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Promoting youth
volunteering and civic
service engagement: A
stocktake of national
programmes across OECD
countries

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Ollin Pérez-Raynaud,
Alexandra Robinson**

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A stocktake of national programmes across OECD countries

Pietro Gagliardi, Ollin Perez-Raynaud and Alexandra Robinson



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Abstract

Youth volunteering and civic service programmes can foster young people's confidence for further civic engagement, skills development, and association with democratic institutions, while also promoting solidarity, social inclusion, and resilience. Although programmes differ in their objectives and features, this paper maps national and international youth volunteering and civic service programmes across OECD countries and the European Union, providing comparative insights and highlighting good practices from a public governance perspective. The paper also gathers key lessons to support further work in this area, promote peer-learning and inform countries' policy options and reform efforts.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym/Abbreviation	Full title
AmeriCorps NCCC	AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps
BRP	<i>Basisregistratie Personen</i> (Municipal Personal Records Database)
CAD	Canadian Dollar
CEJ	<i>Contrat d'Engagement Jeune</i> (Youth Engagement Contract)
CEREQ	<i>Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications</i> (Centre for Studies and Research on Qualifications)
CSC	Canada Service Corps
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CTI	Corps Training Institute
DG REFORM	European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support
DRAJES	<i>Délégations régionales académiques à la jeunesse, à l'engagement et aux sports</i> (Regional Academic Delegations for youth, engagement and sports)
DUS-I	<i>Dienst Uitvoering Subsidies aan Instellingen</i> (Services Implementing Subsidies to Institutions)
EACEA	European Commission's Education and Culture Executive Agency
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FCC	<i>Formation Civique et Citoyenne</i> (Civic and Citizenship Training)
FY	Fiscal Year
GBA Plus	Gender-Based Analysis Plus
INJEP	<i>Institut national de la jeunesse et de l'éducation populaire</i> (National Institute of Youth and Informal Education)
INSEE	<i>Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques</i> (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDT	<i>Maatschappelijke diensttijd</i> (Civic Service for the Youth)
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NJR	<i>Vereniging Nationale Jeugdraad</i> (Dutch National Youth Council)
ODIW	Organisation Data Input Window
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCIW	Participant Contact Information Window
PMEC	Performance Measurement and Evaluation Committee
SALTO	Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities
SDJES	<i>Service départemental à la jeunesse, à l'engagement et aux sports</i> (Departmental Services for youth, engagement and sports)
ToC	Theory of Change
UCS	Universal Civil Service
US FEMA	United States Federal Emergency Management Agency

1 Introduction

Volunteering matters a great deal for people's well-being and can benefit society at large (OECD, 2015^[1]). It can also help strengthen civic and citizenship literacy and confidence to participate in public life, which are both particularly important for young people. Indeed, young people consistently tend to express lower trust in government and to participate less in institutionalised channels of participation compared to other age groups across OECD countries (OECD, 2024^[2]; OECD, 2022^[3]; OECD, 2020^[4]).

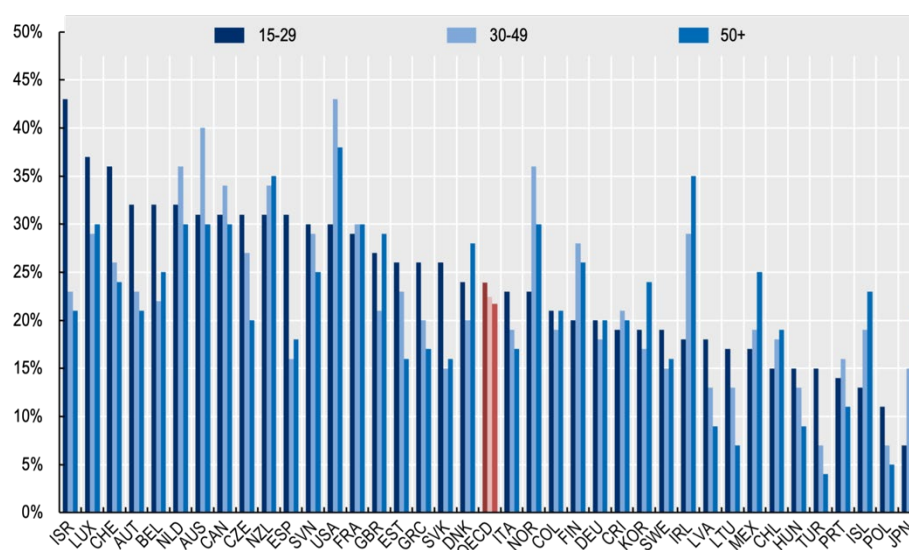
Volunteering can take different forms: it can be informal and self-organised; it can be more formal and organised through organisations; it can be promoted through local or national programmes. This paper focuses specifically on government-led national programmes as useful policy tools to provide young people with structured opportunities for volunteering and civic service, as also recognised by the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People (OECD, 2022^[5]). While acknowledging the important diversity in their objectives and features, this paper maps national youth volunteering and civic service programmes across OECD countries and the European Union, providing comparative insights and highlighting good practices from a public governance perspective (sections 2 and 3). The paper also gathers key lessons (section 4) to support further work in this area, promote peer-learning and inform countries' policy options and reform efforts.

In 2023, 24% of young people on average across all 38 OECD countries surveyed by the Gallup World Poll reported having volunteered time to an organisation in the previous month, compared to 22% of people aged 30-49 and 22% of people aged 50+ (see Figure 1). In some countries, more than a third of young people reported having volunteered, including in Israel (43%), Luxembourg (37%) and Switzerland (36%). On the other hand, young people were least likely to report having volunteered in Japan (7%), Poland (11%) and Iceland (13%). It is important to note that the data focuses on volunteering time to an organisation, and hence might not include more informal ways of volunteering (e.g. in community-based or faith-based informal groups).

Figure 1 also shows that some countries exhibit large gaps in volunteering involvement across age groups. In 22 OECD countries, young people volunteered more than the total population on average, notably in Türkiye (1.7 times), Spain (1.6 times) and Poland (1.6 times). On the other hand, young people volunteered less than the total population in 16 OECD countries, including most notably in Japan (0.4 times), Ireland (0.6 times) and Iceland (0.7 times). Various reasons may motivate these age-based differences, including availability of spare time and affordability for different age groups as well as cultural factors. In addition, even among young people, access to volunteering opportunities may be hindered for people from vulnerable and marginalised backgrounds. Beyond the data included here, valuable data sources on youth volunteering include the International Labour Organization, the European Social Survey and the Eurobarometer among others (OECD, 2015^[1]).

