

4. Confirmation Work in the View of the Workers

GEORG HARDECKER, KATI NIEMELÄ, THOMAS SCHLAG, AND
FRIEDRICH SCHWEITZER

4.1 Introduction

It is obvious that the quality and meaning of confirmation work depends on those who are planning and organising this program. The ministers continue to be key persons in this respect but, increasingly, voluntary workers also play an important role. In order to capture the views of the workers, the study asked not only confirmands but also the workers themselves, both ministers and other workers. Their views on confirmation work – concerning topics, aims, motives as well as their experiences – will be presented in the following.

Both kinds of workers are addressed in the following, employed workers (full-time or part-time) and voluntary workers. In the following, the term »workers« includes both groups. In cases where it is necessary to distinguish between the two groups, the terms »employed workers«, »main responsible person« or »ministers« on the one hand, and »voluntary workers« or »volunteers« on the other hand, are used. This distinction remains helpful in spite of the fact that volunteers may receive some kind of financial compensation in some of the countries participating in the study.

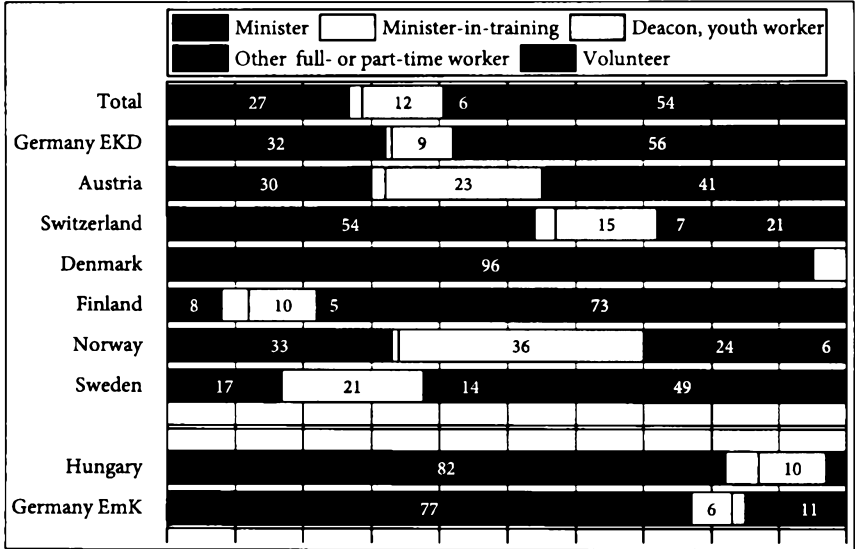
4.2 Staff Composition: Some General Information on the Workers

Who are »the workers«? The first study made clear that confirmation work is not only based on ministers and confirmands but also involves volunteers (Schweitzer et al. 2010, 282). To what extent this applies, however, is very country-specific. The different kinds of the workers are shown in Figure 12.

On an international level, less than half (46 %) of those working in confirmation work are full- or part-time employed workers and more than half (54 %) are volunteers. Confirmation work today often means teamwork: the majority (83 %) of the main responsible persons state that they are working with a team of workers (WE12) and more than half (56 %) that confirmation work is organised and prepared together with volunteers (VU07). The share of volunteers is highest in Finland (73 %), Germany (EKD: 56 %) and Sweden (49 %), while in Denmark no volunteer was involved in the study. In Denmark all employed workers were either ministers or ministers-in-training.

The age distribution among volunteers is very wide. In the data, the youngest volunteer was 14 and the oldest 80 years old. The average age of the volunteers

Figure 12: Different workers in confirmation work in the participating countries (%)



N = 4331.

is 20 years. The volunteers are youngest in Finland (mean age 16-17) and Sweden (18 years), while in Hungary and among the Methodists in Germany volunteers are typically about as old as the employed workers. The mean age of the employed workers is 42 years.

