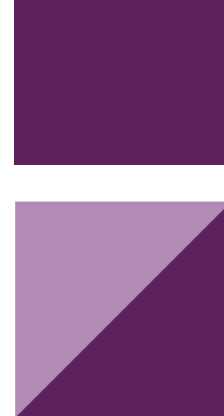


POLICY RECOMMENDATION



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the “E-volunteering – building online volunteering ecosystem” project, the consortium recommends that policy makers address the following policy recommendations to support e-volunteering across Europe

Policy makers must urgently establish a clear legal framework and protection for e-volunteering on both European and national levels

- Establish a harmonised definition of e-volunteering to guide the legal framework across the EU
- Include e-volunteering in already existing European programmes: Mainstream and recognise e-volunteering in the European programmes in the implementation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Extend the European Solidarity Corps Programme (ESC). Integrate with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges (EVE).
- Develop and update national legislative frameworks

Establish clear and enforceable quality standards and comprehensive protection frameworks to ensure the safety, rights and meaningful engagement of e-volunteers

- Develop European-level quality standards for volunteering and encourage their integration nationally, including
- Volunteers rights and protection framework: reimburse expenses, provide social protection coverage, prepare digital inclusion and accessibility standards, define clear roles and obligations.



- **Organisational standards and guidelines:**

- E-volunteers should receive support and training, their tasks should be defined by clarity and transparency.
- E-volunteering should be reflected in all aspects of activities, it should involve quality in management, monitoring and evaluation. It should be inclusive and defined by cultural awareness, based on motivation, appreciation and recognition and with preconditions of safety, security and quality of learning.
- Host organisations should ensure smooth integration of e-volunteers. E-volunteering programmes should ensure social cohesion and intercultural learning.

Youth organisations should be empowered through funding mechanisms at all levels to ensure the sustainable development of e-volunteering

- Allocate national European and international funds for e-volunteering initiatives
 - European Union: Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, Digital Europe Programmes
 - Council of Europe: European Youth Foundation, European Youth Card
 - United Nations

Authorities should recognise, validate, and promote e-volunteering as an equal and impactful form of civic engagement, integrating it into major programmes, recognition frameworks, and training systems to ensure its visibility, value, and sustainability across all sectors.

- Integrate e-volunteering to the European recognition framework: Endorse e-volunteering through European programmes, integrate it to Youthpass and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Link e-volunteering directly to the European Skills Agenda and its follow-up. Expand the Council of Europe's Youth Work Portfolio to support e-volunteering.
- Recognise volunteering experiences through national certification schemes

Authorities should invest in capacity building, stakeholder mapping, and the development of accessible online platforms, ensuring that all actors are equipped, connected, and empowered to participate meaningfully in e-volunteering initiatives

- Develop capacity of youth organisations to implement e-volunteering initiatives by enhancing skills and integrating e-volunteering into the European European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Quality Label and Erasmus+ KA1 accreditation programme.
- Ensure stakeholder mapping and multi-level stakeholder engagement: engage in comprehensive stakeholder analysis and set up an advisory board.
- Support online platforms and resources: Support the efforts already made in setting up and adopting a user-friendly European platform for e-volunteering. Encourage the use of national e-volunteering project management platforms. Centralise resources on e-volunteering.

INTRODUCTION

The “**E-volunteering – building online volunteering ecosystem**” project is supported by the Erasmus+ programme and the European Union and implemented by a consortium of six organisations. The project aims to increase the quality of the work of youth organisations in terms of e-volunteering, by building their capacities in attracting, engaging, managing and coordinating e-volunteers on a transnational level through a structured and multifunctional e-volunteering ecosystem.

At the initial stage of the project, the consortium mapped relevant stakeholders and actors in the field of e-volunteering on the international and national levels in the partner countries, to identify the key actors in the field of e-volunteering, including governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), online platforms, businesses, volunteers, and beneficiaries.



This was followed up by a policy review of the existing various legal mechanisms which support volunteering in the partner countries and on a European level. At the same time, a research analysis was conducted combining both qualitative research through focus groups and quantitative research through questionnaires to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the topic.

There were in total 6 focus groups, while 201 respondents, representatives of youth organisations involved in e-volunteering filled out the questionnaire.