Figure 1. In 22 OECD countries, young people volunteer more than the total population, 2023 or latest available

The chart shows the share of people aged 15-29, 30-49 and 50+ who reported having volunteered time to an organisation in the previous month in 2023, or latest available year.



Note: Data for Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Türkiye and the United States refer to 2022. Data for Estonia refer to 2021.

Source: OECD calculations based on Gallup World Poll (Database).

Volunteering and civic service can foster young people's civic engagement and empowerment, as well as promote societal resilience

Defining volunteering has proven difficult conceptually. Once critical element of volunteering is the provision of work: for instance, the International Labour Organization defines volunteer work as “unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organisation or directly for others outside their own household” (OECD, 2015^[1]). Volunteering can also take many different forms and is often differentiated between formal volunteering (i.e. through organisations) and informal volunteering (OECD, 2015^[1]). Establishing a common understanding of “youth volunteering” is further hampered by the fact that there is wide variation across countries on the definition of “youth.” In addition, in some countries, the notion of youth volunteering co-exists with the notion of civic service. For instance, in Italy, the Universal Civil Service is not officially considered a volunteering programme, instead being defined as “the voluntary choice of dedicating up to one year of your own life to serve the non-armed and non-violent defence of the Homeland [...] through actions for communities and territories.”¹ In France, the Civic Service aims at “reinforcing national cohesion and social diversity by offering to any volunteer the opportunity to serve the values of the Republic and to engage themselves for a collective project by undertaking a placement of general interest in an approved legal entity.”²

Volunteering, when carried out in an inclusive way and on the basis of shared values, can help build social cohesion, improve community well-being, and bridge the gaps for those in the most vulnerable situations.

¹ <https://www.politichegiovani.it/servizio-civile/cosa-e-il-servizio-civile/>

² <https://www.service-civique.gouv.fr/comprendre-le-service-civique/en-bref>

For instance, young volunteers were pivotal in ensuring the continuity of day-to-day activities and services in the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis, especially for vulnerable groups (OECD, 2020^[6]). In fact, some governments created dedicated channels and programmes to promote youth volunteering to address the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, France created a dedicated national volunteering platform (“*Je veux aider*”) focused on mobilising immediate help, such as with the urgent distribution of food and hygiene products, exceptional childcare for health staff, maintenance of social relationships with isolated elderly people, and practical help for fragile neighbours (OECD, 2020^[6]). In Italy, young volunteers and youth organisations assisted elders and fragile people, especially in small and isolated communities as well as in large cities, thereby supporting public institutions in emergency management (OECD, 2020^[6]). More generally, in 2015, the value of the time that people (of all ages) spent volunteering was estimated at close to 2% of GDP (OECD, 2015^[1]). Volunteering hence represents a large, but largely hidden, contribution to society; at the same time, governments should not rely on volunteer action as a substitute to the effective delivery of quality public services (notably social services to vulnerable people).

At the same time, volunteering and civic service activities can empower the young people who take part in them by strengthening their skills and confidence for further civic engagement and boosting life satisfaction (OECD, 2020^[4]). Volunteering can help young people build social capital; consolidate bonds of trust and co-operation; and cultivate norms of altruism, solidarity, civic mindfulness, and respect for diversity, notably among young people from under-represented and marginalised groups (OECD, 2020^[4]). In addition, studies find that voluntary work can help people get personally involved with political and community issues, learn about social issues and build skills needed for further civic engagement (OECD, 2023^[7]). In turn, trust in other people and confidence in one’s own ability to participate in public life have been identified as important drivers of trust in public institutions (OECD, 2022^[3]). As recognised by the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People (OECD, 2022^[5]), meaningful volunteer service can hence help strengthen young people’s trust in government and their relationships with public institutions, which are priority areas for governments. Indeed, the 2023 OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions finds that young people tend to trust the national government less compared to older generations: on average, 36% of those aged 18-29 report having high or moderately high trust in the national government, compared to 43% of people aged 50 and above (OECD, 2024^[2]).

Additionally, through volunteering and civic service opportunities, young people can develop valuable hard and soft skills, which can enhance their personal and professional development and networks, as well as employment prospects (OECD, 2020^[4]; 2015^[1]). Research has also shown that volunteering at a young age can help promote healthy lifestyles and discourage risky behaviours, and foster mental health (OECD, 2015^[1]). Finally, volunteering is associated with positive mood, self-esteem and self-confidence (OECD, 2015^[1]).

It is worth noting that, while this paper discusses the importance of volunteering programmes in fostering civic engagement and empowerment among young people, it also recognises that a host of governance and social conditions are to be present for meaningful civic engagement to take place. These include, among others, the protection and promotion of civic freedoms, ensuring young people can access information and take part in the digital civic space, and fostering an enabling environment for civil society organisations (OECD, 2022^[8]). Education also has a key role to play in promoting civic engagement and volunteering.

Section 2 provides an overview of national youth volunteering and civic service programmes across OECD countries and the European Union, highlighting the wide variation of their general features. Section 3 maps these programmes on key dimensions, providing comparative insights and highlighting good practices. Section 4 gathers key lessons to promote peer-learning and inform countries’ policy options.

2 National youth volunteering and civic service programmes across OECD countries

National programmes to promote youth volunteering and civic service engagement are becoming more common