The following observations can be made about gender. While 64% of the ministers are male and 36% female, within the group of the volunteers the distribution is almost the other way round: 37% of the volunteers are male and 63% are female. The country-specific gender distribution is, however, not determined by the share of volunteers alone. The biggest percentage of female workers is found in Finland (65%), the country with the largest group of volunteers; whereas Denmark, the country with no volunteers in confirmation work, also has a share of 61% of women. More confirmation work in teams does not automatically mean more female workers.

Before the confirmation work gets started, 30% of the workers know (almost) none of the confirmands, 29% know less than half of the confirmands (WF05). Confirmation work therefore allows for new contacts between the different age groups within the church. Especially in the Nordic countries and in Austria, it is typical that the workers do not know most of the confirmands in advance. In Norway, only 3% of the workers said that they knew most of the confirmands before confirmation time while in Hungary the share was 63% and 51% among the Methodists in Germany.

Another difference concerns the involvement of deacons and youth workers in confirmation work. The share of deacons and youth workers is bigger than the share of ministers in Norway, Sweden and Finland. Also in Austria their share is almost equal to the share of ministers.

Two aspects show no country-specific character: almost all workers are Protestants (WF03: 98.7%), and almost all of them have the nationality of the respective country (WF04: 98%).

Comparing the values from the first study with those from the second, one can see an increase in the share of workers who participated in special trainings for confirmation workers. This is the case at least in Germany (EKD) and Austria (WF18, only asked in DE [EKD], AT, CH, DK): Less than one third did not attend such training in 2012/2013. In Denmark, values are stable, in Switzerland 32% of the workers did not attend a special training (2007/2008: 23%).

Within 5 years, the share of the female workers increased in Germany (EKD) by 5 percent points and in Denmark by 14.

4.3 Important Topics – in the View of the Workers

What topics are important in the eyes of the workers? At the beginning of confirmation time, the workers were asked concerning the importance of twenty possible topics. On the one hand, nine of these topics received 80% and more agreement which means that they were affirmed by a huge majority of workers: Baptism, The Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ, the Bible, God, justice and responsibility for others, the meaning of life, death and resurrection. On the other hand, there were six topics that received less than 50% agreement: other Christian denominations (for example, Catholics), other religions, drug abuse and criminal behavior, angels, magic/esoterics/supernatural experiences, care of the environment/ecology. The five topics in between were: course and meaning of Sunday services, one's own parish, friendship, love and sexuality, the social mission of the church. This basic picture also holds true, with few exceptions, for Hungary and the EmK where most topics receive affirmations above 50%.

The workers' choices show a certain preference for topics that are clearly related to the Christian tradition but the list of most preferred topics also includes some ethical topics (justice and responsibility) and existential questions (meaning of life). Yet beyond the international averages, there is a considerable amount of variation, at least with some of the topics. In this respect, national and regional traditions seem to play a role. Moreover, the difference between the main responsible workers who often are ministers, and the volunteers comes into play here.

National variations can be found, for example, with the Lord's Supper (only

69% in Switzerland), the course and meaning of Sunday services (only 51% in Norway), one's own parish (only 51% in Denmark) or other religions (only 9% in Denmark and 12% in Norway) with negative tendencies on the one hand, and with positive tendencies, on the other hand, in the case of other Christian denominations that attract special interest in Hungary (62%) and with the EmK (56%). The special interest in denominational topics could be explained by the special structure of the EmK as a minority Church and, in the case of Hungary, with the strong Catholic presence in this country (unfortunately, there are no data on the workers in Poland for comparison).

