ecuador were also frequently visited by the volunteers surveyed in the first part of this project, and have been noted as important destinations in other studies by WYSE Travel Confederation.

Number of projects by country (countries with two or more projects only)



The main types of projects identified were related to education, wildlife conservation, childcare, and youth development.

Main focus of project

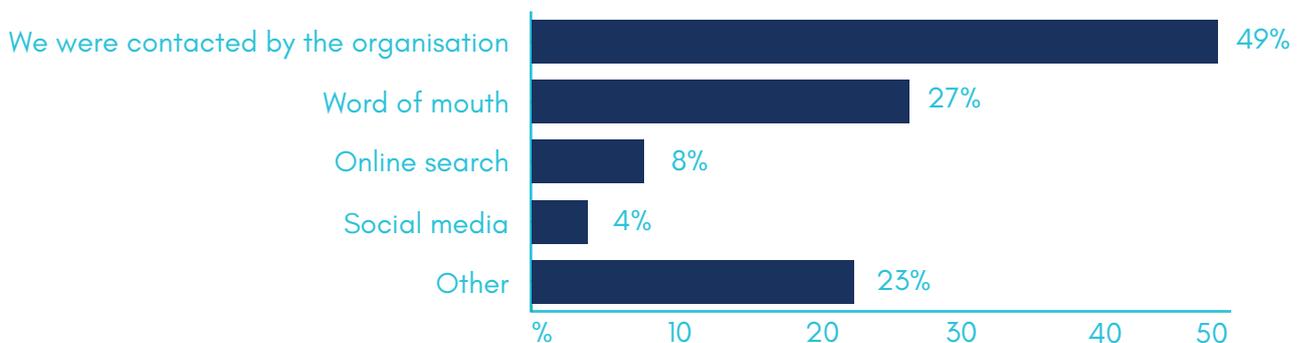


The 'other' category covered a wide range of activities, principally a mixture of activities (e.g. wildlife and education), empowerment of women, training and healthcare.

DEVELOPING THE VOLUNTEER PROJECT-PARTNER RELATIONSHIP

Nearly half of the projects surveyed reported that the partners they work with had initiated contact with them (49%). Some projects found partners through word of mouth (27%), but relatively few found partners via online search or social media.

How did you find out about your project partner?



The other means of initial contact mentioned by the projects were predominantly informal contacts via friends or colleagues, which indicates that this is fairly important as a means of initiating partnerships.

The reasons for contacting the volunteer organisation were varied. Educational experience and working with children was key for projects working in these areas, as was the ability to provide support for English language teaching. Economic resources were also frequently mentioned, although many specified that they wanted to partner with a non-profit. Several projects also mentioned that reputation was important, although it was not so important that the organisation be well-known. This underlines the tendency for partnerships to be developed through informal contacts and word of mouth.

Reasons for contacting the partner organisation (most frequent keywords)

Education	11	Non-profit	6	Learning	3
Children	10	Partnership	5	Organised	3
Economic/funding	9	Reputation	5	Regular	3
Experience	8	Quality	4	Well-known	3
Support	8	Environment	3	Skills	2
English	7	Ethics	3		

Often the choice to partner was based on a mix of different aspects.

"We look for non-profit partners with grassroots and small-scale projects focused on community buy-in and impact. We look for projects that have been around for several years."

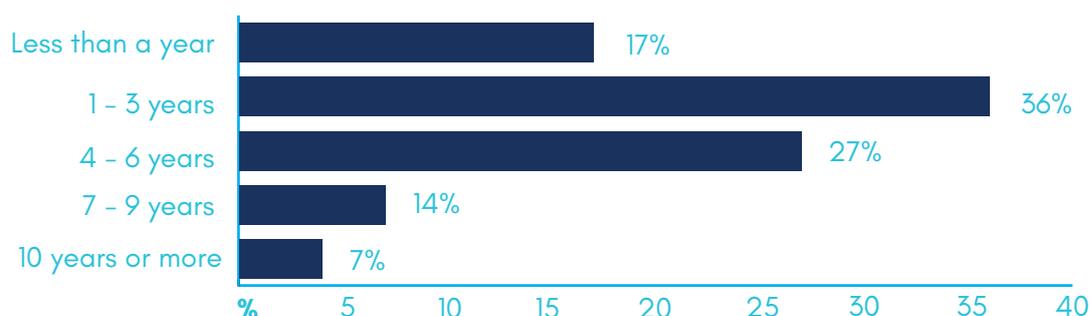
"X is a small, transparent organization - your impact is directly seen on the community and a volunteer is allowed to be involved in administrative work as well. It was a great balance between learning more about the non-profit world from an administrative sense and being a on ground, hands on volunteer."

"I was looking for a non-profit that had a strong partnership and relationship with the community."

"They assist us in a variety of ways- from PRO and media, to assisting us in the eco workshops, it is a win-win situation."

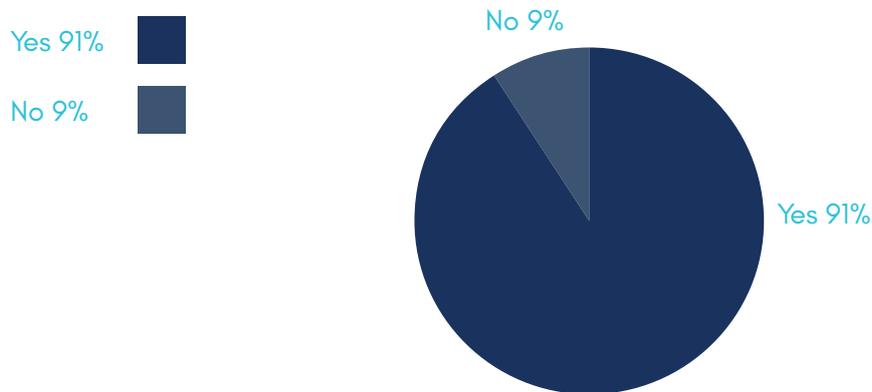
Just over half of the projects had been running for three years or less. Only 14% had been in existence for more than 10 years. This pattern coincides with the findings of the TRAM (2008) report on the global volunteer travel market, which indicated that an increasing number of volunteer projects have been launched in recent years.

How long have you been working with your partner organisation?



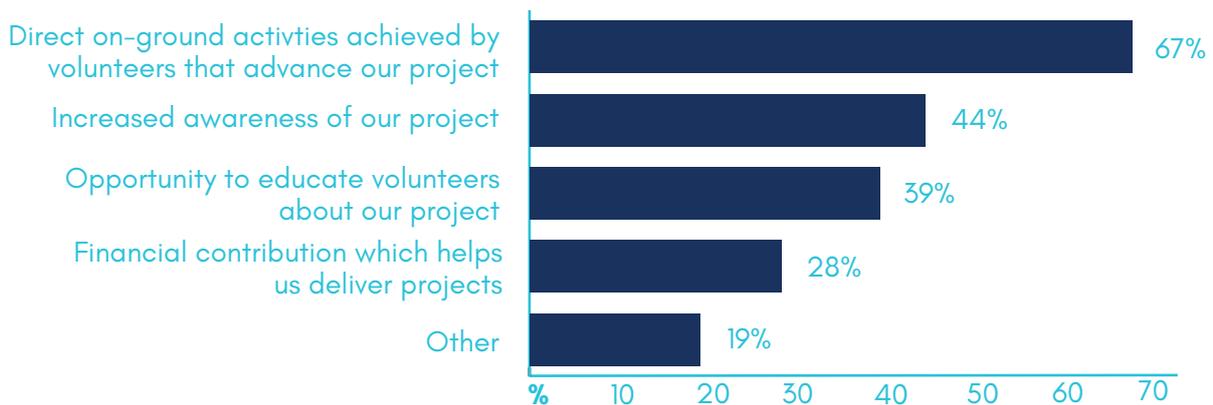
As most partners have been working together for more than a year, they also tend to be familiar with the project objectives. Those who are not aware of the project objectives were less likely to have been working together for more than three years.