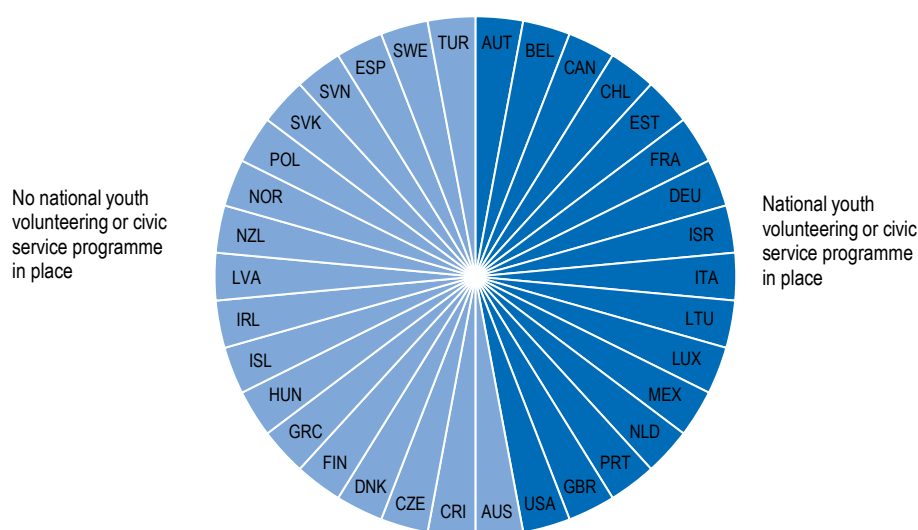
National, government-led youth volunteering and civic service programmes have gained popularity across OECD countries over the last 20 years. Across OECD Members, at least 16 countries³ (see Figure 2 and Table 2.1), as well as the European Union, have a youth volunteering or civic service programme to foster young people's civic participation and help them gain skills to enter the labour market. In some cases, such as in Italy and Israel, these programmes originated as alternatives to the military service and later developed into standalone programmes. In other cases, these programmes were born from an interest in strengthening social resilience and solidarity, building civic engagement or supporting young people in their transition to an autonomous life. For instance the Canada Service Corps aims to equip young Canadians with meaningful life skills and experiences while encouraging them to “give back to their communities” (Canada Service Corps, 2024^[9]). The European Solidarity Corps, an international programme run by the European Union Commission, aims to “strengthen cohesion, solidarity, democracy, European identity and active citizenship in the [European] Union and beyond” through solidarity activities (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2021^[10]). Following the COVID-19 crisis, countries such as Italy and France included specific measures to strengthen civic service programmes in their national recovery plans in recognition of their significant impact on young people and communities (OECD, 2022^[11]). For instance, the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan provided additional funding to increase the number of young participants in the Universal Civil Service, recognising its important role in strengthening young people's skills and active citizenship (Government of Italy, 2021^[12]).

In other countries, while there is no national programme, governments support youth volunteering by relying on international initiatives, by providing financial resources to civil society organisations (such as in Ireland and Finland), or by enabling the connection between young people and organisations seeking volunteers through online platforms (such as in Türkiye).⁴ The provision of core funding to civil society organisations is also a critical element to build CSOs' capacities to engage young people in a more strategic and sustainable way in civic activities (OECD, 2022^[8]). In addition, countries such as Czechia, Germany, Lithuania, Slovakia and Spain have included strategic objectives on youth volunteering in their national youth strategies (OECD, 2020^[4]).

³ Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Estonia, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom and United States of America.

⁴ <https://gonulluyuzbiz.gov.tr/> (Turkish)

Figure 2. More than four in ten OECD countries have a national youth volunteering or civic service programme in place



Note: Information was not available for Colombia, Japan, Korea and Switzerland. The European Union has also established the European Solidarity Corps.

Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Youth Governance Surveys, interviews and desk research (updated as of 2023).

Table 2.1. Youth volunteering and civic service programmes mapped in this paper

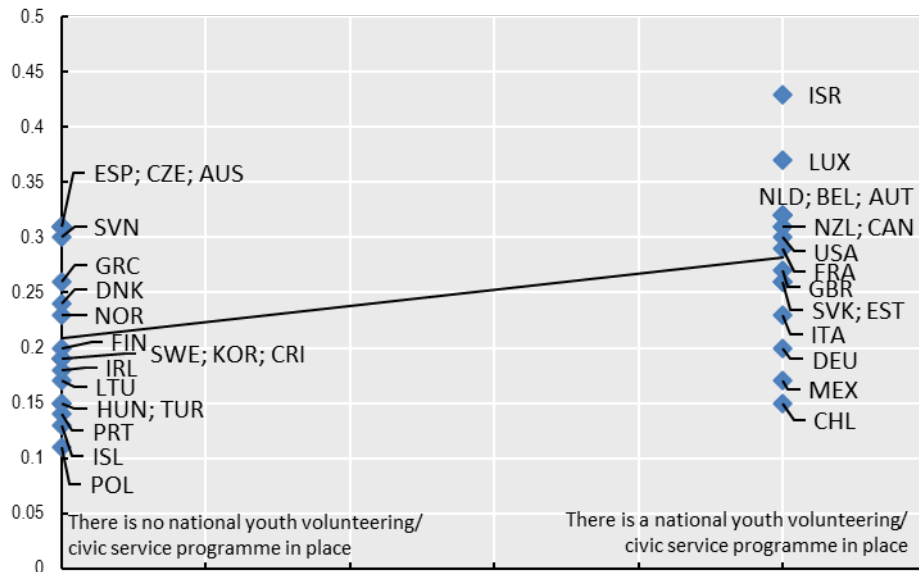
OECD Member	Programme
Austria	Voluntary Social Year
Belgium	Bel'J
Canada	Canada Service Corps
Chile	Live Your Parks
Estonia	Community Practice
France	Civic Service
Germany	Youth Voluntary Services
Israel	National Civil Service
Italy	Universal Civil Service
Lithuania	Youth Voluntary Service
Luxembourg	National Youth Service
Mexico	Social Service
Netherlands	Civic Service for Youth
Portugal	Now Us
United Kingdom	National Citizen Service
United States of America	AmeriCorps NCCC
European Union	European Solidarity Corps

As recognised in the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People (OECD, 2022^[5]), national youth volunteering and civic service programmes, when equipped with adequate human and financial resources, can encourage civic engagement among young people by ensuring a common vision and co-ordinated action. OECD analysis demonstrates that, on average, 28% of young people reported having volunteered across countries with a national programme in place, compared to 21% of young people in countries without such programme. While other societal, economic, and cultural factors also contribute to a higher propensity to volunteer in the general population, the analysis shows that there is a positive and precise relationship (Wilcoxon rank sum test p-value: 0.01) between having a national

youth volunteering or civic service programme in place and the extent to which young people volunteer (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Relationship between having a national youth volunteering/civic service programme in place and reported volunteering rates among young people

The horizontal axis plots countries with national youth volunteering or civic service programmes at value 1, and countries without such programmes at value 0. The vertical axis plots the share of young people reporting that they have volunteered time to an organisation in the past month in 2023, or latest available year.



Note: The Wilcoxon rank sum test yields a p-value of 0.01; “youth” here refers to people aged 15-29.

Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Youth Governance Surveys, interviews, desk research and Gallup World Poll (Database).