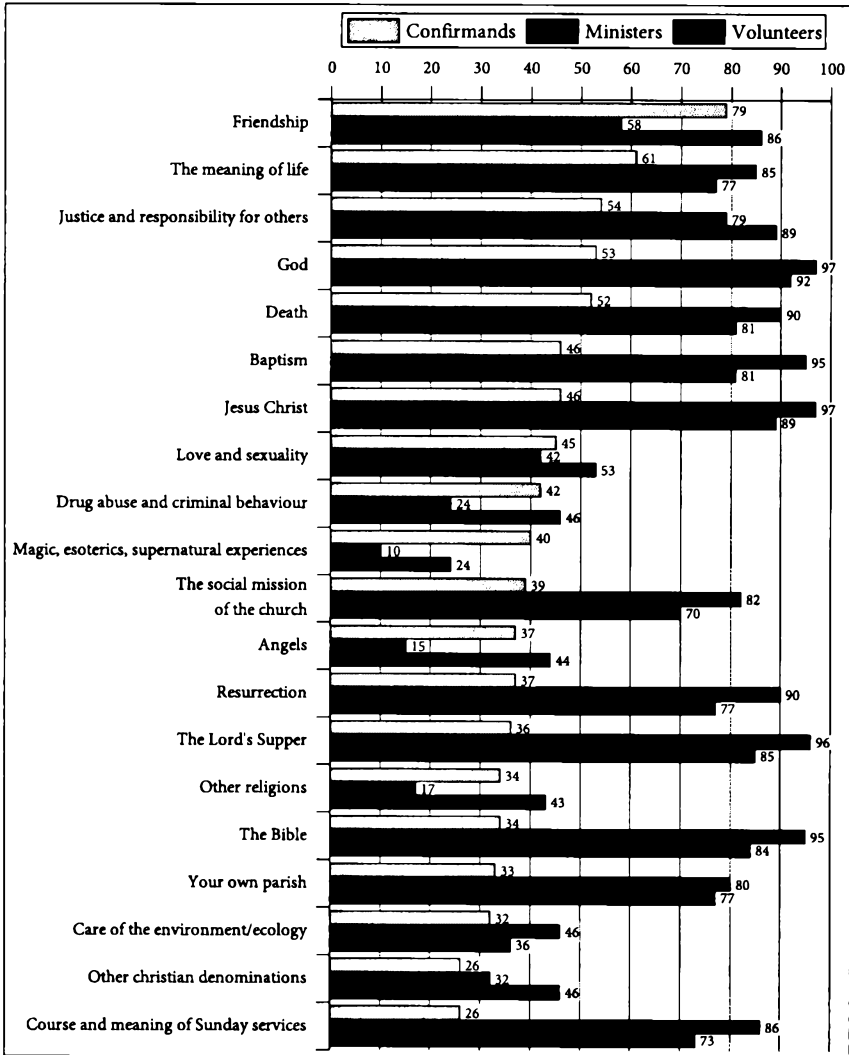
The second variation of interest refers to differences between the preferences of the ministers who are often the main responsible workers, and the volunteers. Such differences show up with some of the topics while in other cases the preferences are very similar. It is very interesting to compare the ministers' and volunteers' preferences with the preferences of the confirmands. Figure 13 describes the preferences of all three groups.

With some topics, the interests expressed by the confirmands exceed those of the ministers, in other cases, the reverse is true. The voluntary workers are often closer to the confirmands which indicates the special potential they have for meeting the confirmands' interests, probably because they are close in terms of age. Moreover, the pattern for the ministers shows that they tend to stress church-related topics much more than the confirmands.

Comparing the two studies from 2007/2008 and 2012/2013, there are a number of changes in the workers' preferences. Some topics receive less approval: baptism (- 6 percent points), the Lord's Supper (- 3), course and meaning of Sunday services (- 4), Jesus Christ (- 4). Other topics receive more approval than five years earlier: friendship (+ 3), love and sexuality (+ 4), social mission of the church (+ 5). Taken together, this means that traditional topics of the Christian faith have lost some of their standing, although still at a very high level, while topics closer to the life world of the confirmands have gained in interest.

Yet again one needs to be aware of different developments in the participating countries. In the case of friendship as a topic, there are increases as well as decreases to be observed between the two studies: Austria (+ 3 percent points), canton of Zurich (- 8), Denmark (- 6), Norway (- 9). In such cases, general averages obviously cannot tell the whole picture.