Are you familiar with your sending partner's general objectives and mission?



The project partners were most likely to be helping the project in terms of direct on-ground activities (67%) or to increase project awareness (44%). Only 28% of project partners help in terms of direct financial contributions to the project.

What objectives is your project partner helping you to achieve? (multiple responses)



The other objectives that partners were helping to achieve included writing reports and generating data (particularly for wildlife-related projects), providing support and cultural exchange.

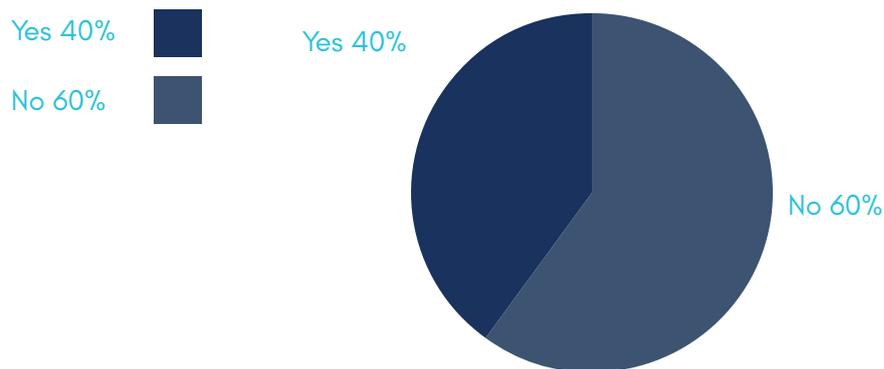
Working effectively with project partners requires communication. Over two thirds of projects communicate at least weekly with their partners, and only 8% communicate quarterly or less.

How often do you communicate with your project partner organisation?



Most projects (60%) said that they do not need to communicate more frequently.

Would you like to have more communication with your project partners?



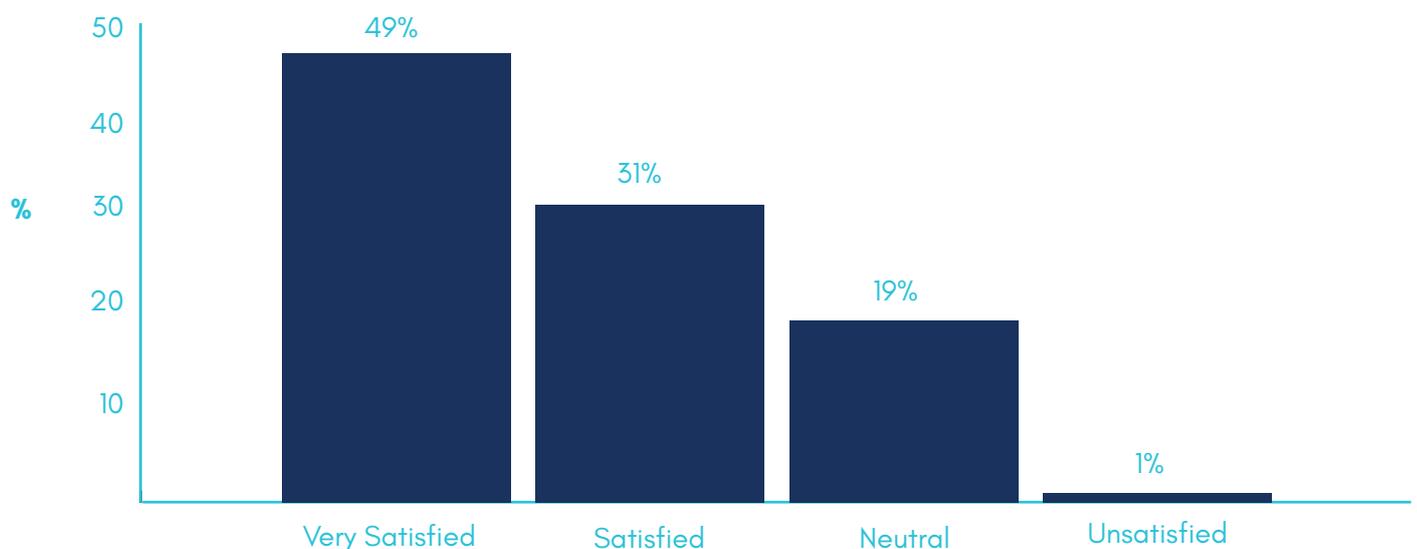
Of those projects indicating they wanted more communication, some cited the need for more volunteers, while others mentioned the need for more face-to-face meetings, more dialogue or the need to address language problems.

"Communication across oceans & cultural differences is always a challenge. I don't think there is ever harm in communicating more!"

"Knowing more about the organisation and to be able to share information about our activities would certainly help us."

When asked about the level of preparation of volunteers, most projects indicated that they were very satisfied (49%) or satisfied (31%) with the training or preparation that volunteers have. This seems to indicate that volunteers arrive on the ground well trained and ready to participate in the work at hand. Furthermore, it could be implied that the volunteers themselves are useful to the projects.

How satisfied on a scale from 1 to 5 are you with the level of training/preparation that volunteers receive before arriving on the project? (1 = very unsatisfied - 5 = very satisfied)

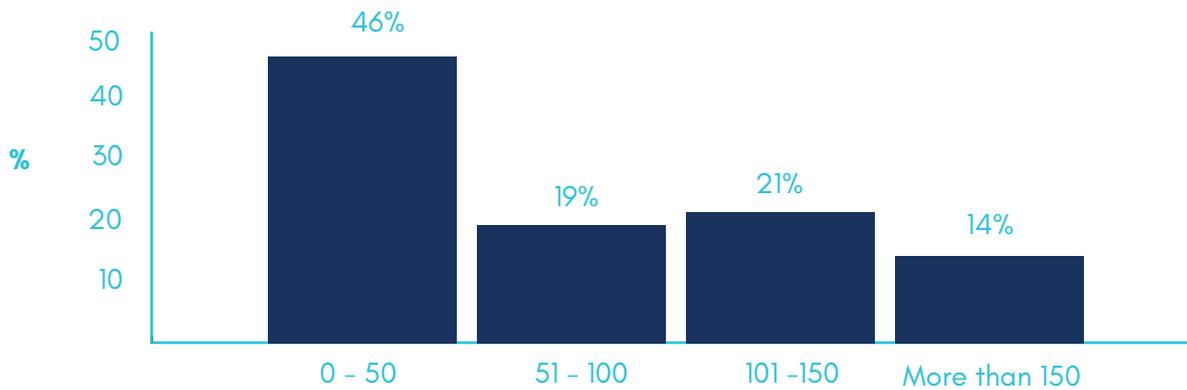


VOLUNTEER INPUT TO PROJECTS

To understand the scale of the projects and the amount of labour they can deliver, we asked about the total number of volunteers and the number of days dedicated to the project per year.