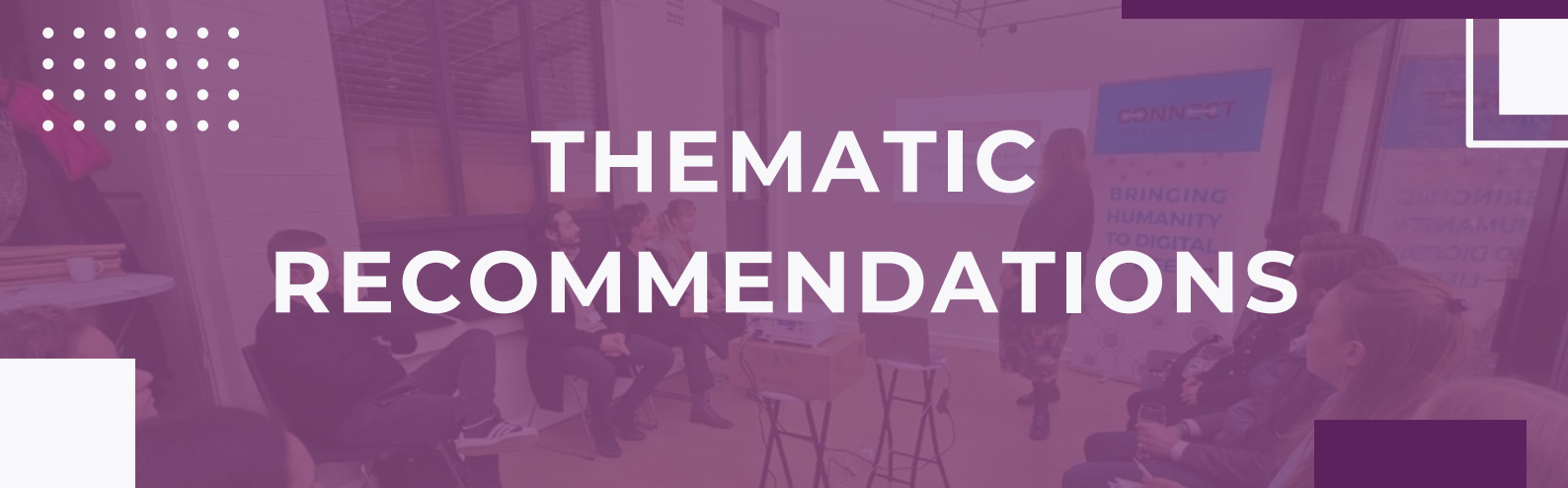
Each partner organised Living Lab stakeholder meetings to engage them in open innovation and brainstorming processes and to collect ideas for policy changes to ensure the sustainability, recognition and standardisation of e-volunteering. A document was prepared on the standardisation and recognition of e-volunteering, with specific standards for e-volunteering for youth organisations.

Two innovative curricula were developed in the framework of the project. One targets youth organisations who run e-volunteer initiatives (**Volunt@@ring curriculum**), the other one aims to prepare young people to participate to become e-volunteers (Volunt@@rs curriculum). A multifunctional e-volunteering webtool was developed to support the cooperation of youth organisations and e-volunteers. A pool of trainers was created, and national and European level workshops were organised to test the curricula and the webtool.

These piloting activities involved over **260** people. In addition, **11** e-volunteers have already supported the work of the consortium members with the support of the web tool.eering on the international and national levels in the partner countries, to identify the key actors in the field of e-volunteering, including governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), online platforms, businesses, volunteers, and beneficiaries.

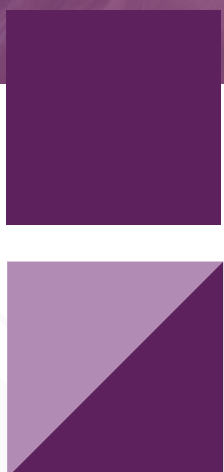
More recently a policy development conference took place in the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, bringing together 43 policy makers, youth representatives and experts from across Europe. The conference identified further policy and legal gaps across five countries and co-developed a set of policy priorities and proposals to guide institutional reforms.

The following policy recommendations are the cumulative results of the project since its inception in 2023. The recommendations aim to contribute to creating an inclusive, recognised and impactful e-volunteering ecosystem which empower young people and youth organisations in a digital age.



THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

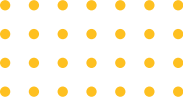
1. Legal framework and definitions



Policy makers must urgently establish a clear legal framework and protection for e-volunteering on both European and national levels

On EU level, “volunteering is defined as all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal. Volunteers act under their own free will, according to their own choices and motivations and do not seek financial gain. Volunteering is a journey of solidarity and a way for individuals and associations to identify and address human, social or environmental needs and concerns. Volunteering is often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative.” While the standardisation of volunteering has been progressing in the last decade, e-volunteering remains overlooked and is rarely mentioned explicitly in the different policy frameworks and documents. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions; Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU /* COM/2011/0568 final *

Based on the previous analysis conducted by the consortium, there is currently a legal gap and inadequate protection regarding e-volunteering. The fundamental problem is that existing legal frameworks do not address the unique aspects and challenges associated with e-volunteering adequately. This has created a significant gap in the protection of e-volunteers and the organisations who engage them. The number of e-volunteers is already increasing in many countries, therefore the need for a supporting legal framework is growing.



One identified structural problem is that without a distinct legal status of e-volunteers, which distinguishes them from employees and traditional volunteers, there is no legislation setting requirements on their activity and providing them with rights and benefits. This can result in issues to privacy, data protection and recognition, for example. The implementing organisations also face similar issues. Based on the research run by the partnership, there is a gap in policy knowledge among organisations. Nearly 25% of them are “not familiar” with relevant policies in their countries, and over 50% are “not sure at all” that specific e-volunteering national policies exist, and the same percentage of organisations are uncertain whether there is a mention of e-volunteering at all in their national legislation. The majority of the respondents believe that there is a need for standardisation of e-volunteering at different levels.

While unfavourable regulations can pose serious obstacles for e-volunteering, complex regulatory environments also pose a problem. For example, they can block or discourage both individuals and organisations in engaging in e-volunteering or it could lead to inconsistent applications of rules.