Figure 13: Interest in topics at the beginning of confirmation time (t_1) among ministers, volunteers and confirmands (%)



N = 18676-26019 (confirmands); N = 905-1380 (ministers); N = 1385-1541 (volunteers); 7-point-scales were used; the share of positive responses (5, 6, 7) is reported. Items: CL01-CL25 and WA03-WA26. No data was collected for WA12/CL16 (Care of the environment/ecology), WA23/CL22 (God), and WA26/CL25 (Angels) in Switzerland. The items are sorted according to the interest among confirmands.

4.4 Aims of the Workers

Workers' aims were classified into six categories with the help of factor analysis. These are:

- *Faith related aims* (Cronbach's alpha = .82) which consists of the following items: WB20: experience the presence of God; WC11: learn to live their everyday life in relationship to God; WC02: be strengthened in their faith; WB10: get to know other people to whom faith is important; WD02: Confirmation work should be used as a missionary chance for winning people for the Christian faith.
- *Aims related to community and fun* (.67) which consists of the following items: WB30: meet nice people in the services; WB31: feel secure and accepted in the group in the services; WD07: have a lot of fun; WB33: experience a friendly atmosphere in the services; WB09: be allowed to decide about the topics together with their fellow confirmands.
- *Aims related to liturgical life* (.74) which consists of the following items: WB27: become (more) familiar with the use of the hymn book; WB34: get acquainted with the liturgy; WC03: learn central Christian texts by heart (e.g., the Creed); WB11: become (more) familiar with the Bible; WC09: learn to enjoy singing or making music.
- *Aims related to encouraging voluntary work* (.79) which consists of the following items: WP12: get to know parts, programs and tasks in the church where they can work as volunteers; WP13: be won for continuing as voluntary workers in the church; WP11: get to know young people working in the church as volunteers.
- *Aims related to personal growth and belonging* (.72) which consists of the following items: WC04: be supported in their personal and social development; WC01: develop a personal point of view concerning their own life; WD03: experience community; WC16: develop a sense of belonging to the parish; WC15: experience that their questions concerning faith play a role.
- *Aims related to an active role in services* (.73) which consists of the following items: WB28: be given the opportunity to contribute their own ideas to the preparation of a service; WB29: have tasks in the services (for example, do a reading); WB04: experience forms of worship adequate for young people.

Aims related to personal growth and belonging were regarded as most important aims both by employed workers and volunteers. Over 90 % regarded these as important. Employed workers regarded faith-related aims as second most important (82 %) while volunteers placed the importance of the sense of community and fun (82 %) as the second most important aim. Both employed workers and volunteers put equal emphasis on the confirmands' active role in services and encouraging confirmands to take part in church voluntary work. Faith-related aims were regarded as important by 82 % of employed workers and 62 % of volunteers. The aims related to liturgical life were regarded as least important; 55 % of employed workers and 44 % of volunteers regarded it as important.

Table 13: Aims of the employed workers' and volunteers' (t₁)

	Employed workers		Volunteers		Total	
	Important (5-7) %	Mean	Important (5-7) %	Mean	Important (5-7) %	Mean
Aims related to personal growth and belonging	94	6.08	91	5.97	92	6.02
Aims related to community and fun	78	5.54	86	5.79	82	5.67
Aims related to an active role in services	82	5.66	80	5.65	80	5.64
Faith-related aims	82	5.69	61	5.17	71	5.41
Aims related to encouraging voluntary work	71	5.29	67	5.27	68	5.25
Aims related to liturgical life	55	4.95	44	4.71	49	4.82

N = 3610-4044 (total), N = 1789 (employed workers), N = 1710 (volunteers); scale: 1 = not important; 7 = very important.

Employed workers in different countries differed from each other (see Table 14). The biggest differences were related to how much they put emphasis on encouraging voluntary work, community and fun and faith-related aims. Encouraging voluntary work was given very little emphasis in Denmark while in other countries it was typically regarded as important. Faith-related aims were given most emphasis in Hungary and among the Methodist confirmation workers in Germany, and Norway, and again least in Denmark. Aims related

to community and fun were given most emphasis in Sweden and Finland, and least in Germany and Switzerland. Liturgical life was emphasised most among the employed workers in Hungary and Finland and least among the employed workers in Switzerland. Aims related to the confirmands' active role in services and aims related to growth and belonging were typically regarded as important among employed workers in all countries, but slightly less in Denmark.