Programmes vary widely in their general features

The duration of a placement in the youth volunteering and civic service programmes considered in this paper (see Table 2.1 in section above) varies widely across OECD countries, although most commonly it remains between 6 and 12 months. Often, a national youth volunteering or civic service programme will provide some flexibility by offering different “tracks” with different durations. For instance, the United States’ AmeriCorps NCCC programme traditionally lasts 10 months, although 8-10-week summer positions are also available.⁵ In the Netherlands, the Civic Service for Youth (MDT) offers both *ad hoc* and shorter schemes alongside the standard ones. For example, since Spring 2020, more than 10 000 young people have participated in two *ad hoc* COVID-19 MDT projects: “Perspective for Youth” (*Perspectief voor de Jeugd*) and “#thisisalsoMDT” (*#ookditisMDT*) (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2020^[13]). In addition, around 70 000 young people participated in the municipal-level *ad hoc* COVID-19 project “Youth on the Move” (*Jeugd aan Zet*), financed by the MDT (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]). Furthermore, a shorter scheme, MDTshort (*MDTkort*), was introduced allowing municipalities, schools and civic organisations to apply to start 30-50 hour programmes with a maximum EUR 50 000 grant. The aim

⁵ <https://americorps.gov/serve/fit-finder>

of MDTshort is both to introduce organisations to MDT and to provide young people with opportunities that have lower thresholds for participation.

Programmes also vary widely in terms of hours of voluntary work per week, from a few hours to full-time. The most common arrangement is full-time, ranging from 30 to 40 hours per week. However, in the Netherlands and Estonia, the programmes provide flexibility; volunteering might be for as little as three hours a week (as it happens on average in the Netherlands), sometimes taking place during school hours.

Some variation in country practices also exists in terms of the youth population that is eligible for the programme, ranging from a minimum of 12-years-old (only one programme, most commonly 16 or 18) to a maximum of 35-years-old (most commonly between 25 and 30). In a few countries, the volunteering or civic service programme is only accessible to students, as is the case in Estonia and Mexico, or to young people who have completed compulsory education, as is the case in Germany.

There is also wide variation in terms of compensation offered to volunteers, from fully voluntary programmes (with no compensation) to programmes that offer remuneration equivalent to a living wage, with at least 11 out of 17 programmes providing some kind of remuneration. In at least half (8) of the countries with national youth volunteering or civic service programmes as well as in the European Solidarity Corps, non-monetary remuneration (including meals, room and board, language learning support, transportation and insurance) is sometimes or always provided as part of the package of benefits. In some countries, some remuneration is withheld until successful completion of the programme, as is the case in Israel and the United States. For instance, in Israel's National Civil Service, volunteers receive the same benefits as military veterans at the end of their volunteering placement, including scholarships, access to preferred employment and a two-month exemption from paying social security.⁶

The number of positions available in such programmes can range from a few hundred to nearly 150 000 per year, often varying based on the country's size. For instance, in recent years, France provided 145 000+ positions, the Netherlands 100 000+, Germany 80 000+, Italy 50 000+ and the United Kingdom 50 000+. On the other hand, a few hundred positions were available in recent years in Mexico (700+) for instance. In some countries, the number of positions available varies across years depending on factors such as available resources. Most commonly, entities that host young people as volunteers are civil society organisations (CSOs).

Box 2.1 presents further information on general features in selected youth volunteering/civic service programmes.

⁶ <https://sherut-leumi-ezrachi.co.il/%d7%96%d7%9b%d7%95%d7%99%d7%95%d7%aa-%d7%95%d7%94%d7%98%d7%91%d7%95%d7%aa/> (Hebrew)

Box 2.1. General features of focus programmes

Canada Service Corps (CSC)

The Canada Service Corps (CSC) is a federal-level government programme established in 2018 to promote civic engagement among young people aged 12 to 30, focused on themes such as reconciliation, preserving the environment and strengthening youth resilience, among others. Volunteers engage in service placements either on a full-time basis (30 hours per week for a minimum of three months in a year), or on a flexible basis (a minimum of 120 hours of service completed within a 12-month period). It also funds youth-serving organisations to disburse micro-grants (up to CAD 5 000) directly to young people to help them lead small-scale innovative community service projects. Since 2018, CSC has funded youth-serving organisations, 95% of which were non-profits, to support over 200 projects across Canada, creating over 40 000 volunteer service opportunities for young people. This represents more than 32 000 CSC service placements, which have contributed about 3.9 million service hours to their communities. CSC has also distributed over 7 451 micro-grants, approximately 85% of which went to young people from Indigenous and under-served groups. By encouraging young people to engage in service, these opportunities help them practice leadership, grow their personal and professional networks and gain valuable skills and experience. The number of young people in service placements increased from 6 675 in the 2019-20 fiscal year (FY) to 8 576 for FY 2021-22 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020^[15]; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022^[16]). Incremental targets for future years have been established using costs and youth participation counts from the 2022 results.

France's Civic Service

France's Civic Service provides opportunities to young volunteers, aged 16 to 25, and up to 30 if they are disabled, to carry out collective projects of public interest and promote the values of the Republic (Government of France, 2023^[17]). While open to people aged 16 and above, only 11% of volunteers are reported to be aged below 18 at the time of starting the Civic Service (an increase from 6% in 2020). Volunteers taking part in the French Civic Service engage in placements lasting between 6 and 12 months, with a minimum commitment of 24 hours a week (Service Civique, 2023^[18]). Young participants receive a state allowance of at least EUR 620 per month as well as additional monetary or in-kind support from the host organisation. Young volunteers receive holiday entitlements, a full social protection scheme financed by the State and pension entitlements. In addition, they receive a volunteer card, which gives them access to the same benefits as the French student card (including, for instance, free museum visits). Only accredited organisations that work in the general interest can host young people taking part in the Civic Service: these include associations, foundations, some socially responsible companies, and national and sub-national government bodies. In 2023, 148 500 volunteers were hosted by more than 9 500 accredited organisations.

Italy's Universal Civil Service (UCS)

Italy's Civil Service was established in 1972 as an alternative to military service. Reformed in 2017, it was transformed into the Universal Civil Service (UCS). The UCS involves young people aged between 18 and 28 in social, civic, cultural, and professional training activities through social solidarity, national and international cooperation, and the protection of national heritage. Young volunteers are asked to commit for 25 hours per week, to be divided into at least 4 hours per day for 5 to 6 days a week. Young volunteers receive a monthly allowance (EUR 507.30 for volunteers in Italy in 2023).

