



IVY 2026 GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION: *Europe's response*

May 2026



As part of the CEV Spring European Volunteering Congress 2026 held in Maia, Portugal, the [European Volunteering Capital 2026](#), over 100 delegates from member organisations of the [Centre for European Volunteering \(CEV\)](#), local municipalities from Portugal, members of the European Volunteering Capital Candidates Community (EVCCC) and other public authorities reflected on the [IVY 2026 Global Call to Action](#) and its connection to, and implications for, the European volunteering context.

Recognition

- Recognition must be systemic, not just symbolic
- Validation of learning through volunteering should be lifelong and universal
- The barrier to validation of learning is fragmentation, not lack of tools
- Recognition must reflect diverse volunteering practices
- Better data collection that is regular, comparable and ethical is essential
- Volunteers must be meaningfully involved in decision-making processes on volunteering and recognition
- Recognition and support cannot be separated; they are mutually reinforcing

Delegates agreed that volunteering must be recognised, valued and celebrated not only symbolically, but also systemically. They concluded that public appreciation, awards, storytelling and visibility campaigns remain important, but they are not sufficient on their own and affirmed that recognition should be embedded in policies, funding mechanisms, education and employment systems as well as in broader strategies for social cohesion, democratic participation and sustainable development.

Conclusions from the discussions on the European perspective concerning validation of learning acquired whilst volunteering as part of recognition efforts were that one of the key priorities is to move beyond a narrow understanding of validation of learning as a youth-related issue. Existing European tools, such as Youthpass and other programme-based validation mechanisms, provide useful models, but validation of learning acquired whilst volunteering should be understood more holistically and broadly as a lifelong learning opportunity. Volunteers of all ages, including adults, older people, migrants, informal volunteers and people outside formal EU programmes, should be able to have their contribution and learning recognised. Delegates therefore called for an age-inclusive and universal approach to the validation of skills and competences acquired through volunteering.

Participants also highlighted that the challenge for validation as a component of recognition for volunteering is not in the absence of tools, as there are at least 50 across Europe, but their fragmentation, limited visibility and uneven use.

Many organisations are unsure which certificates or validation instruments are meaningful, comparable or recognised by employers and educational institutions. A simplified and more coherent European framework would help volunteer-involving organisations, volunteers, employers and public authorities to understand and use recognition tools more effectively. Such a framework should allow flexibility for national and organisational contexts, while providing a common structure and language across Europe.

It was emphasised that validation of learning acquired whilst volunteering must include the diversity of volunteering practices. Informal volunteering, community-based engagement and volunteering carried out by migrants or marginalised groups are often less visible in official systems, despite their significant contribution to social resilience and inclusion. European recognition frameworks should therefore avoid privileging only formal or programme-based volunteering and should ensure that diverse forms of solidarity and civic action are acknowledged.

In addition, discussions underlined that a further condition for meaningful recognition is better data about volunteering, including through impact studies that demonstrate the significant impact of validation of learning on volunteers. The lack of comparable European data on volunteering weakens advocacy and limits the ability of governments and organisations to demonstrate the scale, value and impact of volunteering. Participants agreed that Europe needs common definitions, shared indicators and regular data collection mechanisms that are accessible, ethical and comparable across countries. Furthermore, that recognition should be evidence-based, and data systems must also be inclusive and practical for civil society organisations to use.

Participants also insisted on the need for a stronger emphasis on the connection between volunteering and democracy. There was agreement that volunteering strengthens participation, trust, solidarity and community resilience and that recognising volunteers is therefore not only a matter of individual appreciation, but also a way to protect and promote democratic life in Europe. For this reason, it was underlined that volunteers should be meaningfully involved in decision-making processes related to volunteering policy, recognition systems and the future development of civic participation.

Finally, participants underlined that recognition cannot be separated from resourcing. Symbolic appreciation and validation frameworks remain ineffective without sustained investment in the infrastructure that makes them operational – including volunteer-involving organisations, national coordination bodies and the digital tools that support validation processes. Recognition and support are therefore not parallel tracks, but mutually reinforcing conditions for the future of volunteering in Europe.



Support

- Support is a shared structural responsibility
- Sustainable funding is the foundation without which inclusion, safeguarding, quality and recognition can't be delivered
- Stronger legal and policy frameworks are necessary
- Support must address organisations' practical realities
- Volunteering depends on protected civic space; shrinking civic space, polarisation and declining trust must be actively reversed
- Strong democracies and thriving volunteering sustain one another

European stakeholders strongly confirm the IVY 2026 Global Call to Action's message that volunteering does not happen automatically and cannot be sustained without enabling environments. They concluded that in Europe, support for volunteering must be understood as a structural responsibility shared by public authorities, civil society, volunteer-involving organisations, donors, the private sector and volunteers themselves. Furthermore, while individual motivation remains essential, volunteering can only thrive when organisations have the resources, infrastructure, legal clarity and political recognition needed to involve volunteers safely, inclusively and effectively.