1.1 Establish a harmonised definition of e-volunteering to guide the legal framework across the EU

The EU should develop and adopt a harmonised definition of e-volunteering; the definition should build on existing frameworks, such as the above-mentioned definition of volunteering. It should include specific provisions for fully digital and hybrid volunteering. E-volunteering should be seen as a complementary approach that extends the scope of volunteering, not replace it. It is recommended to ensure that e-volunteering policies and initiatives are designed to augment and support traditional volunteering efforts.

E-volunteering has unique aspects compared to in-person volunteering which should be included in the legal framework. It enables volunteers to engage remotely regardless of geographic or physical constraints, as they rely on digital tools and platforms for communication, coordination and completion of tasks. E-volunteering activities often involve social media management, content creation, administrative support, online training and workshops, translations, advocacy, and virtual mentorship.

Due to its digital nature, it also poses more challenges than traditional volunteering, especially in the field of data protection and privacy, but also in tracking volunteer contributions and managing online conduct.

E-volunteering is a complementary form of civic engagement which enhances traditional volunteering and it can be beneficial in different areas. The EU should develop a comprehensive cross-sectoral policy framework as well to formally integrate e-volunteering to diverse sectors, including education, health care, climate action and crisis response.



For example, civic engagement activities in a volunteering context are already part of secondary education curricula across EU Member States and there are university courses related to different disciplines at university level. To align with the Digital Decade objectives, the integration of e-volunteering in secondary education could ensure that the digital transformation objective includes civic engagement dimensions as well.

1.2 Include e-volunteering in already existing European programmes



Mainstream and recognise e-volunteering in the European programmes in the implementation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). As the European Union is preparing for its next budgetary period, various European programmes are currently being evaluated and restructured. While preparing a potentially larger budget and stronger commitment to youth within especially the Erasmus+ and Solidarity Corps Programmes, the EU is encouraged to mainstream and recognise e-volunteering as a valid form of volunteering and an important driver for digital transformation.

Extend the European Solidarity Corps Programme (ESC). To address the demand for flexible and inclusive engagement, the European Solidarity Corps Programme could be extended to e-volunteering. The programme already includes digital activities, but this measure would ensure formal recognition of e-volunteering as well as structured support, including funds. E-volunteers should receive equivalent support to presential ESC volunteers, including online training, language support and digital literacy resources through the EU Academy.

They should also be covered by insurance and their costs (digital tools, internet costs, living costs etc.) should be covered. Existing volunteering models could be easily extended to e-volunteers, including cross-border individual volunteering and virtual teams. The ESC portal should host e-volunteering opportunities as unique or blended opportunities and incorporate tools for virtual teamwork. The ESC Quality Label could be also applied to organisations with exemplary capacities for virtual mentorship and good practices in digital safety and security.

Integrate with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges (EVE). This extension aligns with Erasmus+ objectives and responds to the growing demand for flexible, inclusive youth engagement. EVE projects rely on small group formats led by trained facilitators, which can be adapted to e-volunteering. Facilitators could guide teams working on different tasks, projects and campaigns. The EVE online platform provides a secure environment for collaboration and asynchronous communication, it can be used to coordinate e-volunteers from different geographical locations and across borders. The EVE badge system can also be used to formally recognise e-volunteering contributions, and its monitoring and evaluation system can be used to track learning and participation. EVE's professional development offer can also be extended for training youth organisation staff and volunteers on e-volunteering.



1.3 Develop and update national legislative frameworks

European countries should be encouraged to codify e-volunteering in volunteering laws where it exists or consider developing a specific legislation where it does not. Policy makers should consider national volunteering traditions and adapt legal frameworks to their country's cultural context. It is advised to avoid overly prescriptive regulations that would restrict traditional forms of volunteering.

Country-specific recommendations

France

A wide legislative framework for volunteering exists in France through national and local policies. France recognises two forms of volunteering: bénévolat, where the individuals volunteer alongside their primary status (in their free time) and volontariat, where people have a recognised volunteer status and generally undertake this role on a full time basis for a limited period of time. Both of these forms are regulated through various laws, including the Volunteering Act of 2014, the Labour Code, the Civil Code, and the Law of Association of 1901. They define rights and obligations of volunteers, as well as set out protection for them and for the volunteers. None of these address e-volunteering specifically.

The government should explicitly integrate e-volunteering to the already existing legislation and policies, including a clear definition and references to its specific nature compared to traditional volunteering. New regulations should harmonise with France's strong tradition of volunteer engagement but keep pace with the technological change and evolving forms of volunteering.



Greece

Law 4873/2021 was the first piece of legislation in Greece attempting to regulate volunteering and civil society organisations, focusing on transparency, accountability and integrity of NGOs. This law regulates the funding of voluntary organisations and sets out a general framework for volunteering, but it does not address the specific needs of e-volunteering.

The government should develop legislation to recognise e-volunteering and distinguish it from on-site volunteering or employment. They should develop policies for skills recognition to support the already existing efforts of public agencies recognising volunteers' skills. They should develop a national strategy or policy for volunteering, especially e-volunteering, as currently each ministry or public organisation is responsible for its own volunteering activities.



Serbia

The Law on Volunteer Work, adopted in 2010, regulated volunteering in Serbia. It sets out rights, obligations and principles for volunteering, but it does not specifically address e-volunteering or refers to any innovative forms of volunteering, such as digital engagement. Recent policy debates, including the public consultation on the new Law on Volunteering have acknowledged the need for better recognition of new forms of volunteering, including online activities, but there have been no policy updates since the launch of the debate in 2021. The National Youth Strategy 2023-2030 acknowledges the modern forms of volunteering, especially in the context of digital transformation.

