

Strengthening, Inspiring and Celebrating
VOLUNTEERING & SOLIDARITY since 1992!

Mechelen European Volunteering Capital Candidate 2025
Jury Feedback | Brussels, 5 December 2023

Mechelen is an excellent example of harnessing volunteering for inclusion, diversity and participation of its inhabitants, symbolising the European values of connection, diversity and progress. The city has shown its well planned and developed effort to integrate volunteer policy as part of the wider social policy and cohesion encouraging encounters between citizens and volunteering organisations. Each volunteer sector has an advisory board with experts and volunteers from various organisations, who meet on a structural basis and provide direct advice to policy makers. The collaboration between organisations and the municipality creates stronger ties providing everyone the opportunity to volunteer and express solidarity. Mechelen participates in a network of local authorities on volunteering that inspire each other and that benefits the volunteer managers, organisations and volunteers.

Mechelen provides impressive and wide support to volunteer organisations to increase their capacity to adapt their volunteering opportunities and enable people from diverse backgrounds and situations to volunteer. The regular Volunteer Fair provides information about volunteering possibilities in the city and connects volunteers with volunteer-involving organisations. Volunteers and organisations can also get connected through an online platform and social media facilitated by the city authorities. Together with the Flemish Volunteer Support Centre, Mechelen has developed training opportunities to raise awareness, focusing on lifelong learning and continuing to offer regular training while volunteering.

The city gives particular attention to taking actions to ensure that volunteer contribution does not replace paid jobs. The service Volunteer Point stimulates volunteer participation and informs and advises all city employees, citizens and employers about the legislation on volunteering. Besides, the municipality provides various grants to volunteer organisations and does not require any co-financing from the side of the recipients, and so increases access to much needed resources.

There is great attention towards recognition and celebration of volunteering and the contribution of volunteers in society. Volunteers are featured in the monthly city magazine, in a quarterly newsletter about volunteering, on social media, and during the annual Day of the Volunteer and the Week of the Volunteer.

The municipality started creating the structural policy plan for volunteers using the experiences from the COVID19 crisis based on the core values of social policy participation of everyone in social life, creating opportunities for the vulnerable, working together across borders and living together in diversity. The inclusive policy focuses on participation and the elimination of barriers and ensures representativeness promoting participation of minorities through volunteering.

The strategy for future growth in volunteering focuses on accessible and talent-oriented volunteering, organisational growth and research, social relevance and impact with a permanent focus on training, cooperation and networking. To achieve the intended objectives Mechelen works in multidisciplinary teams demonstrating good practice in this regard. The policy plan points to the importance of the coach as a key role for the volunteer supervision and support. Nevertheless the municipality should improve the support to the development of and engagement with the European programme European Solidarity Corps.

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ABOUT THE COMPETITION:

CEV launched the **European Volunteering Capital Competition** to strengthen, inspire and celebrate volunteering and the impact made by volunteers at the local level by giving recognition to municipalities that support and strengthen volunteering, especially through partnerships with stakeholders from different sectors such as volunteer centres, volunteer-involving organisations and the for-profit sector.

The judging criteria are the extent of their strategies, policies, and programmes in connection to the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 and to the CEV Volunteering Policy Statements. Evidence about their engagement with, and support for, the European Solidarity Corps when the applicant comes from an EU member state is also required. Applicants are also asked to indicate if they are signatories of the Integrating Cities Charter.

The awarded municipality is chosen from the candidates by an **international jury of key personalities** connected with volunteering, representing civil society, the private, for-profit sector, as well as the EU institutions: Michel Lefranc (CEV Board), Daniele Antonozzi (CEV Board), Lena Karnalova (CEV Board), Tine Radinja (Mayor of Škofja Loka, Slovenia & EU Committee of the Regions member), Krzysztof Pater (EESC Member, Rapporteur Opinion "Volunteering - Citizens Building the Future of Europe"), Brando Benifei (Member of the European Parliament, S&D), Barbara Eglitis (Coordinator, European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre), Piotr Sadowski (Member of the Standing Committee the Conference of INGOs, Council of Europe), Begona Barbera Garcia (Iberdrola Social Projects Manager, Employee Volunteering European Network (EVEN), Morten Wolden (Trondheim Municipal Director).

The previous winners are: Trento 2024 - Trondheim 2023 - Gdansk 2022 - Berlin 2021 - Padova 2020 - Košice 2019 - Aarhus 2018 - Sligo 2017 - London 2016 - Lisbon 2015 - Barcelona 2014.

The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) is the European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion of, and support to, volunteers and volunteering in Europe at European, national or regional level. Through our network we work together to ensure that: the value of quality volunteering as an expression of Solidarity and European values is understood, supported and celebrated; policies & programmes, together with the European social environment, inspires, encourages and supports quality European Volunteering; Individuals and organisations that are active in the volunteering and civil society sphere share, learn and are inspired from one another in the framework of CEV. In this way we reach out to the many thousands of volunteers and volunteer organisations in Europe as a source of support bringing the European dimension to their work.