A recurring priority in the European discussions was sustainable funding, stressing that volunteering should not depend primarily on short-term project cycles or fragmented funding opportunities. It was emphasised that long-term investment is needed not only for specific volunteering activities, but also for the infrastructure that makes volunteering possible: volunteer centres, national volunteer development agencies, coordination platforms, training systems, digital tools and support mechanisms for volunteer-involving organisations. There is no doubt that without stable investment, other priorities such as inclusion, safeguarding, quality management and recognition cannot be properly implemented.

Participants also stressed the need for stronger legal and policy frameworks for volunteering. In several European contexts, volunteering remains politically marginal or lacks a clear institutional home. The belief that public authorities should develop coherent volunteering strategies, designate responsible bodies or contact points, and ensure that legislation reflects the diversity of contemporary volunteering, including formal, informal, digital, episodic and community-led engagement, was overwhelming. In addition, a clearer common language around volunteering would also support better coordination across countries and sectors.

There was unanimous endorsement for the fact that support measures for volunteering should also address the practical realities faced by organisations.

It was noted that bureaucratic burdens, discontinued funding, limited staff capacity and growing expectations placed on civil society organisations reduce the time and energy available for meaningful volunteer engagement. The conclusion that volunteer-involving organisations need capacity building, professional development, tools for volunteer management and opportunities to exchange good practices was paramount. That European and national umbrella organisations have an important advocacy and coordination role, especially in countries where public infrastructure for volunteering is weak, was also a main conclusion.

Participants agreed that a stronger emphasis should be placed on the link between volunteering and democratic civic space. Volunteering is not only a mechanism for service delivery; it is an expression of active citizenship, solidarity and participation. It flourishes where people are free to associate, organise, express their views, cooperate and act collectively for the common good. Shrinking civic space, political polarisation, declining trust and restrictions on civil society undermine the conditions that allow volunteering to thrive, and efforts to decrease these trends should be prioritised.

Overall, stakeholders call for enabling environments that combine sustainable investment, strong infrastructure, supportive legal frameworks, reduced bureaucracy, inclusive participation and protected civic space. Strong democracies create the conditions for volunteering to flourish, and volunteering in turn strengthens democracy, solidarity, social cohesion and community resilience.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding goes beyond physical safety and it's a necessary condition for quality volunteering
- Responsibility is shared across the volunteering ecosystem
- Wellbeing and burnout need explicit attention
- Clearer standards and accessible recourse are essential
- Safeguarding must be strong yet practical and be robust enough to protect volunteers and communities but workable for organisations of any size

Participants welcomed the Call to Action's emphasis on creating safe environments for volunteering and protecting the rights, wellbeing and dignity of volunteers and the people with whom they engage. The European discussions confirmed that safeguarding is a necessary condition for quality volunteering, but also emphasised that it should be understood more broadly than physical safety or insurance alone. Safeguarding should include protection, prevention, rights, security, mental health, wellbeing, clear procedures, appropriate training, safe working conditions and access to support when problems arise.

It was highlighted that safeguarding applies both to volunteers and to the people they support, accompany or serve. In this context, some fields of volunteering require particular attention, including activities with children, older people, people experiencing illness or vulnerability, sports volunteering, humanitarian and defence of human rights contexts and emotionally demanding forms of engagement. Safeguarding measures should therefore be proportionate to the risks involved, while avoiding unnecessary overregulation that could discourage participation or overburden organisations.

Participants considered the Call to Action a strong starting point, but noted that responsibility for safeguarding should not rest only with governments and volunteer-involving organisations. A wider ecosystem of actors has a role to play, including volunteers themselves, municipalities, volunteer infrastructure bodies, funders, educational institutions, companies, insurance providers and, where relevant, beneficiaries and communities. Funders should ensure that their resources support organisations that protect volunteers' rights and wellbeing, while insurance providers should help make appropriate coverage affordable and accessible.

A major point raised in the European discussions was the need to address volunteer wellbeing and burnout explicitly. Volunteers may face emotional exhaustion, stress, physical fatigue, difficult relationships, grief, conflict or unsafe situations. Safeguarding should therefore be integrated into the whole volunteer journey: recruitment, role description, preparation, training, supervision, feedback, support, exit and re-engagement. Volunteers should engage based on their own free will, know what is expected of them, what risks may arise, what support is available and how they can step back safely when needed.

European stakeholders also call for clearer standards, simpler language and accessible procedures. Codes of conduct, volunteer agreements, risk assessments, mentoring, psychological support and training for both volunteers and volunteer managers should be promoted. Volunteers must have somewhere to go when problems arise, including independent mechanisms such as an ombudsman, volunteer relations commission or equivalent support body. Safeguarding should also include learning from positive practice, sharing experiences and acting on feedback, not only responding when things go wrong.

Participants agreed that safeguarding must be strong enough to protect volunteers and communities, but practical enough to be implemented by organisations of different sizes and capacities. Safe volunteering requires clear responsibilities, adequate resources, affordable insurance, trained volunteer managers, accessible support systems and a culture that values the well-being, dignity and rights of everyone involved.