Serbia should continue with its plan to recognise online volunteering by explicitly recognising it in its legislation. The new legal framework should specifically address the needs and rights of e-volunteers and codify the ways their achievements can be recognised nationally.



Slovenia

The Law on Volunteering, adopted in 2011 and amended in 2015, regulates Slovenia's volunteering sector. It defines volunteers' rights and allows limited cost reimbursement for them. It does not specifically address e-volunteering. The Strategy for the Development of NGOs and Volunteering until 2023 also lacked provisions for e-volunteering. At the same time, approximately 25 sectoral laws (e.g. health care, disaster management, etc.) reference traditional volunteering without mentioning e-volunteering and its unique aspects.

However, in the draft regulation "Odlok o strategiji razvoja prostovoljstva do 2030" (Draft Decree on the National Volunteering Development Strategy 2030) (Evid. no. 2024-3130-0044), currently in preparation by the Ministry of Public Administration (as of November 29, 2024), e-volunteering is explicitly mentioned as one of the forms of volunteering to be promoted in addressing societal challenges. While still in draft form, this marks an important formal recognition of e-volunteering in a national strategic document in Slovenia.

The government should amend the Law on Volunteering to include e-volunteering. The national Strategy should also align with the amended Law and include e-volunteering by mandating digital adaptation funds for organisations.



Spain

In Spain there is a legal framework which recognises volunteering both on national and regional levels. While the national law (Law 45/2015) does not specifically mention e-volunteering, several regional governments have started to address this gap. The new forms of volunteering and further engagement in ICT has already been mentioned in amendments, but the last debate of this law was in 2021. The main volunteer programme of INJUVE, International Volunteer Fields and other programmes like FormARTE and CULTUREX, as well as other programmes do not yet recognise e-volunteering specifically.

On a regional level, 8 out of 17 autonomous regions in Spain use their own official platforms for volunteer programmes. Notably, the region of Valencia approved a new Volunteering Law in May 2025, which explicitly includes digital volunteering as a recognised modality, alongside measures to ensure proper accreditation, training and insurance coverage.



Other regions like Castilla-La Mancha, Navarra and the Canary Islands are currently in the process of reforming their own laws and have opened consultations that include e-volunteering as a key element.

Through this, it is visible that Spain recognises the value of volunteering. The government should make efforts to include e-volunteering into the agenda in the parliament and include it in the debate on the amendment of the volunteering law. E-volunteering should be explicitly included in Law 45/2015, addressing its unique aspects like digital privacy or liability. This national update would also help ensure coherence with regional developments that are already moving forward in this area. Regional governments are advised to align their autonomous laws and create nationwide standards, while recognising e-volunteering through their regional structures, as they have autonomy in this field.

2. Quality standards and protection of rights

Establish clear and enforceable quality standards and comprehensive protection frameworks to ensure the safety, rights and meaningful engagement of e-volunteers.

The need for quality standards and protection of rights emerges from the inadequacy of the existing legal protections and the growing exposure of e-volunteers and organisations to unique digital risks. Research findings also identified alarming gaps in organisational capacity. The focus group also identified a grey area including visa requirements, insurance, tax and liability concerns. Traditional volunteering standards cannot address the vulnerabilities e-volunteering entails, including, for example, data protection concerns or online conduct issues.

The need for quality standards and protection of rights emerges from the inadequacy of the existing legal protections and the growing exposure of e-volunteers and organisations to unique digital risks. Research findings also identified alarming gaps in organisational capacity.

The majority of the respondents in the research project believe that standardisation of e-volunteering is of high importance. Without standardised quality measures and a comprehensive rights protection, e-volunteering faces many barriers, including competition with paid markets, screening candidates remotely, online conduct, bullying, safety for volunteering with minors, purpose clarification, access levels, and more.



The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme has been one of the first international initiatives to recognise e-volunteering. Individuals can contribute their time and skills remotely through the Online Volunteering service to support peace, development and humanitarian efforts. The UNV programme has clear guidelines on how individuals can support their activities digitally. There is a dedicated online platform.

2.1 Develop European-level quality standards for volunteering

Clear, measurable quality standards are needed for e-volunteering on the European level that define rights and responsibilities of e-volunteers. These should ensure that volunteers enjoy the same protections equivalent to traditional volunteers while taking into account the challenges of digital nature of the activity.

2.1.1 Volunteers rights and protection framework

Reimburse expenses. While e-volunteering seems to be of no costs, both implementing organisations and volunteers incur expenses, such as internet services, equipment, digital tool subscriptions as well as living costs if the role is of a full time voluntary service nature. The reimbursement of these expenses should be non-taxable income and should not exclude e-volunteers from social protections schemes such as unemployment benefits. This would ensure accessibility to suitable electronic devices, reliable internet connection and digital skills training for young people, especially those coming from marginalised groups, rural areas and minorities.

Provide social protection coverage. E-volunteers should benefit from social protection, including health, accidents and public liability insurance. Cooperation with the insurance sector is needed for setting up specific insurance schemes for e-volunteers or including them in existing offers.