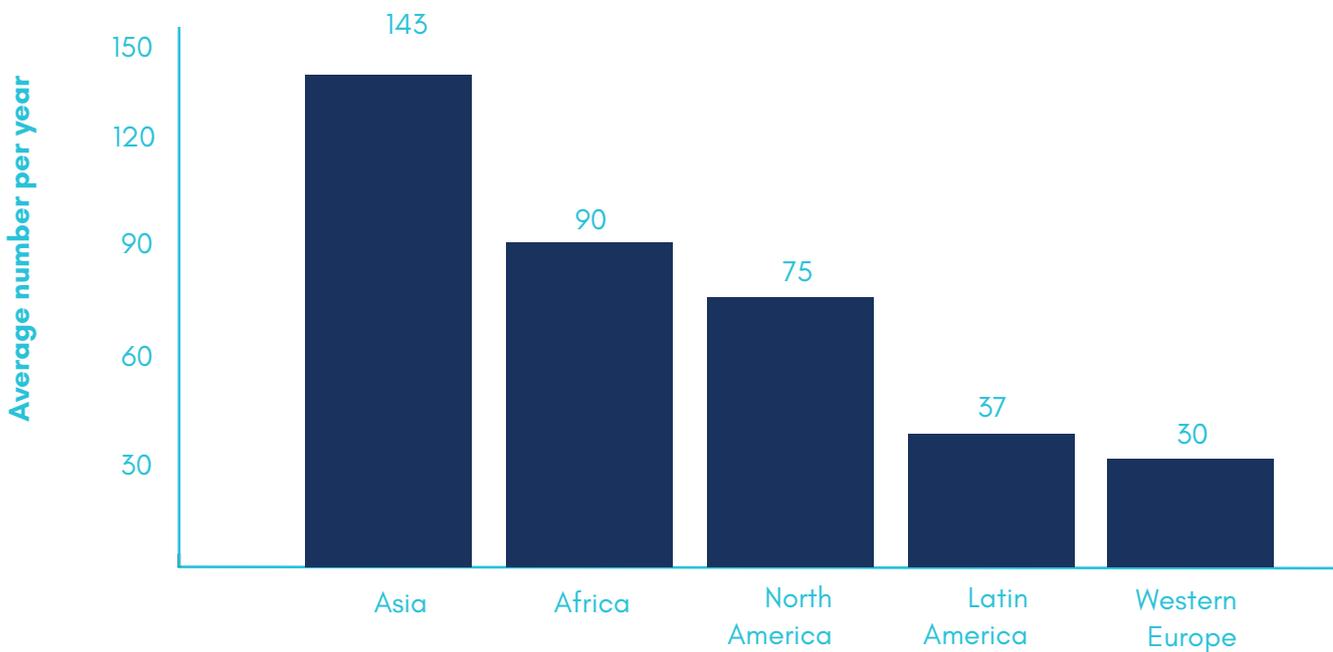
Many projects (46%) are relatively small scale, with 50 volunteers or less per year. Only 14% of projects have more than 150 volunteers per year, but these account for a larger volume of volunteer work.

Number of volunteers per year



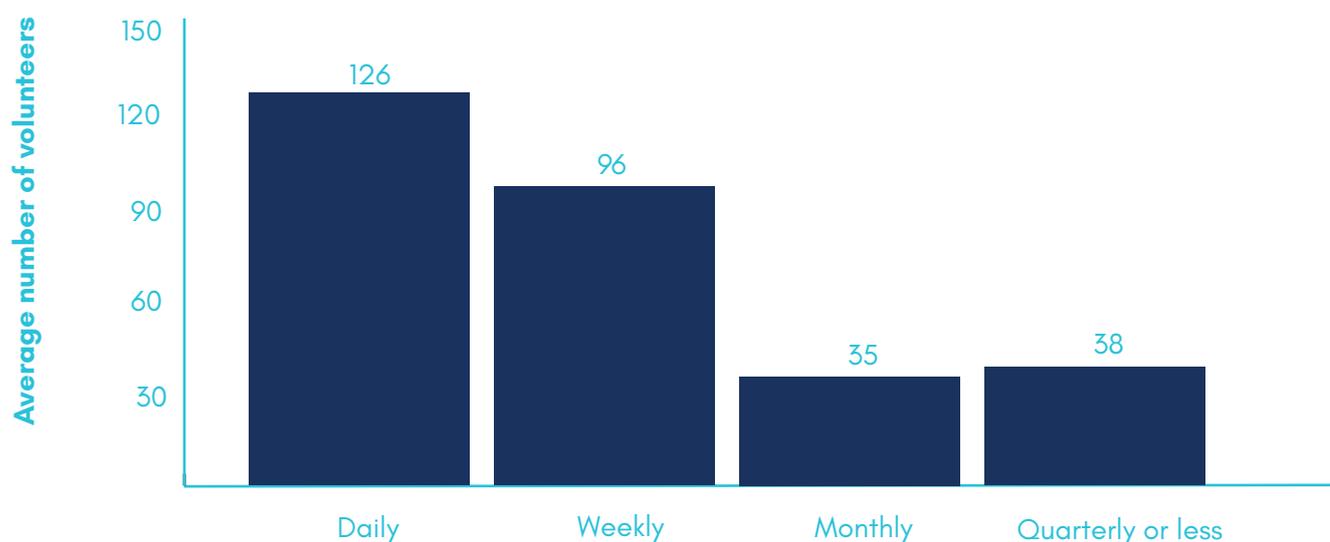
The projects with the largest average number of volunteers tend to be in Asia (143 per year), Africa (90) and North America (75). Projects in Latin America and Western Europe are significantly smaller.

Number of volunteers per year by region



The larger projects in terms of number of volunteers tend to communicate with their partners more often than do smaller projects.