Table 14: Share of employed workers in different countries (t_1) who regard different aims as important (%)

Employed workers	Total	DE	AT	CH	DK	FI	NO	SE	HU	DE
	EKD								EmK	EmK
Aims related to growth and belonging	94	95	95	94	87	97	95	91	98	96
Faith related aims	82	85	74	67	65	82	89	81	95	91
Aims related to an active role in services	82	83	85	80	69	83	88	78	76	88
Aims related to community and fun	78	70	75	71	77	94	77	90	79	82
Aims related to liturgical life	55	56	35	28	63	69	48	51	81	47
Aims related to encouraging voluntary work	71	77	80	*	16	81	81	65	68	84

* Item WP11 was not asked in Switzerland so the sum variable cannot be computed for Switzerland.

N = 1974 (total), 846 (DE EKD), 20 (AT), 106 (CH), 88 (DK), 215 (FI), 98 (NO), 380 (SE), 106 (HU), 115 (DE EmK); scale: 1 = not important; 7 = very important; the share of those with a positive response (mean value > 5).

There were also some notable differences in aims among volunteers in different countries. These are presented in Table 15. The biggest differences among volunteers were related to how much faith-related aims were given emphasis by them. They were highlighted less among Finnish and Swedish volunteers – one of the reasons probably is their younger age compared to the age of volunteers in other countries.

Compared with the results from 2007/2008, some changes have taken place. However, the dimensions of the aims cannot be used for comparison since not all items were included or they are not fully comparable in data from 2007/2008. Therefore, the comparison needs to be done by analysing single items. Among the full-time workers there is a slight decline especially in some faith-related aims. These are the importance of »becoming familiar with the content of Bible« (WB11: 94% to 85%), being »strengthened in their faith«

Table 15: Share of volunteers in different countries (t_1) who regard different aims as important (%)

Volunteers	Total	DE	AT	CH	FI	SE	HU	DE
		EKD						EmK
Aims related to growth and belonging	91	92	92	88	88	90	100	100
Aims related to community and fun	86	81	92	92	89	96	67	82
Aims related to an active role in services	80	86	83	75	75	71	100	100
Aims related to encouraging voluntary work	67	75	62	*	60	54	100	73
Faith related aims	61	71	75	71	46	56	100	91
Aims related to liturgical life	44	43	25	39	50	38	100	36

* Item WP11 was not asked in Switzerland so the sum variable cannot be computed for Switzerland.

N = 1951 (total), 1016 (DE EKD), 12 (AT), 24 (CH), 587 (FI), 298 (SE), 11 (HU), 3 (DE EmK); Denmark is not included because there were no volunteers in the study there, and Norway is not included because there are no data for the volunteers in t_1 ; scale: 1 = not important; 7 = very important; the share of those with a positive response (mean value > 5).

(WC02: 94 % to 92 %) and learning »to live their everyday life in relationship to God« (WC11: 86 % to 80 %) and learning central Christian texts by heart (WC03: 64 % to 61 %).

4.5 Satisfaction of the Workers

In t_2 the workers were asked how satisfied they are with the confirmation work in their specific parish (VM01) and how they like doing confirmation work in general (VM02) (see Table 16). Of all workers, 89 % like doing confirmation work and 83 % are satisfied with the confirmation work in their parish.

In Sweden, the values for the satisfaction with the local confirmation work and the share of those who like doing confirmation work are equal, in Finland the satisfaction with the confirmation work in the parish is slightly higher than the share of those who like doing confirmation work. In all other countries, the share of those who like doing confirmation work is slightly higher than the share of those satisfied with the confirmation work in their parish.