The Netherlands' Civic Service for the Youth (MDT)

The Netherlands' "Civic Service for the Youth" (*Maatschappelijke diensttijd, MDT*) allocates grants to civil society organisations, schools, and municipalities to realise volunteering projects that offer young people (aged 12 to 30) the opportunity to discover and build their talents, meet new people, and do something for someone else and/or society. Young people follow MDT placements of at least 80 hours within 6 months, which can take place during a gap year, alongside study/work or, in certain cases, during school hours. In 2022, 71 projects have been awarded funding, allowing approximately 100 000 young people to start an MDT placement (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]). The programme's objective for 2022-2026 is to fund 550 000 MDT placements and to enable 416 000 young people to complete it (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]).⁷ Importantly, the MDT aims at providing volunteering opportunities in geographical proximity to every young person in the country.

The European Solidarity Corps

The European Solidarity Corps, managed by the European Commission, engages young people, aged 18 to 30 (18 to 35 for the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps), in solidarity activities that induce positive societal changes in the European Union and beyond, while improving their competences and facilitating their active citizenship (European Commission, 2024^[19]). Volunteer placements are full-time (between 30 and 38 hours a week) and can range from 2 weeks to 12 months. Volunteering placements can be undertaken individually or in groups and can take place in-country or across borders. Young volunteers receive insurance, support services (such as linguistic support and training), transportation to and from their project, accommodation, meals and a daily allowance for personal expenses (EUR 4-12 a day, depending on the country). Young volunteers with specific needs may also have additional costs covered. In 2018-2019, 27 316 young people participated in 3 750 projects and between 2021-2027, the European Solidarity Corps aims to engage at least 185 000 young people in its activities (European Commission, 2020^[20]).

⁷ Based on past grant rounds, 25% of uncompleted placements are taken into account, either due to progression to work or education or due to dropout for other reasons.

3 Mapping youth volunteering and civic service programmes across OECD countries

Youth volunteering and civic service programmes differ in a number of ways, from general features of the programme (as seen in the previous section) to training opportunities and measures taken for marginalised young people, legal underpinning, distribution of competences, processes for planning, participatory approaches, controls and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. This section maps national youth volunteering and civic service programmes across OECD countries as well as the European Solidarity Corps, providing comparative insights across these main dimensions and highlighting good practices. The section includes concrete examples from across OECD countries, several of which referring to programmes in Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the European Union, reflecting the inputs of peers from the respective administrations.

Training opportunities and targeted measures can build young people's skills and promote social inclusion

Most programmes offer training opportunities for young volunteers and are linked to employment outcomes

At least 12 OECD countries as well as the European Solidarity Corps provide training opportunities for young volunteers as part of their youth volunteering or civic service programme, although approaches vary widely (See Table 2). These trainings most commonly aim to promote civic engagement as well as personal and professional skills. Across programmes that involve external partners, host organisations are sometimes responsible for training activities, and these may vary across organisations, as is the case in Canada and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, for example, host organisations are required to outline a training plan in their initial grant application and adherence to the plan is part of the evaluation standards of the MDT-proof label (*MDT-prooflabel*), a required minimum quality label for host organisations. In France, throughout their placement, young volunteers receive support from tutors selected by the host organisations to identify core competences, understand how to transform the activities undertaken in the programme into new skills and learn how to communicate and valorise them for their future endeavours. Tutors are supported in their responsibilities through (compulsory) training activities, both online and offline,⁸ as well as by detailed guides and methodological tools.⁹ Young participants in Italy's Universal Civil Service are similarly accompanied by a tutor in their service and can receive additional tutoring (if required) to learn how to valorise their skills for employability.

⁸ <https://www.tuteurs-service-civique.fr/presentation.html>

⁹ <https://www.service-civique.gouv.fr/api/media/assets/document/livret-accompagnement-volontaire-sc.pdf>

Table 2. Training opportunities within selected youth volunteering and civic service programmes

Programme	Training opportunities
Civic Service (France)	Each volunteer receives civic and citizenship training (<i>Formation Civique et Citoyenne, FCC</i>) and supervision in this area throughout their placement (Service Civique, 2023 ^[21]). The FCC includes a practical component and a theoretical component. For the theoretical component, young people are asked to choose a topic among 34 proposals listed in a Reference Framework of Civic Themes: they explore the chosen theme individually and collectively, discussing the values associated with it and their translation into action (Service Civique, 2023 ^[21]). The practical component includes first aid training and must be delivered by a civil protection organisation approved by the Ministry of the Interior. Completing the FCC is compulsory to obtain the government-issued Civic Service certificate at the end of the placement. The Civic Service Agency provides up to EUR 100 per volunteer for the host organisation to deliver the theoretical component of the FCC training and reimburses up to EUR 60 per first aid training delivered (Service Civique, 2023 ^[21]).
Youth Voluntary Services and Federal Volunteer Service (Germany)	Volunteer training is stipulated by law for the purpose of enhancing the volunteer's social, cultural, and inter-cultural skills and strengthening participants' feeling of responsibility for the common good. Volunteers younger than 27 must receive 25 days of training per year while volunteers over 27 must receive 12 days of training per year. Training must include a one-week political education seminar in a state training centre. Training may also include courses qualifying volunteers for their work, such as certifications as a lifeguard, a forklift driving license, a first aid course, a chainsaw license, etc.
Universal Civil Service (Italy)	Entities are responsible for training Universal Civil Service (UCS) volunteers for a total duration of at least 80 hours over the course of the volunteering service. The training aims to make young people aware of their choice with a view to promoting active participation in society. It is divided into two parts: general training of at least 30 hours (focused on the values and identity of the UCS; active citizenship; and the role of the young participant within the system of the UCS); and specific training of at least 50 hours, focused on the activities covered by the project, to acquire specific knowledge, techniques, and methodologies.
AmeriCorps NCCC (United States of America)	Volunteers complete Corps Training Institute (CTI) prior to their volunteer placement. CTI includes training on programme rules and regulations, leadership, team building, and civic engagement, as well as trainings in first aid, chainsaw operation, driving vans, etc., as necessary. Volunteers also participate in physical training at least three times weekly for the duration of their placement.
European Solidarity Corps (European Union)	Volunteer training activities occur pre-departure (only for cross-border projects), on-arrival (only for projects of 2 months or longer), mid-term (only for projects of 6 months or longer) and at annual European Solidarity Corps events (European Commission, 2024 ^[19]). All volunteers receive access to General Online Training, which includes modules on the mission of the European Solidarity Corps, roles and responsibilities of participants, inter-cultural awareness, health and safety and more. All volunteers also receive language learning support in the form of either a EUR 150 grant for language learning or access to an online language learning course via the Online Linguistic Support. All volunteers also regularly meet with a mentor appointed by their host or support organisation. Additional mandatory training for Humanitarian Aid Volunteering projects includes a self-assessment, a 25-hour online course, an online exam and a five-day in-person course at a training centre.

