

TWO YEARS OF INNOVATING IN VOLUNTEERING ASSESSMENT:

The Volunteering Impact Measurement Training in Europe (V-CALC) project comes to an end (*or maybe it's just the beginning*).

All good things come to an end, and we are proud to announce that the Volunteering Impact Measurement Training in Europe (V-CALC) project is one of those. That's right! We are at the closing stage of our project. Given the special occasion, we are really excited to look back and share with all of you the valuable milestones achieved during the V-CALC implementation. This cherished success will allow us to continue building on the establishment of common grounds for comparable data collection, analyses, policies and programs in the field of volunteering.

First of all, we would like to refresh your minds about the whys and wherefores that made the implementation of this project really necessary. As many of you know now, the V-CALC project was conceived to tackle the prevailing issue of a lack of standardised methodology for measuring the impact of volunteer involvement across nations on a European scale. Our mission regarding the development of this project has been no other than to provide evidence and visibility of volunteering as an agent of true social transformation, as well as offering capacity-building training in efficient data gathering and volunteer impact assessment. In this way, we developed innovative tools and a digital Platform to contribute to harmonising the methodology for measuring volunteering contributions by all different actors involved in the sector. Finally, we also provided relevant data-based literacy to inform policy nationally and at European level.

Therefore, our V-CALC project builds on social and human capital, promoting European values and seeking to trigger a long lasting impact beyond the life of the project with outputs such as: training volunteer managers and coordinators; innovative digital tools and a platform for volunteering impact assessment; as well as, data-based literacy for relevant stakeholders and policy-makers to continue building on the development of efficient and sustainable, evidence-based volunteering policies.

The Volunteering Impact Measurement Training in Europe (V-CALC) has been promoting the Erasmus+ priorities since its inception. Through all phases of the project, we have been acting upon enhancing the volunteering sector. In line with the Erasmus+ priorities, the V-CALC project was conceived to empower a new push to our European democracy; act on inclusion and diversity; innovate in the digital realm; and last but not least, boost a green transformation. Our innovative approach in this regard, consisted of spreading these priorities in civic spaces through measurable and robust volunteering contributions, as well as through providing literacy and visibility on its benefits. Consequently, the *Volunteering Impact Measurement Training in Europe* has always fostered a genuine integration of people from all backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures as well as genders, in volunteering initiatives, leveraging their capacity to measure and understand the

impact of their volunteering contributions thanks to the implementation of accessible, concise and interactive online training, digital literacy and best practices.

Alignment with EU Values: the project is firmly rooted in our common EU values -values that serve as a ground for our common social and historical heritage (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights)-. We aim at promoting our European fundamental values in civic spaces, thanks to better understanding of volunteering efforts and providing a hub to showcase the powerful benefits of volunteering on social cohesion, active citizenship and significant well-being of citizens and the economy.

Project Outputs:

The V-CALC project seeks to trigger a long-lasting impact beyond the life of the project, capitalizing the impact of the project outputs as follows:

The Volunteering Impact Platform: it aims to revolutionise the recording, and collection of data from all parties involved in volunteering: measuring the impact of volunteer activities in all the diverse beneficiaries: volunteers, volunteer providers and communities across nations. In doing so, it will enhance the empowerment of volunteering organisations across Europe to collaborate with stakeholders in the research field, promote the measurement of the Economic Value of Volunteering while supporting policymakers to work directly with partners to ensure that more reliable and comparable data on volunteering is gathered on a European scale – all with the aim to inform and implement changes to volunteering policies and programmes through which consolidated European standards for volunteer recognition and impact measurement are in place.

The Volunteering Impact Measurement Training: = tailor-made training sessions around non-formal education (NFE) values and best practices. This programme combines accessibility, active participation, and innovative ICT tools to enhance impact measurement practices across Europe, pledging to the UN 2030's Agenda by leaving no one behind. The online training sessions provide both a theoretical basis and practical experience, deepening the features of the methodology we developed previously in the project, "The Theory of Change", for volunteering impact measurement. The training programme strongly relies on the combination of learning by doing and a learner-centred approach, allowing participants from all walks of life to actively engage and interact. By the end of the V-CALC project, more than 800 volunteer managers and coordinators of all ages & diversity across Europe will be trained to measure and understand the impact of their volunteers.