The biggest differences between both aspects of satisfaction on the one hand, and the lowest values concerning the own satisfaction with the local confirmation work on the other, can be found in Hungary and among the Methodists in

Table 16: Share of the workers who are satisfied with the confirmation work in their parish (VM01) and who like doing confirmation work (VM02) in 2007/2008 and 2012/2013 (t₂) in different countries (%)

	VM01: satisfied with the confirmation work in their parish		VM02: like doing confirmation work	
	2007/2008	2012/2013	2007/2008	2012/2013
Total	83	83	89	89
DE EKD	81	84	91	92
AT	85	91	96	95
CH	78 (CH-ZH)	82 (85 CH-ZH)	94 (CH-ZH)	90 (90 CH-ZH)
DK	88	73	85	87
FI	92	88	90	81
NO	81	78	87	90
SE	93	84	97	84
HU	–	71	–	92
DE EmK	–	69	–	85

N = 2558 (total); 1292 (DE EKD); 116 (AT); 662 (CH); 67 (DE), 154 (FI); 76 (NO); 196 (SE); 31 (HU); 111 (DE EmK); scale: 1 = not at all; 7 = totally; the share of those with a positive response (5, 6, 7).

Germany (EmK). This might be related to the smaller size of these churches. The smaller the church and the confirmands' groups, the smaller the possibilities.

Remarkable decreases between the first and the second study are, for example, the satisfaction with the local confirmation work in Sweden by 9 percent points and in Denmark by 15. So in Denmark, the relation between general pleasure and the local confirmation work becomes similar to the values in Hungary and the Methodists in Germany (EmK), but without the minority situation. Within the German speaking countries, one can observe a slight increase: the workers are more satisfied than 5 years earlier.

4.6 Conclusion

From the results on the workers, some findings can lead to general conclusions and further efforts:

1. Obviously and somehow surprisingly, the number of volunteers participating in confirmation work throughout the European countries involved in the study, is higher than the number of »professionals«, be it ministers, minis-

ters-in-training, deacons, youth workers or other full- or part-time workers. That means that, on a European level, one should not draw a picture of confirmation work which presents the image of »one minister teaching his or her group«, but rather the picture of a lively and dynamic group of many, especially young people involved in preparing and doing confirmation work. In this respect, confirmation work builds a link between the different generations in the church. Concerning this observation, it is interesting that for young women, it is obviously much more attractive to become volunteers than for young men. So it could well be that the gender gap continues after confirmation.

2. It should also be said here again that the confirmands are very satisfied with the workers (cf. p. 68). This again speaks for the potentials of teamwork in this field.
3. The number of volunteers involved in confirmation work should not only be appreciated for their contribution to making this program more attractive for the confirmands but as a development that has its own value especially for older adolescents. For them, it probably means either a first active form of commitment or, in cases where such commitment was already there before confirmation work, a chance to continue with it. In either case, becoming a volunteer in confirmation work can be viewed as part of education for civil society (cf. p. 93 ff.).
4. The main aim of the workers throughout the participating countries is obviously not to shape a certain missionary form of confirmation work but rather to try to develop a liveable and workable balance of faith-, life- and youth-related questions. Examining the results one wonders whether the slight decline of faith-related aims over the last years indicates a general »self-secularisation« among the workers. It could also be the case, however, that workers have become more hesitant to identify with traditional teachings. It would be important to do more research in this respect.
5. Most of the workers are very satisfied with the confirmation work in their own parish. Of course, this result only reflects their personal self-estimations. Therefore, the question remains open if this satisfaction really mirrors the actual quality of confirmation work.
6. Concerning all these results it can be said that the workers, be it the professionals or the volunteers, show a deep commitment of heart and soul and a high potential of positive motivation. Beside this, they hint at the need of further improvements, be it the stronger connection of faith-, life- and youth-related issues, the team-building-factor and also the continuous improvement of their individual pedagogical and theological competences, manifested in a further increase of specific trainings for all the workers, involved in confirmation work.