Prepare digital inclusion and accessibility standards. Taking into account persons with fewer opportunities, including but not limited to people with disabilities, economic barriers or from rural areas, different provisions should be applied to make e-volunteering accessible and inclusive. E-volunteers should access, where needed, appropriate hardware to carry out their activities. They should have reliable internet connection and digital skills training. This measure also aligns with the EU digital inclusion commitments and addresses the digital divide.

Define clear roles and obligations. There should be clear definition and division of tasks and responsibilities between e-volunteers and the volunteering organisations, including communication and conflict resolution mechanisms adapted for digital environments.

2.1.2 Organisational standards and guidelines

E-volunteering should be reflected in all aspects of activities

Youth organisations should integrate e-volunteering practices into their operations, ensuring that they align with their mission and vision.

Host organisations should ensure smooth integration of e-volunteers

Host organisations should design integration strategies to welcome e-volunteers and take additional measures and efforts to ensure teamwork and cohesion among team members.

E-volunteering tasks should be defined by clarity and transparency

Roles, responsibilities, and expectations for e-volunteers should be tailored to their needs, desires, skills and competences, as relevant for the organisational framework in which they operate. They should be clearly described, communicated, and accessible to both sides.

E-volunteers should receive support and training

E-volunteers should be provided with necessary guidance and assistance to effectively contribute to their tasks, as well as be offered opportunities for competences development, personal growth and well-being.

E-volunteering should involve quality in management, monitoring and evaluation

Effective coordination, performance measurement, and regular evaluation, guarantee that e-volunteering efforts are impactful and well-managed.

E-volunteering should be inclusive and defined by cultural awareness

Opportunities for e-volunteering are open and accessible to young people from diverse backgrounds, taking into consideration cultural differences and thus fostering intercultural understanding.

Safety and security should be preconditions for e-volunteering

A secure digital environment, the protection of e-volunteers' personal data and respect of their rights are pivotal for positive and effective e-volunteering experiences. E-volunteers and organisations should be trained to recognise different types of online abuse, such as cyberbullying, cyber harassment, cyber stalking, hate speech and trolling, etc. This not only protects individuals involved but also helps to ensure the safety of all internet users and contributes to the protection of human rights online

E-volunteering should be based on motivation, appreciation and recognition

Acknowledgment of e-volunteers contributions and recognition of their efforts' impact is a prerequisite for their long-term engagement and commitment to the organisation's work

E-volunteering programmes should ensure social cohesion and intercultural learning

Host organisations should implement additional measures to accommodate cultural differences, foster tolerance and inclusion, and ensure social cohesion among team members.

Quality of the learning experience should be a precondition in designing e-volunteering programmes

Host organisations should implement additional measures to accommodate cultural differences, foster tolerance and inclusion, and ensure social cohesion among team members.



2.2 Encourage the integration of quality standards nationally

National authorities should ensure that quality standards are upheld on national and local levels. It is recommended that protection frameworks are quality standards adopted by organisations at all levels, to provide equal opportunities for all volunteers, elevate e-volunteering practices and address better the digital divide, accessibility and inclusion. National standards should also reflect local traditions, culture and needs combined with European principles.



3. Funding and financial support

Youth organisations should be empowered through funding mechanisms at all levels to ensure the sustainable development of e-volunteering.

The primary research identified a significant resource gap and infrastructure deficits in youth organisations to implement e-volunteering. More than half of the organisations asked do not have any budget for e-volunteering activities, while the others have only low or medium funds, mainly on a project-basis. At the same time only 24% of the respondents said that their organisation has high capabilities in e-volunteering. More than 50% reported the lack of funds as the main reason for not yet implementing e-volunteering activities. Therefore, there is a need for funding for staff members and operational capacity, including necessary infrastructure, training, support systems.

Dedicated funding mechanisms would also mean that the development of e-volunteering practices can move from project-base to a more sustainable growth. Stakeholders should invest in e-volunteering and provide support at European and national levels.



3.1 Allocate European and international funds for e-volunteering initiatives

Prioritise the allocation of dedicated funding to support and expand e-volunteering initiatives in Europe. European and national programmes already support digital youth work and volunteering, but they do not yet fully recognise and provide financial support for the unique needs of e-volunteering. By explicitly including e-volunteering in funding guidelines, adapting cost structures, and updating recognition and reporting mechanisms, these programmes can help organisations develop robust e-volunteering projects, ensure digital inclusion (especially for volunteers with fewer opportunities), and foster digital skills and cross-border collaboration. National authorities are also encouraged to complement these efforts with targeted grants and supportive policies, ensuring that e-volunteering is accessible, valued, and fairly compensated, thereby maximising its potential for societal benefit and youth engagement

3.1.1 European Union

Key action 1

Mobility projects for youth workers already encourage projects to boost digital skills, foster digital literacy and develop understanding of digital technologies among youth workers and young people. Under this Action, beneficiaries should be encouraged to focus their projects on e-volunteering. The Training and Cooperation Activities offered by National Agencies also support digital transformation in the youth field which can be extended to boost e-volunteering. Youth participation activities also support digital tools and blended approaches, which can be a base for projects on e-volunteering.

Key action 2

There are already projects under this Action which focus on enhancing digital competences, online project management and quality of digital youth work through international cooperation. For cooperation projects, e-volunteering should be seen as a complimentary activity to traditional volunteering for the youth organisations, which can also support their day-to-day organisational work.