Policy Recommendations: the V-CALC policy document builds on the findings of a series of six (6) key reports, carried out by the project consortium, which highlighted critical challenges in the volunteering sector in: Belgium; Spain; Croatia; United Kingdom & Albania, while also covering the European level. It proposed pragmatic policy recommendations for National and European level, tailored to overcome the identified challenges. The relevance of the policy document is being achieved by an inclusive consultation process involving key stakeholders from partners' respective national volunteer organisations, as well as from the

European level. Relevant stakeholders provided their experiences and expertise through detailed surveys and focus groups addressing the current needs, challenges, and proposed policy recommendations aiming at the more efficient implementation of the impact assessment methods or activities. The document also includes the input collected through seven V-CALC Community of Practice Sessions, where volunteer managers, volunteers, researchers, and policymakers had a space for mutual collaboration, dialogue, and exchange of promising practices.

Key Takeaways from the V-CALC Project

- The V-CALC project tackled the prevailing issue of a lack of standardised methodology for measuring the impact of volunteers across Europe.
- The V-CALC mission was to develop a robust methodology, “**The Theory of Change**”, within a user-friendly digital tool (volunteeringimpact.eu), which enables harmonised cross-sectoral and cross-national volunteering contributions’ measurement.
- This innovative project seeks to make a significant difference by offering flexible online training for volunteer managers and coordinators from all walks of life to actively engage and interact, so as to take advantage of digital solutions and the best green practices, thereby fostering a more inclusive environment for volunteering, gathering reliable data about the impact of volunteering across nations and contributing to enforce ERASMUS+ Priorities and EU fundamental values.
- The initiative leverages digital innovation to tackle the lack of harmonised methodology and enhance volunteering impact measurement across Europe, aiming to influence policy-making with data-driven insights.
- We ensured the sustainability of project results by developing a strong community of practitioners across Europe, promoting the use of the Volunteering Impact Online Platform, and developing policy recommendations for the development of better evidence-based volunteering policies in Europe.
- Until issues such as agreed common ground for comparable data collection, analysis, policies and volunteering programs are sufficiently addressed and harmonised at the EU level, it will be impossible to have a realistic assessment and measure of the true transformative effect of volunteering in Europe, its economic and social value, as well as the development of efficient and sustainable, evidence-based policies.

Final Conference in Brussels, Belgium

Before concluding this newsletter, it is worth mentioning to cherish the tremendous success achieved during the V-CALC Final Conference. Over 100 volunteering stakeholders coming from different parts of the world gathered in Brussels the 19th of November with excitement to learn more about V-CALC achievements, outputs and further debate and contribute to the sustainable future of the milestones conquered.

The program delved into the insights of global trends, tools for assessing the impact of volunteering efforts, as well as the methodology developed for that purpose. The agenda consisted of different expert input, together with project partners' best practices, lessons learned and key takeaways from each Work Package. Finally, a debate was sparked aimed at fostering the continuity of standardized impact measurement practices in Europe.

Final Words

We remain committed to building safe civic spaces, regardless of age, condition or ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as to promoting best practices on volunteering impact management. We cheer the great milestone achieved in volunteering impact assessment thanks to the development of *the Volunteering Impact Platform*. This platform adds an European added value as a free, friendly and accessible tool for everyone. We want to ensure it becomes widely used for this purpose, as well as refine it to the needs of the future users. Thus, building social and human capital and promoting common European values.

To conclude, we would like to provide a few words of appreciation to all the V-CALC partner organisations (Centre for European Volunteering, UEA Institute for Volunteering Research, Out of The Box International, Fundación Hazloposible, Dkolektiv and Beyond Barriers) who worked untiringly in this project. Thank you all for contributing to the outstanding implementation of the V-CALC project. Together with all the interested stakeholders, we are conquering the deserved visibility of volunteering as a main agent of social transformation, and thus, showcasing its significant impact on the future of democracies in Europe.

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