Frequency of communication by number of volunteers



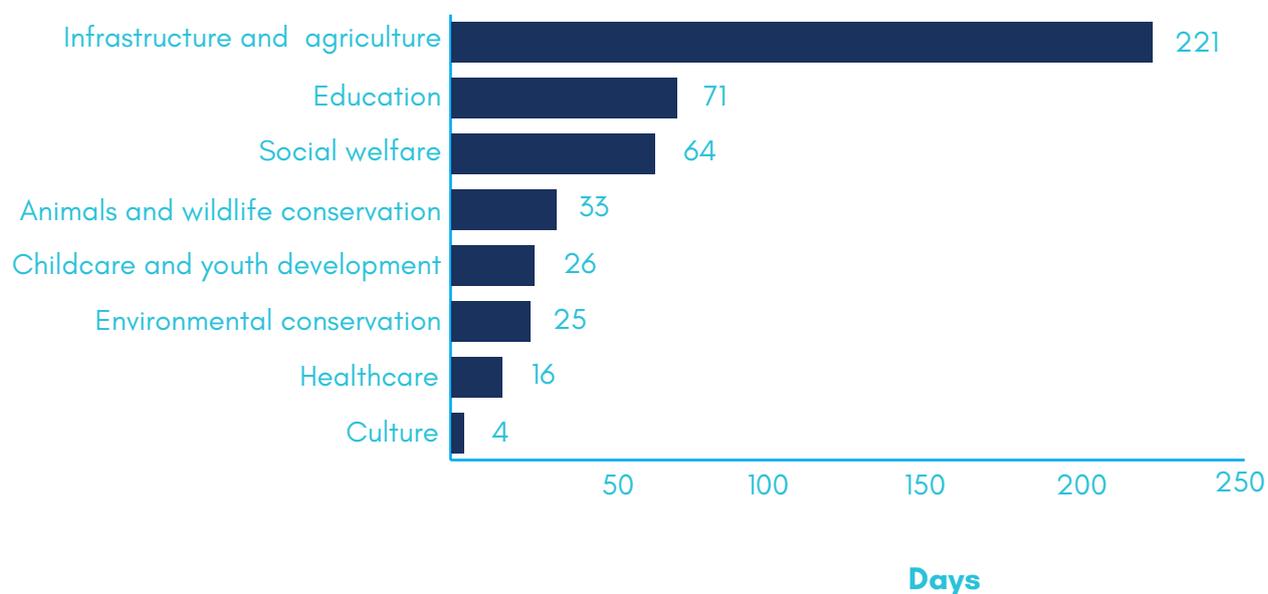
The average number of days spent by volunteers at the projects was 49. For the main destination regions, the length of stay tended to be longest in Latin America (69 days).

Average days per volunteer by world region



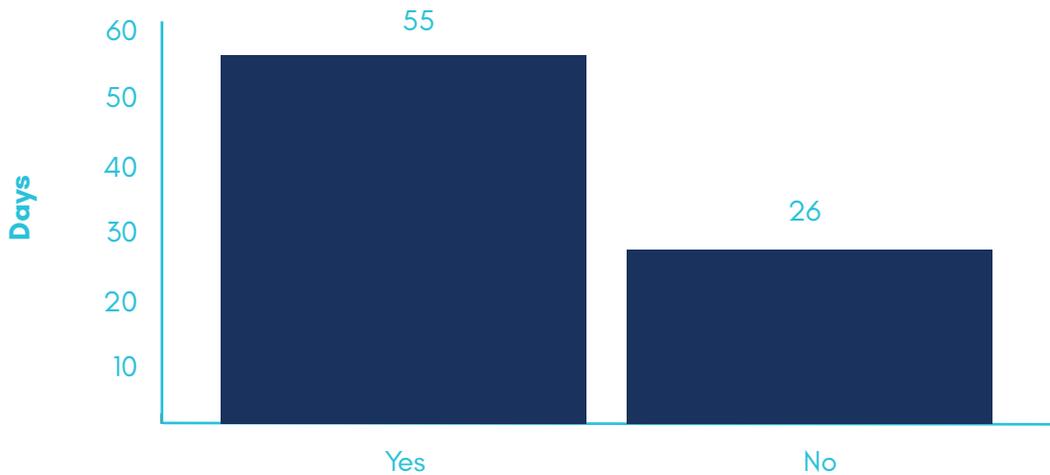
The projects with the largest average number of volunteers tend to be located in Asia (143 per year), Africa (90) and North America (75). Projects in Latin America and Western Europe are significantly smaller.

Volunteer days by project type



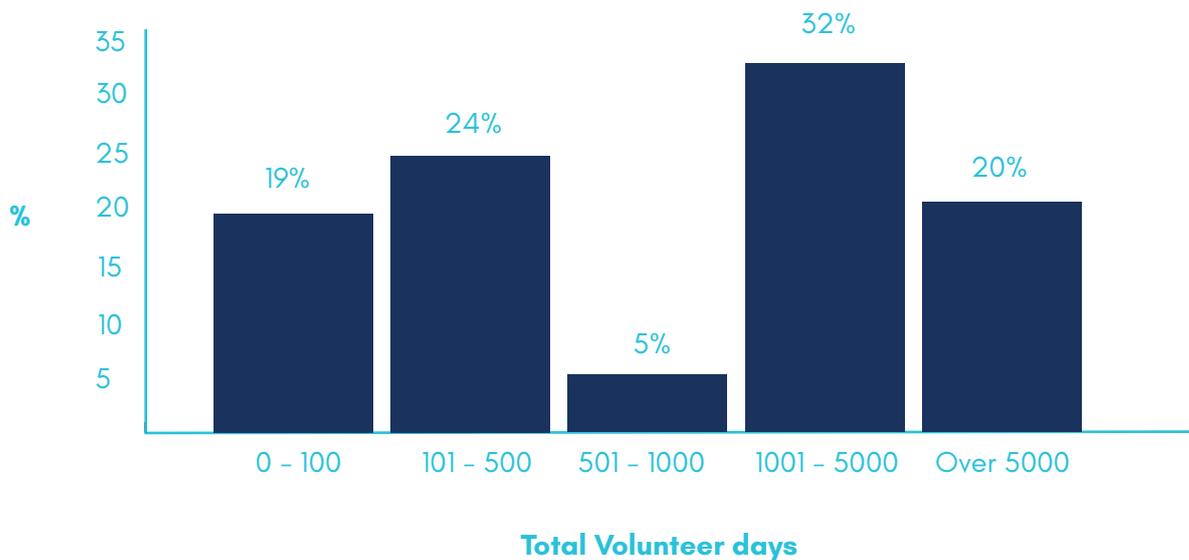
For those projects who indicated that their partners were helping them in developing on the ground activities, the average length of volunteer stay was greater than for other projects.

Direct on the ground activities



The average total number of volunteer days contributed to each project was just over 3,000 a year. However, most projects have far fewer volunteer days in total - 43% of projects have a total of 500 days or less.