Source: OECD elaboration based on OECD Youth Governance Surveys, interviews and desk research.

Youth volunteering and civic service programmes can also open opportunities for young people to strengthen leadership skills and gain practical experience with running projects. For instance, in addition to funding service placements, the CSC provides funding to organisations to disburse up to CAN 5 000 in funding to young people to help them lead small-scale, and innovative community service projects that they have conceived. Young people who receive micro-grant funding have an opportunity to take ownership of an issue that is important to them, propose a solution and implement it at the local, community level, while developing their leadership, budgeting and planning skills. The number of youth-led projects funded through these micro-grants has fluctuated from 1 624 in FY 2019-20, to 2 205 in 2020-21 and 1 802 in 2021-22 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023^[22]). The European Solidarity Corps also provides funding for local youth-led projects through its Solidarity Projects (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. European Solidarity Corps: youth-led solidarity projects

Within the European Solidarity Corps, Solidarity Projects are non-profit solidarity activities initiated, developed and implemented by young people (European Commission, 2024^[19]). Projects aim to bring positive change in a local community in response to a specific issue or challenge. Solidarity Projects range from 2 to 12 months. They take place in-country and must be organised by a group of at least five people aged 18 to 30 who all legally reside in the same country. Groups receive EUR 630 per month to manage and implement their projects and may request additional funding to receive coaching in support of the project, as well as to cover costs to support the participation of young people with fewer opportunities. Groups may work independently, within an established organisation or with support from a coach. As of October 2024, 6 461 Solidarity Projects have been implemented since 2018.

Source: <https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/projects/>.

All 16 OECD countries with a national youth volunteering or civic service programme in place as well as the European Union link their programmes to skills acquisition and/or employment promotion to some extent, although approaches vary. Austria, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and the European Union provide young volunteers with skills certifications at the end of their volunteering placement. For instance, in Austria, the Volunteer Passport (*Freiwilligennachweis*) was introduced as documentation of competencies acquired through volunteering and, in 2019, a Digital Volunteer Passport (*Digitaler Freiwilligenpass*) was introduced (European Commission, 2023^[23]). In the European Solidarity Corps, young volunteers have access to Youthpass¹⁰ to identify and document their non-formal and informal learning outcomes (SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, n.d.^[24]). The certification of competences has also been recently introduced in Italy, with its implementation currently being rolled out. In Germany, in addition to a certificate, the Act to Promote Youth Voluntary Services also stipulates that volunteers may request written references from their host organisation that indicate the vocational skills acquired during the placement.¹¹ In the Netherlands, the MDT has been proposed as a potential pathway to orient young people towards sectors that are facing labour shortage (See Box 3.2).

In some cases, participation in a national youth volunteering or civic service programme also gives young people preferential access to certain employment opportunities upon completion. In the United States, young volunteers that complete their placement have access to the Employers of National Service, a network of over 600 private, public, and non-profit sector employers that have committed to hiring AmeriCorps alumni based on their skills and service experience.¹² The AmeriCorps programme also provides education to young volunteers on how to present their volunteering experience on resumes, LinkedIn profiles, and in job interviews.¹³ In Italy, since 2023, 15% of places in competitions for public sector (non-leadership) jobs are reserved to young people who completed the Universal Civil Service.¹⁴

¹⁰ <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/>

¹¹ https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_jfdg/index.html

¹² <https://americorps.gov/partner/partnerships/employers-national-service>

¹³ <https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/alumni/find-a-job>

¹⁴ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2023/06/21/23G00088/sg>

Box 3.2. The Netherlands: using the MDT to support shortage sectors

A number of MDT projects already engage with sectors that are facing labour shortages. For instance, many young people volunteer in care facilities as part of their MDT placement (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]). Furthermore, the 2023 parliamentary letter “Action Plan Green and Digital Jobs” stated an intention to explore the connection between MDT and shortage sectors, notably care, education and climate/technology (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2023^[25]).

In these cases, while MDT placements remain focused on voluntary work in civil society organisations, pilots are designed to expose young people to sectors facing labour shortages and to potential careers therein, for example through workshops or specific experiences. For instance, the Ministry of Defence designed a three-day bootcamp within MDT placements to train young people on leadership skills and team building activities while simultaneously introducing young people to the Ministry of Defence. A programme aimed at orienting young people towards shortage sectors is also being developed in collaboration with the Confederation of the Netherlands’ Industry and Employers.

Programme design and targeted measures can promote social diversity and inclusion

Youth volunteering and civic service programmes can be used by governments to promote social diversity, inclusion, gender equality and cultural understanding. Clear commitments at programme level can catalyse efforts in this sense. For instance, OECD findings show that volunteering programmes are crucial for the protection, reception and integration of forcibly displaced populations, asylum seekers and refugees, and that have played a key role in bringing innovative solutions to complex humanitarian challenges (OECD, 2023^[26]).

Countries can promote diversity and inclusion by carefully considering young people’s pathways throughout the eligibility, application, selection, and participation phases. For instance, in the Netherlands, all young people registered in the Netherlands’ Municipal Personal Records Database (*Basisregistratie Personen*) are eligible to join an MDT placement, hence also including refugees and homeless young people, European Union (EU) students and non-EU students who reside in the Netherlands for more than four months (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[27]). In Canada, a 2019 Gender-Based Analysis PLUS found that young women and girls were more likely to participate, suggesting the opportunity to implement targeted outreach efforts to increase awareness among men and boys.

