

Volunteering is a rights-based, conscious civic act based on free will that embodies EU values and directly strengthens social cohesion, contributes to resilience, peace and prosperity, actively preventing hate speech and promoting inclusion and tolerance across all Member States. Yet the EU policy landscape remains fragmented, highly youth-centred and project-based, with weak recognition of volunteering infrastructure, learning outcomes and data, and no coherent cross-sectoral political or financial framework. IVY2026, the 30th anniversary of the EU Youth and Solidarity Programmes and the launch of the EU Civil Society Strategy, positions 2026 as the right political moment to assert a European vision of volunteering and to anchor it in the next MFF 2028-2034.

Key current structural gaps that justify action

- There is no EU-wide, cross-sectoral framework for volunteering. The responsibility and support for volunteering are dispersed across policy areas, such as youth, social, democracy and civil protection.
- Over-reliance on a youth-centric understanding of volunteering, including through ESC, which fails to recognise lifelong and intergenerational characteristics of volunteering.
- Insufficient structural funding for volunteering infrastructure. Fundamentally, project-based and short-term funding fails to ensure structural support for volunteering organisations and infrastructures.
- Patchy recognition and validation of learning outcomes from volunteering across Member States limits their integration into education, employment and lifelong learning pathways
- Weak, irregular and incomplete EU-level data on volunteering, with narrow definitions that overlook new and informal forms of civic engagement.

Key political asks

Build a coherent EU framework for volunteering (linked to MFF 2028-2034)

- Recognise volunteering as a horizontal priority across EU programmes, including Erasmus+, ESC, AgoraEU, civil protection, health, skills, social inclusion and SDG-related instruments supported by annual inter-DG meetings on the topic.
- Guarantee dedicated, long-term funding lines for volunteer-involving and volunteer-infrastructure organisations, including operating grants and support for advocacy and watchdog roles. The specific role of national lotteries for society, via funding of good causes, should be recognised & the EU should prevent undue obstacles on regulatory frameworks for critical funding channels for volunteering such as this.
- Develop an EU-wide data and measurement framework for volunteering (including innovative, informal and hybrid forms), with regular, comprehensive data collection and better use of tools such as EU-SILC and Eurobarometer.

Mainstreaming volunteering into flagship strategies

- Ensure the EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness, the European Democracy Shield, the EU Civil Society Strategy, AgoraEU, the Skills Agenda, resilience and preparedness, and health strategies all include concrete volunteering objectives, instruments and indicators.
- Use IVY2026 and EU Volunteering and Solidarity programme anniversaries as catalysts to communicate this political commitment and to involve volunteers and their organisations in co-creation and follow-up.
- In the next MFF (2028-2034):
 - Keep a distinct, mission-driven ESC strand with earmarked funding and a significant budget increase;
 - Create stable, long-term funding lines and operating grants for volunteer-involving and volunteer-infrastructure organisations;
 - Establish an EU-wide volunteering data framework that captures formal, informal and innovative forms of engagement.

Adopt an MEP Volunteering Statement for IVY2026

- Provide explicit political recognition of volunteering as a strategic asset for the achievement of EU values, as well as democracy and civic engagement, resilience and wellbeing and upskilling and personal development.
- Set out a cross-cutting vision for volunteering across the life course, reflecting cultural and legal diversity while defining common EU-level principles.
- Commit to, in line with the EU Civil Society Strategy:
 - Strengthen effective engagement of Civil Society as partners in governance, including through the recognition and reiteration of the importance of volunteering in strengthening democratic resilience, civic engagement and social cohesion.
 - Supporting & Protecting Civil Society, including by fostering an enabling and safe environment for both formal and informal volunteers to act and support their communities, putting into practice EU values, ensuring their safety and wellbeing in any circumstance and context.
 - Ensuring adequate, sustainable and transparent funding for civil society that is necessary to maintain stable organisational capacities and invest in volunteer training, coordination and infrastructure, ensuring that volunteers and organisations alike contribute more effectively to social cohesion and democratic participation.