Number of volunteers per project

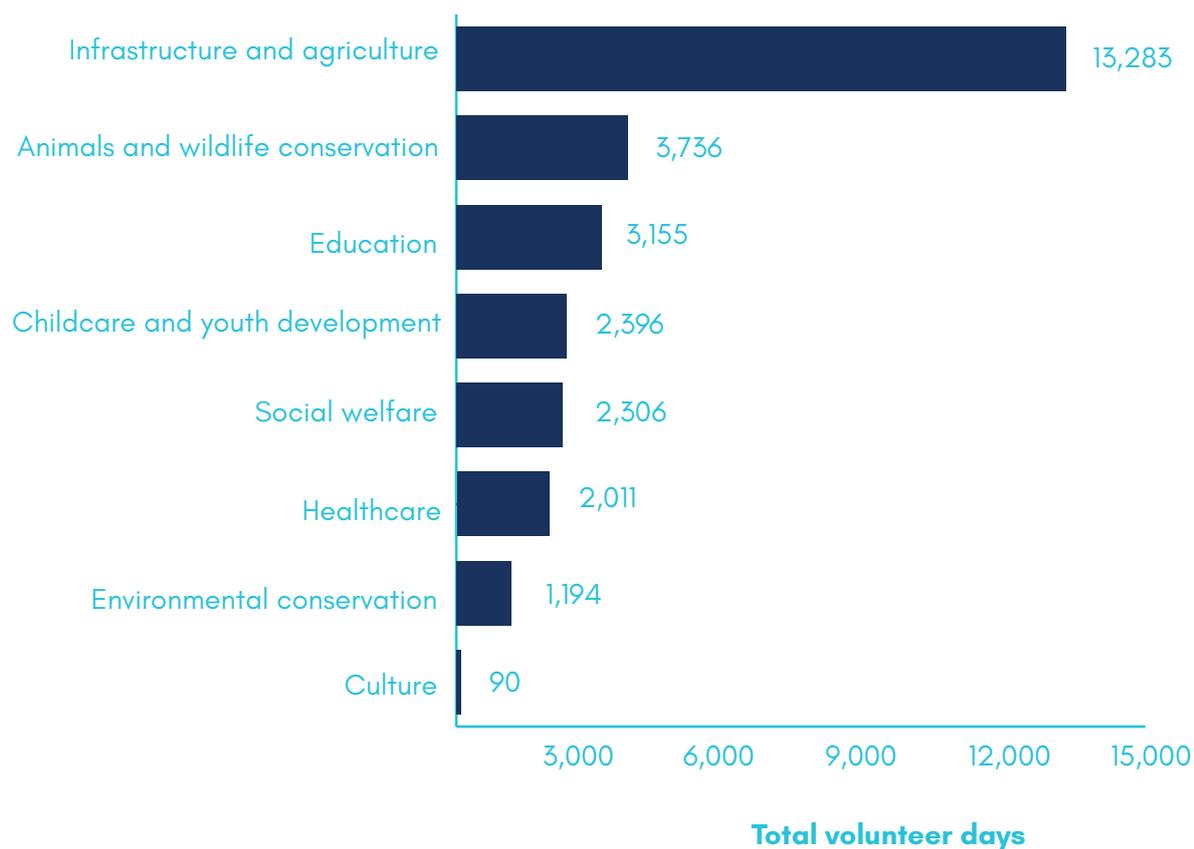


Based on the total number of volunteer days, we can estimate the volunteer traveller spending generated by the projects. Data from the WYSE Travel Confederation's New Horizons III Survey indicates young volunteers traveling internationally spent EUR 67 a day on average. That would indicate, on average, a volunteer project can generate about EUR 201,000 euros in volunteer spending annually for the destination.

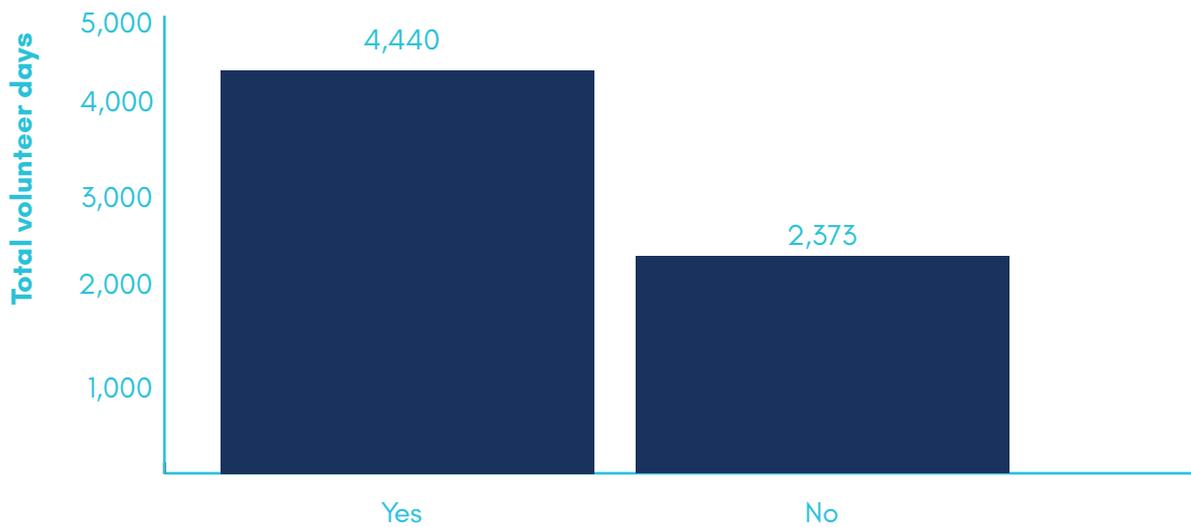
The number of volunteer days per project is highest in Asia and lowest in Western Europe.

Volunteer days per project by region

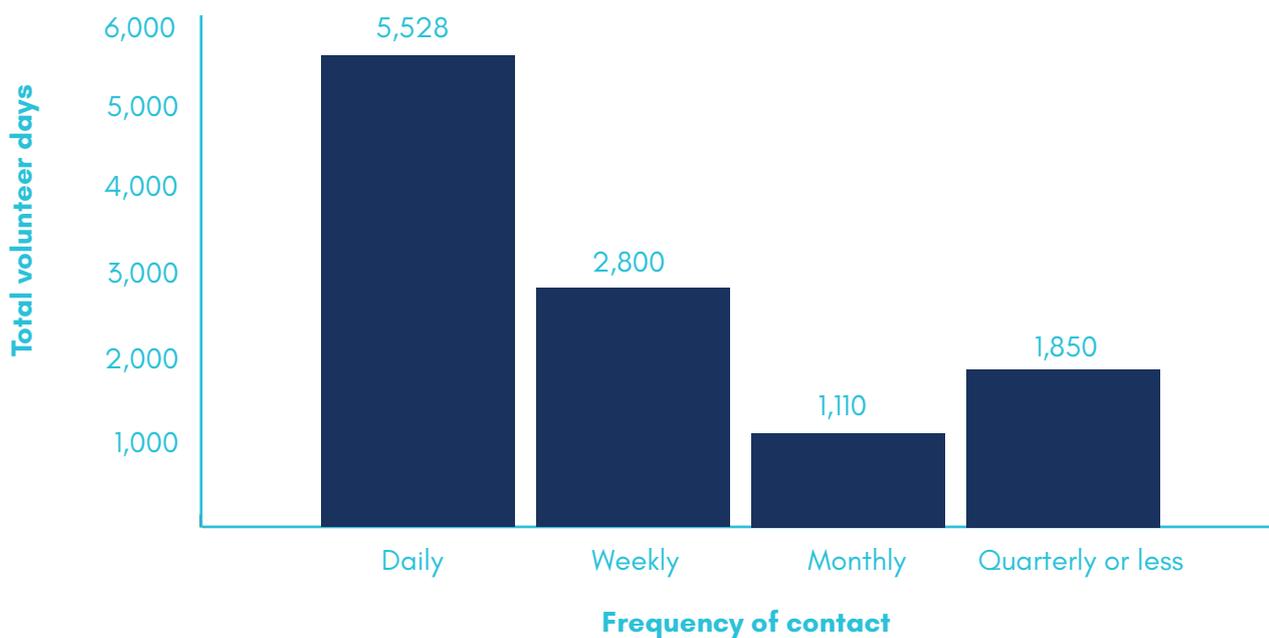
The average number of volunteer days is highest for infrastructure and agriculture projects. Other types of projects generally have between 2,000 and 4,000 volunteer days.