While often active in their immediate communities through informal channels, young people from vulnerable backgrounds often face barriers when seeking to engage in more structured volunteering activities or programmes (Camia, Zimmermann and Lischke, 2024^[28]). They face a host of barriers, including low resources and skills, limited access to information, or perceptions of exclusion or cultural disconnection. In Canada, the CSC has made concerted efforts to sign contribution agreements with organisations that have expertise in improving participation of Indigenous and under-served young people in volunteer service placements to build a more inclusive service. In the CSC’s 2023 programme intake, organisations that met specific diversity-related criteria (e.g., whose leadership or governance bodies were representative of the youth populations they aimed to serve or which were youth-led) were prioritised for funding (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023^[29]). In addition, the CSC requires that all projects target participation from at least 50% of total youth participants who identify as Indigenous youth, under-served youth or both. In Italy, some projects reserve a certain number of placements (3 088 in 2021, 5 339 in 2022 and 10 019 in 2023) for young people with fewer opportunities (DPG&SCU, 2023^[30]; DPG&SCU, 2022^[31]; DPG&SCU, 2021^[32]). The Netherlands and France have also developed specific programmes and projects to increase the diversity and inclusion of volunteers (See Box 3.3).

Other countries have lowered access barriers by developing more inclusive selection processes. In the Netherlands, there is no formal selection process for young people wanting to do an MDT placement, ensuring it remains open and inclusive. The French Civic Service provides advice to host organisations – who are independent in their selection process – to ensure these take a non-discriminatory approach to engaging young people regardless of their academic achievements or qualifications and promote social diversity. Host organisations cannot require young volunteers to have specific training, skills or previous professional or voluntary experience for them to participate in placements (Service Civique, 2023^[21]). Instead, during the application process, the screening questionnaire assesses young people's motivation and interpersonal skills, work ethic, interests and availability, as well as personal information (Service Civique, 2023^[21]). Providing concrete and clear guidance to host organisations in this regard is a key factor for the successful implementation of such inclusive selection processes.

Further, countries can also take targeted measures to ensure young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have the capacities and resources to take part in organised volunteering opportunities. For instance, in the European Solidarity Corps, people with fewer opportunities may receive higher financial support to cover specific expenses and needs, and may have access to preparatory visits and reinforced mentorship before, during and after their volunteering experience.¹⁵

Box 3.3. Measures for under-represented and marginalised young people

Netherlands' MDT

Young newcomers and refugees

MDT World Girls (*Wereldmeiden*) is a buddy project in which girls with a Dutch background interact and exchange experiences with girls who have fled their country of origin for six months through sports. In 2022, MDT in Action for Ukraine (*MDT in actie voor Oekraïne*) enabled nearly 1 400 young people to help familiarise Ukrainian refugees with their new place of residence in the Netherlands, host fundraising campaigns, deliver language lessons and organise activities to bring together Dutch and Ukrainian young people. Consequently, in 2022, 68% of the young people who participated in MDT met people with different origins than their own through the MDT (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]).

France's Civic Service

Young people in rural communities

In 2021, two calls for expressions of interest were disseminated to encourage local authorities in rural areas to take on civic service volunteers. As a result, 24 rural municipalities that expressed interest received financial support from the Civic Service Agency to host young volunteers in 2021 and 2022 in their local communities (Service Civique, 2023^[33]).

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)

In partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Integration, the Civic Service Agency has launched a call for volunteering placements designed to increase the accessibility of the Civic Service

¹⁵ Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-decision-framework-inclusion-2021-27> (accessed 24 June 2024). Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/implementation-inclusion-diversity_apr21_en.pdf (accessed 24 June 2024).

to young NEETs, as part of their Youth Commitment Contract (*Contrat d'Engagement Jeune*)¹⁶ (Service Civique, 2022^[34]). The initiative mobilises EUR 15 million to train young NEETs in preparation of their placement, mentor them for future projects and provide them with civic and citizenship training.

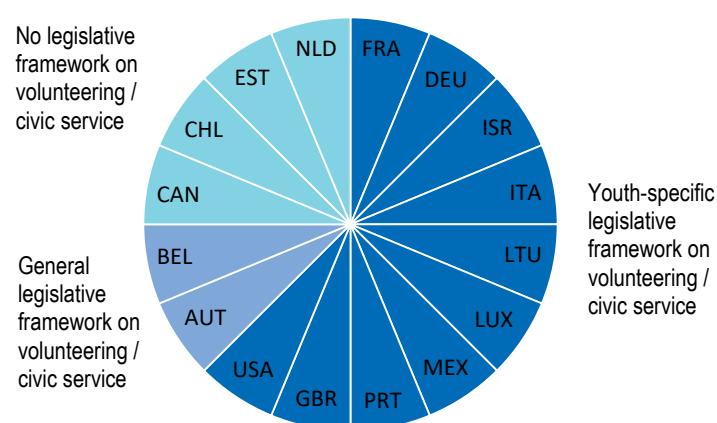
Young school-leavers

The Ministry of Education and Youth launched the programme "*Pour un parcours de confiance*" to prevent and address school-leaver cases by involving at-risk young people in Civic Service missions. The programme mobilises Civic Service volunteers to mentor at-risk young people in schools and act as third parties between schools and pupils to help the latter regain confidence. In addition, young people who are dropping out of school can be involved in the Civic Service either by (1) carrying out a Civic Service mission on a reduced time basis while returning to a part-time training course in a school; or (2) carrying out a full-time Civic Service mission while being supported by a mentor from dedicated dropout support platforms and networks. A study in the Bouches-du-Rhône Department pointed to young mothers as one of the groups that most benefited from the programme (Service Civique, 2021^[35]).

Legislative frameworks can help guide programme implementation

Establishing sound legislative frameworks can be helpful in guiding the management of national volunteering and civic service programmes and ensure responsibilities across stakeholders are clearly defined. At least 12 OECD countries and the European Union have established a legal framework to guide the implementation of volunteering and civic service programmes, with 10 OECD countries (as well as the European Union) referencing young people specifically (See Figure 4). Some countries that do not have a national youth volunteering/civic service programme in place (not included in Figure 4) still have legislative frameworks on (youth) volunteering, such as Colombia.¹⁷

Figure 4. Legislative frameworks on volunteering across OECD countries with a national youth volunteering or civic service programme in place



¹⁶ The Youth Commitment Contract is an initiative of the French government to support young NEETs (ages 16-25) to re-engage in employment, education or training through personalised and intensive support measures.

¹⁷ <https://colombiajoven.gov.co/participa/ley-estatutaria> (Spanish).

Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Youth Governance Surveys, interviews and desk research.