European Solidarity Corps Programme



The ESC Guide and application forms should be amended, and e-volunteering should explicitly be included. This would allow activities wholly or partly online to be implemented through the Programme. Costs related to e-volunteering should be eligible, the unit cost structure should be adapted to cover management, coordination and support costs of e-volunteering. The inclusion support should be extended to cover digital accessibility needs for volunteers with fewer opportunities.

To cover demonstrated costs associated with e-volunteering, consider a flexible approach for pocket money, to cover all possible expenses. Introduce specific calls or priorities for e-volunteering projects, to further advance digital skills, digital transition, inclusion and cross-border virtual mobility. Organisations should be supported to develop e-volunteering programmes through funding capacity-building activities. On-arrival trainings, already successfully implemented online during the pandemic, should be offered to e-volunteers to ensure that they also get the benefits of meeting other e-volunteers connected to the programme and an online mentoring system could be set up involving former ESC volunteers.

Digital Europe Programme

Broaden the scope of the Digital Volunteers Programme, which connects digital mentors from large-scale companies with SMEs to civil society organisations as well. Launch specific funding calls for e-volunteering initiatives which use digital platforms for societal benefits. Fund the development of a secure, accessible, multilingual and user-friendly platform for e-volunteering in cooperation with the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes. Provide financial support for skills and infrastructure developments for non-governmental organisations.

3.1.2 Council of Europe

The European Youth Foundation's existing framework and reporting mechanisms for the recognition of volunteer time as a contribution to projects are primarily designed for traditional, in-person volunteering. The EYF's should explicitly recognise e-volunteering as a valid form of volunteer contribution and clarify the eligible activities, such as digital content creation, virtual event facilitation, online advocacy, etc. They should update their volunteer time recognition (VTR) methodology to account for e-volunteer hours at the same level as on-site volunteering. The EYF could explore digital time-tracking tools or online collaboration platforms in addition to physical records. Digital records should be accepted in the documentation for e-volunteering contributions. The EYF should acknowledge e-volunteering in the project budget, for example, included as co-funding just as traditional volunteering.

The rules should allow costs related to internet use, hardware and digital tool needs, especially if it empowers the participation of volunteers with fewer opportunities. Furthermore, to support non-financial initiatives, e-volunteers should be eligible for a European Youth Card. Also referred to as a European Volunteer Card, this Council of Europe initiative is already available for European Solidarity Corps volunteers, therefore with the cooperation of the two institutions it could be extended to e-volunteers participating in the programme.

3.1.3 United Nations

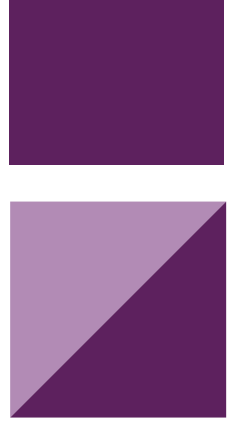
Although the United Nations has one of the most developed online volunteer programmes among the international institutions, their online volunteers do not receive any remuneration or allowance. While the Programme's focus on skills development and experiences are important, the United Nations should provide the same benefits to their online volunteers as to their on-site ones, such as sustenance allowance or other benefits.

3.2 Funding from national authorities

National authorities should develop and manage funding schemes at their levels to complement the existing European ones. They should offer grants for digital transformation and adoption of digital tools for non-governmental organisations. Local digital hubs and community centres should be strengthened through financial support as e-volunteering access points. The authorities should make sure that cost reimbursement received by e-volunteers should not be seen as income and not be taxed. It should also not exclude them from social protections schemes, such as unemployment benefits.



4. Recognition and skills development



Authorities should recognise, validate, and promote e-volunteering as an equal and impactful form of civic engagement, integrating it into major programmes, recognition frameworks, and training systems to ensure its visibility, value, and sustainability across all sectors.

Despite the growing importance of e-volunteers and the growing number of young people participating in such activities, it is still mainly invisible not just for policy makers but for sectors like education or employment as well. E-volunteering significantly contributes to social cohesion, inclusion and skills building and at the same time it enables broader participation, involving young people who otherwise would or could not be part of traditional volunteering activities. The lack of recognition means that the e-volunteers' contributions are undervalued, and their achievements and development is not systematically acknowledged. This can also cause lack of motivation for volunteers, set back the development of e-volunteering practices and reduce the overall impact of the sector.



At the same time, there are training deficits which pose barriers to e-volunteering. The research revealed that nearly 60% of organisations do not offer any training to e-volunteers, and over 50% mentioned the lack of budget for human resources as the main reason. Digital literacy, communication and digital project management skills are essential for effective e-volunteering projects. There is a need for targeted skills development both for e-volunteers and those who work directly with them, like youth workers and staff members of youth organisations. This would ensure high-quality, impactful volunteering activities which maximise the potential of digital engagement and adapt to technological changes.

4.1 Integrate e-volunteering to the European recognition framework

Endorse e-volunteering through European programmes.

Integrating the definition and standards of e-volunteering in the main programmes, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity corps is the first step to raise its status from a complementary to a standalone activity. The programme guides of these initiatives act as reference points in the youth sector, therefore it is essential that the notions of e-volunteering are represented in them and communicated to the public widely through different promotional campaigns.

Integrate e-volunteering to Youthpass.