Volunteer days by project type

The more volunteer days a project generates, the higher the volunteer spend generated. This is also reflected in the support for financial goals that projects reported receiving from volunteers.

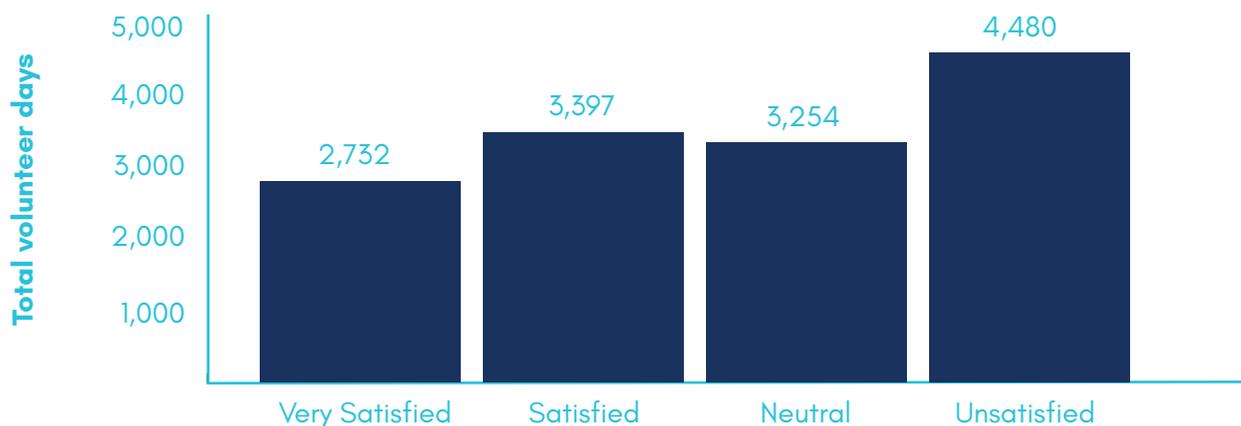
Helping us with financial contributions by volunteer days

Communication between the project and its partners also becomes more frequent as the number of volunteer days per year increases.

Communication frequency by volunteer days

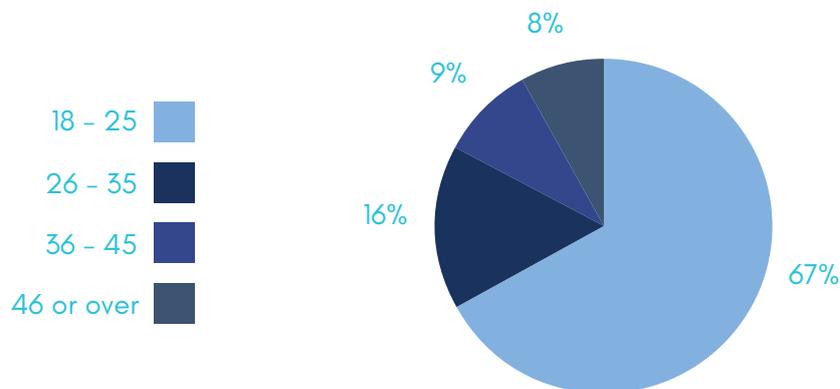
Interestingly, the level of satisfaction with the preparation of volunteers declines as the number of volunteer days increases. This may reflect the fact that projects with a large number of days are often related to infrastructure and agriculture, which may need more specific skills on the part of volunteers.

Volunteer days by level of satisfaction with volunteer preparation



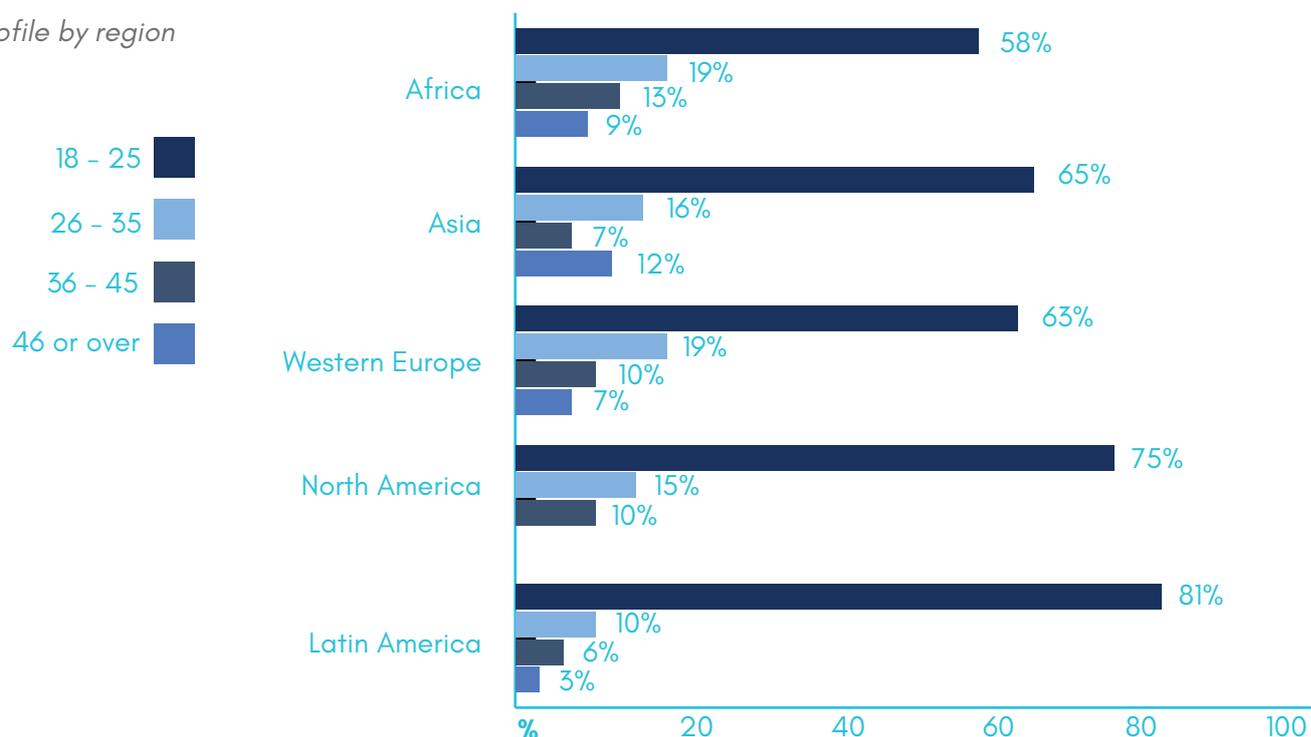
The age profile of the volunteers at the projects is predominantly 18 to 25 years old. This matches the results of the WYSE Travel Confederation Millennial Traveller Survey (2014), which indicated that 65% of volunteer travellers were aged 18 to 25.

Age profile of volunteers



The youngest volunteer profile was reported in Latin America, where over 80% of volunteers are aged 18 to 25. In contrast, Africa has an older volunteer profile with less than 60% aged 18 to 25 and almost 20% aged 26 to 35.