The main recognition instrument of the European youth sector, Youthpass has been documenting and validating young people's learning since its inception. It is already used for volunteering activities, including digital ones, therefore it is a natural next step to clearly recognise e-volunteering as an eligible activity, through including it in the EU programmes. There should be a better focus on reflecting on digital competences and non-formal learning when supporting young volunteers, but otherwise the platform is ready to be used for recognising skills acquired through e-volunteering projects.

Link e-volunteering directly to the European Skills Agenda and its follow-up.

E-volunteering develops digital, transversal and lifelong learning skills which are core priorities of the Agenda. It supports the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, including volunteering, through tools like Europass and the development of micro credentials. E-volunteering experiences should be documented and the learning acquired validated through these platforms, enabling e-volunteers to demonstrate their skills to educational institutions and employers.





NGOs implementing e-volunteering activities should be included as providers of micro-credentials. E-volunteering can be also linked to Vocational Education and Training curricula as a form of work-based learning supported by the Agenda.

Expand the Council of Europe's Youth Work Portfolio to support e-volunteering.

The Portfolio should include competences and standards specific to managing e-volunteers, like digital safeguarding; fostering digital inclusion or digital platform management. The Council of Europe should provide specific training opportunities to develop these competences.

4.2 Recognise volunteering experiences through national certification schemes



Governments and authorities should encourage public and private organisations to fund and support e-volunteering initiatives. They should promote the value of such activities at the same level as traditional volunteering. Where applicable, countries should also integrate e-volunteering for already existing schemes such as service learning in high schools.

5. Capacity building and stakeholder engagement

Authorities should invest in capacity building, stakeholder mapping, and the development of accessible online platforms, ensuring that all actors are equipped, connected, and empowered to participate meaningfully in e-volunteering initiatives.

Effective and sustainable e-volunteering ecosystems require the active participation and collaboration of a diverse range of actors.

E-volunteering is rapidly expanding, it not only involves traditional volunteer organisations, but a wide range of civil society organisations, businesses, online platforms and beneficiaries. The mapping exercise run in a previous project phase showed that there is a need to better understand who the involved parties in e-volunteering are at different levels, so that the proposed policies can address the diverse needs of anyone involved.

However, the implementation of impactful e-volunteering activities faces barriers from the varying levels of capacities involved organisations have. In the conducted research, 46.5% of organisations reported limited familiarity with e-volunteering tools and practices, and the majority lack adequate e-volunteering management capabilities. Therefore, it is essential to build capacities of these organisations, bridge current knowledge, skills and resource gaps.



The research findings indicate that many youth organisations lack familiarity with e-volunteering tools, find it challenging to manage e-volunteers and have limited access to resources and training. An online platform would bridge these gaps by answering the needs of youth organisations and young people. Accessible online spaces also promote inclusion and outreach to marginalised young people, including those from remote areas, who are physically far from the organisation and other volunteers due to geographical and/or other mobility-related barriers.

5.1 Develop capacity of youth organisations to implement e-volunteering initiatives

Enhance skills.

Provide comprehensive training opportunities for youth organisations to enhance their digital skills and exchange best practices with each other at national and international levels. Develop management capacities of organisations to better support the implementation of e-volunteering activities, such as online community building, virtual team leadership and digital mentoring. Ensure that youth workers and staff of NGOs have access to learning opportunities about managing digital platforms, complying with data protection regulations, etc. but also to beginner-level digital training. On a European level, the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchanges professional development offer could be extended to include capacity building for organisations to run e-volunteering initiatives.

Integrate e-volunteering into the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Quality Label.

The European Union should extend this already existing accreditation framework to e-volunteering initiatives by explicitly recognising e-volunteering in Quality Label definitions and defining standards for it. The Quality Label roles and application process should be updated to match this development. It is recommended to allow hybrid models and cross-border virtual projects to take place. Organisations should be able to extend their already awarded quality labels subject to a simplified digital review.



Integrate e-volunteering into the Erasmus+ KA1 accreditation programme.

The Erasmus+ Quality Standards for mobility projects in the field of youth already reference digital tools, virtual cooperation and mobility and hybrid activities. This provides a foundation to include e-volunteering in this existing framework as well. The Erasmus Accreditation in the field of Youth gives simplified access to funding opportunities to organisations under Key Action 1 - Learning mobility activities in the field of youth. Accreditation rules should integrate specific guidelines and requirements when it comes to e-volunteering and organisations should be encouraged to include e-volunteering in their action plans.

5.2 Stakeholder mapping and multi-level stakeholder engagement

Engage in comprehensive stakeholder analysis.

Create mechanisms on European, national and local levels to better map and understand stakeholders involved in e-volunteering both at European and national levels, including governments, NGOs, online platforms, businesses, volunteers and beneficiaries. A stakeholder analysis was prepared in the framework of this project which is accessible [here](#).

Set up an advisory board.

The European Union should set up an advisory body including main stakeholders, NGOs, youth workers, young people and other key actors to facilitate the standardisation and legislative procedure of e-volunteering and continue monitoring e-volunteering trends to facilitate its adaptability to a rapidly changing digital world. National authorities are also advised to invite major stakeholder groups for regular consultation meetings on the topic. Regular policy review processes are encouraged at all levels.

5.3 Online platforms and resources

Support the efforts already made in setting up and adopting a user-friendly European platform for e-volunteering.