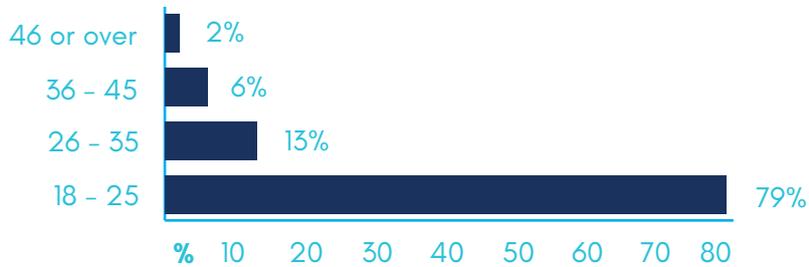
Age profile by region



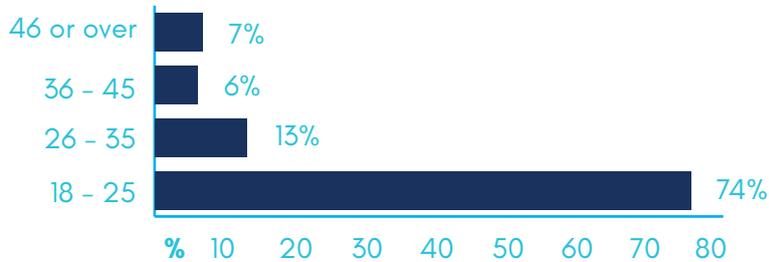
AGE PROFILE BY PROJECT TYPE

The age profile of volunteers tends to be youngest for environmental conservation and educational projects. Older volunteers are more often found in projects that require more specialised skills, such as childcare and infrastructure. Cultural projects have a broad appeal across all age groups.

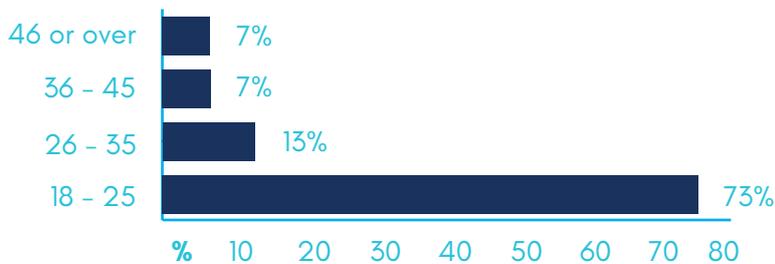
Environmental conservation



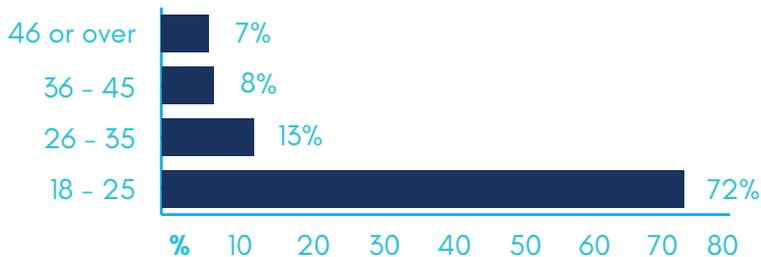
Education

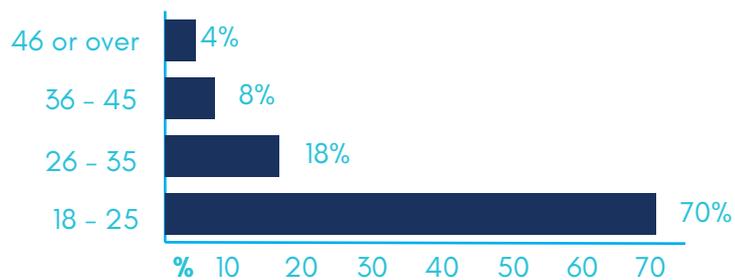
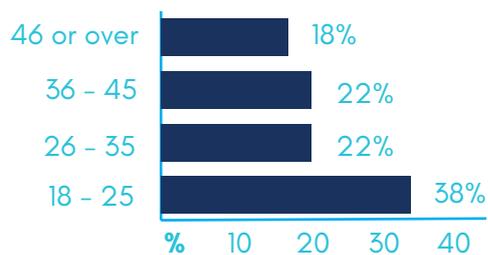
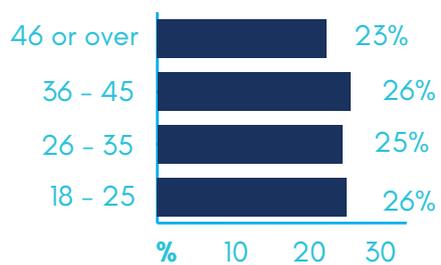


Social welfare



Healthcare

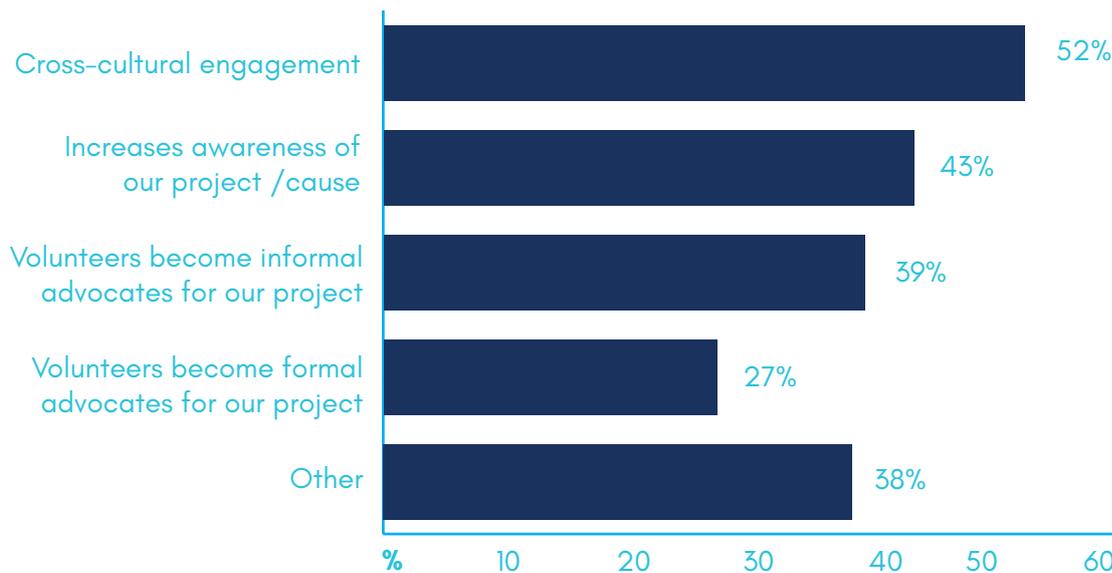


Animals and wildlife conservation*Childcare and youth development**Infrastructure and agriculture**Culture*

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER PROJECTS TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

When asked about the benefits that volunteers generate for the local community, the projects tended to emphasise cross-cultural engagement and increased awareness of the project. This generally matches the response of the volunteers, who also cited culture and exchange as important benefits that they felt they had generated for the community, as well as for themselves.

Project benefits for the local community



The other benefits included language learning for local people and for project staff:

“By teaching English, they are helping in our objective to give the girls a normal life. The English skills given to the girls help my organisation find jobs for them.”

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UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere



2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all



5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all



7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all



8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation



10. Reduce inequality within and among countries



11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns



13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts



14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss



16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development

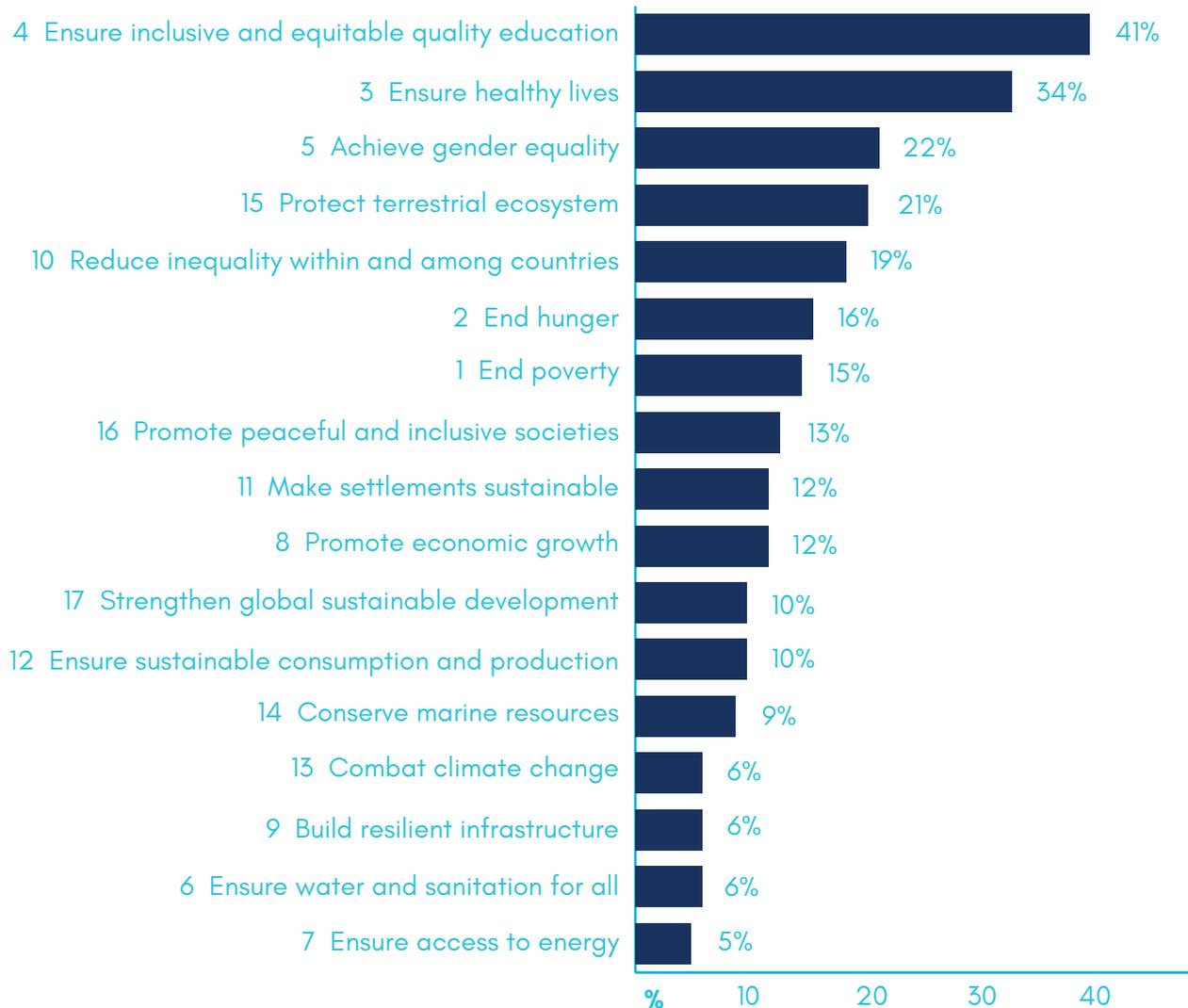


17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

VOLUNTEER PROJECTS AND THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The projects surveyed were asked about the contribution of volunteers to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs that the projects think are the most supported by volunteers were inclusive and equitable education (4) and ensuring healthy lives (3). The support for educational goals is logical in terms of the large number of educational projects covered by the survey.

Project benefits for the local community



Other goals mentioned by the projects themselves include:

- Assisting /inspiring local teachers with new ways of teaching
- Creating awareness around real animal numbers through accurate monitoring and identification
- Educating the locals on animal welfare and pet care.
- Improving and promoting sustainable lifestyles
- Mitigating human-wildlife conflicts
- Promoting multicultural understanding and world peace
- Providing for the wellbeing of people living with mental and physical disabilities.

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CONCLUSION

In general, volunteer projects seem to have long-standing relationships with sending partners and communication between them is dynamic and deemed sufficient for their needs. This perhaps contributes to the overall satisfaction projects reported regarding the training and preparation that volunteers arrive with. This would seem to suggest projects and partners have an open and productive relationship that is mutually beneficial.

Projects deem the majority of volunteers to be trained well enough to provide immediately valuable contributions upon arrival to the work at hand.

Cross-cultural engagement and increased project awareness were identified by project coordinators as the main benefits that volunteers bring to the local community as a result of their time spent volunteering. This is in line with the sentiment of volunteers, who viewed cultural exchange as a benefit for not only themselves, but also their host communities. Again, this seems to suggest a general eye-to-eye understanding between volunteers and host projects regarding expectations of the volunteer experience.

When the Sustainable Development Goals are considered, projects felt that volunteers contributed most to goal 4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education" and goal 5 "Ensure healthy lives". Some volunteers were aware of the way in which their work could reach deeper into the community than just the people they came into direct contact within a project.

"By teaching the children English, they return each day and in turn teach their parents - which makes it easier for them to communicate, to educate themselves, and even obtain a new or better job. This has tremendous socioeconomic impact."

When volunteers were asked to specify the areas in which their trip had influenced their thinking, they most frequently mentioned social, cultural, and global issues, suggesting that the cultural exchange experienced as part of a volunteer assignment abroad contributes to new reflections and ideas about the complexity of global social issues.

"...the community benefited as people gained knowledge about other countries and cultures and learned about different lifestyles. I also want to point out the long discussions about differences and similarities of both countries that brought understanding."

Aside from the mutually beneficial aspects of cultural exchange, with an average of 3,000 volunteer days per year per project, communities stand to benefit economically from hosting young volunteer travellers that spend on average EUR 67 per day in the destination. Although most projects receive fewer volunteer days in total (43% of projects have 500 days or less) volunteer travel has the potential to bring tourism spend into areas that it may otherwise not reach. The positive nature of the overall experience for most volunteers meant the vast majority (85%) were thinking about volunteering again in the future.

Given the high levels of cooperation and communication between projects, partners, and volunteers, it could be implied that all stakeholders of international volunteer travel make valuable contributions toward meeting the sustainable development goals. Perhaps even more important is their power to generate awareness of the important issues behind the SDGs and inspire future volunteers to travel to make a difference.

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**WYSE TRAVEL
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+31 20 421 2800 | research@wysetc.org | www.wysetc.org
Keizersgracht 174-176 | 1016 DW | Amsterdam | The Netherlands