Integrate it as part of the European Youth Portal. To enhance the efficacy of the platform produced with the support of Erasmus+ programme, it is recommended to strive for seamless integration with already existing EU platforms, including Europass, Youthpass, etc. and national volunteering portals. Incentivise e-volunteering providers to use these platforms to streamline their work and reach out to young people. A centralised online platform could help to connect and coordinate the different stakeholders and focus efforts instead of duplicated actions by different organisations.



Encourage the use of national e-volunteering project management platforms.

While many e-volunteering projects are cross-border or European level, the equivalent number of projects also take place on a national level. National authorities are advised to support further development of the platform in their local language and ensure online management for e-volunteering, similarly to the European level, where young volunteers can connect with organisations but at the same time they can be used for the management of day-to-day activities in the e-volunteering initiatives.

Centralise resources on e-volunteering.

In both national and international platforms, digital resources related to the management and implementation of e-volunteering activities, digital skills development, preparation of e-volunteers, etc. should be made available for all interested parties. Translations should be provided where applicable, especially for resources targeting young volunteers, including those coming from marginalised groups and fewer opportunities.



CONCLUSIONS

Volunteering is not only an act of empathy, but an act of citizenship. Therefore, promoting digital citizenship and rights should be accompanied with relevant and quality e-volunteering as an act of online expression of active citizenship. This document provides a specific list of concrete ideas for policy and advocacy work, which should improve the quality, recognition, outreach and impact of e-volunteering

A definition of e-volunteering should be added to the legal framework across the EU and used to develop and update national legislative frameworks. E-volunteering should be integrated into cross-sectoral policy frameworks such as education, health, climate action and crisis response.

Furthermore, e-volunteering should be added to existing European programmes, including Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. At national level, countries are encouraged to codify e-volunteering in their volunteering law or develop new legislations.



To improve quality standards both at European and national levels, clear, enforceable quality standards and comprehensive protection frameworks should be developed. This would ensure that e-volunteers are supported, engage in relevant activities, get the needed protection of their volunteers rights and can access these opportunities in the online environment. Rights and responsibilities should be clearly defined, specific challenges such as data protection and accessibility should be addressed.

E-volunteers should have their expenses reimbursed, receive social protection coverage and access to hardware, internet and digital skills training. Organisations are expected to integrate e-volunteering into all aspects of their work, ensure smooth onboarding and support, and foster inclusive and safe environments.

To address funding and infrastructure gaps in youth organisations, dedicated and sustainable funding mechanisms are needed at both European and national levels. Erasmus+ funding for digital youth work should be increased with explicit support for e-volunteering in both mobility and cooperation projects. The European Solidarity Corps should integrate e-volunteering, adapt costs, and extend inclusion support. The Digital Europe Programme should be broadened to fund e-volunteering platforms and skills development. The Council of Europe's European Youth Foundation is urged to recognise e-volunteering hours, accept digital records, and allow related costs. The UN is encouraged to provide online volunteers with the same benefits as on-site volunteers. National authorities should offer grants, support digital transformation, and strengthen local hubs.

Authorities should recognise e-volunteering as an equal and visible form of civic engagement by integrating it into major European recognition frameworks (Europass, Youthpass, ECTS), and national certification schemes. E-volunteering should be also linked to the European Skills Agenda and micro-credentials.



To build a sustainable e-volunteering ecosystem, authorities should invest in capacity building for youth organisations, stakeholder mapping, and the integration of accessible online platforms. Youth organisations should have access to comprehensive digital skills training and management support. The European Solidarity Corps Quality Label should be extended to e-volunteering with updated standards and simplified processes. A multi-level stakeholder analysis and establishment of an advisory board for ongoing policy development is needed. E-volunteering provider organisations should be institutionally encouraged to use already existing e-volunteering hubs supported and financed through EU programmes, which offer digital safety and protection. National e-volunteering platforms and centralised database of resources would also help to ensure effective and meaningful e-volunteering projects.

The Council of Europe is urged to include related digital competences in their Youth Work Portfolio. Governments are encouraged to treat e-volunteering on par with traditional volunteering in national schemes. These steps aim to ensure e-volunteering is valued, its contributions acknowledged, and its participants motivated and supported.

To build a sustainable e-volunteering ecosystem, authorities should invest in capacity building for youth organisations, stakeholder mapping, and the integration of accessible online platforms. Youth organisations should have access to comprehensive digital skills training and management support. The European Solidarity Corps Quality Label should be extended to e-volunteering with updated standards and simplified processes. A multi-level stakeholder analysis and establishment of an advisory board for ongoing policy development is needed. E-volunteering provider organisations should be institutionally encouraged to use already existing e-volunteering hubs supported and financed through EU programmes, which offer digital safety and protection. National e-volunteering platforms and centralised database of resources would also help to ensure effective and meaningful e-volunteering projects.

It is evident from this summary of the policy recommendations, a cross-sectoral approach is the most effective way to ensure quality and effective implementation of the recommendations. Therefore, a cross-sectoral steering group could be set up between the European Commission, Erasmus+ programme and relevant SALTOs, the Council of Europe, international organisations working on digitalisation and international volunteering organisations, National public authorities responsible for social policies, education and citizens participation. This group would ensure a holistic approach towards e-volunteering and would be responsible for setting up a European Volunteering Agenda. The group would be monitoring the progress and improvement in the field on a regular basis, analysing projects, promising practices, challenges and developments.





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