Several OECD countries face challenges when it comes to defining the legal status of young people taking part in youth volunteering or civic service programmes. In fact, in some countries with a civic service programme in place, such as in Italy, legal frameworks on the civic service programme co-exist with legal frameworks on volunteering more broadly. Legal definitions of “volunteers” may have important and concrete implications. For instance, in France, provisions in the National Service Code give Civic Service volunteers a special legal status that remains distinct from Labour Code applications (Service Civique, 2023^[18]), aiming among others to clarify benefits and avoid disguised employment (Box 3.4). Similarly, in Italy, the Legislative Decree establishing the Universal Civil Service stipulates that civil service placements are not employment and that allowances granted to participating young people are exempt from taxation (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2017^[36]). Some challenges can also arise: for instance, in Germany, certain public transport benefits may be denied to young volunteers by transportation companies that may not be familiar with the programme (Van der Straten, 2020^[37]). The definition of legal status may also pose challenges regarding participants’ eligibility to receiving welfare benefits and being exempt from job searching, particularly among programmes that may require full-time participation (Van der Straten, 2020^[37]).

Box 3.4. France: legal status of young participants to the Civic Service

The legal framework of the Civic Service aims to avoid that volunteers are used in substitution of employees. In that sense, the tasks entrusted to the volunteer must not have been those of an employee (or public servant) of the host organisation less than a year before the Civic Service contract was signed. To support host organisations in implementing this legal provision, they are provided with a document outlining examples of placements in priority themes and, for each, the type of activities that can and cannot be assigned to a volunteer (as compared to an employee/professional).¹⁸

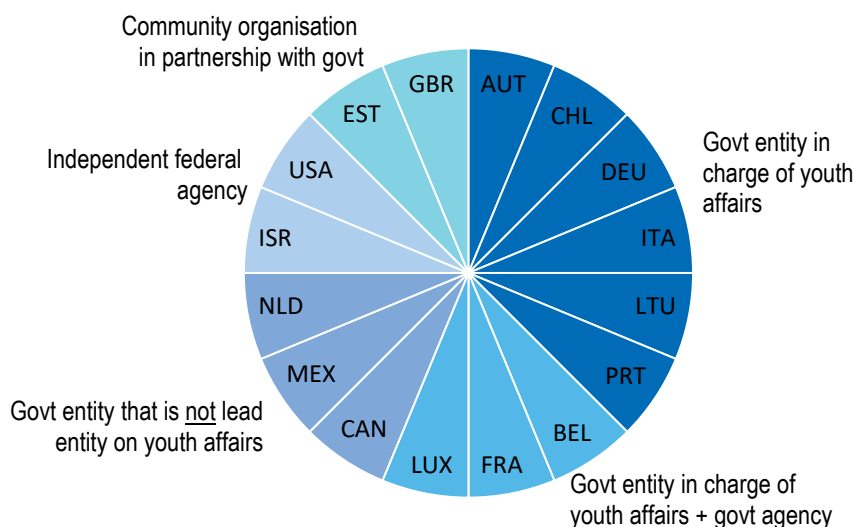
While the governance arrangements vary, cross-institutional coordination emerges as a success factor for implementation in all programmes

Practices to assign formal authority for the implementation of youth volunteering and civic service programmes vary significantly (See Figure 2 and Table 3). In at least six countries, the government entity in charge of youth affairs is also responsible for the implementation of the national youth volunteering or civic service programme: this is the case in Austria, Chile, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, and Portugal. In Belgium, France and Luxembourg, the government entity in charge of youth affairs guides the strategic direction of the programme, while a government agency is tasked with programme implementation. In Canada, Mexico and the Netherlands, the programme is implemented by a government entity that is not the lead entity in charge of youth affairs. In Estonia and the United Kingdom, a community organisation (such as an NGO or any CSO more broadly) is tasked with programme implementation, in partnership with the government. In Estonia, Community Practice (*Kogukonnapraktika*) is implemented by NGO Community Practice (*MTÜ Kogukonnapraktika*), in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁹ In the United States and Israel, an independent federal agency oversees the programme.

¹⁸ <https://www.service-civique.gouv.fr/api/media/assets/document/referentiel-de-mission--service-civique.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://kogukonnapraktika.ee/programmist/>

Figure 5. Practices to assign formal authority for programme implementation vary significantly across OECD countries



Note: In this chart, “govt” is used as a shortening for “government.”

Source: OECD calculations based on OECD Youth Governance Surveys, interviews and desk research.

Table 3. Entities with formal responsibility for national youth volunteering/civic service programmes and type of arrangement

Country	Entity	Type of arrangement
Austria	Department for Family and Youth at the Federal Chancellery; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection	Government entity in charge of youth affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme
Belgium	JINT vzw (Flemish Community); International Youth Bureau (BIJ) (French Community); Youth Office of the German-Speaking Community (Jugendbüro der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft VoG) (German-speaking Community)	Government entity in charge of youth affairs guides the strategic direction of the programme, while a government agency is tasked with programme implementation
Canada	Employment and Social Development Canada	Programme implemented by government entity that is not the lead entity in charge of youth affairs
Chile	National Youth Institute (INJUV)	Government entity in charge of youth affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme
Estonia	Ministry of the Interior; NGO Community Practice (MTÜ Kogukonnapraktika)	Community organisation tasked with programme implementation, in partnership with the government
France	Ministry of Sports, Youth and Community Life; Civic Service Agency	Government entity in charge of youth affairs guides the strategic direction of the programme, while a government agency is tasked with programme implementation
Germany	Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ)	Government entity in charge of youth affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme
Israel	Authority for National-Civil Service	Independent federal agency in charge of the programme
Italy	Presidency of the Council, Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service	Government entity in charge of youth affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme (together with regions and autonomous provinces)
Lithuania	Ministry of Social Security and Labour	Government entity in charge of youth affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme
Luxembourg	Ministry of Education, Children and Youth; National Service of Youth (SNJ)	Government entity in charge of youth affairs guides the strategic direction of the programme, while a government agency is tasked with programme implementation

Country	Entity	Type of arrangement
Mexico	Ministry of Education	Programme implemented by government entity that is not the lead entity in charge of youth affairs
Netherlands	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	Programme implemented by government entity that is not the lead entity in charge of youth affairs
Portugal	Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (IPDJ)	Government entity in charge of youth affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme
United Kingdom	Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS); National Citizen Service Trust (NCST)	Community organisation tasked with programme implementation, in partnership with the government
United States	AmeriCorps	Independent federal agency in charge of the programme

Source: OECD elaboration based on OECD Youth Governance Surveys, interviews and desk research; <https://www.freiwilligenweb.at/sonderformen/freiwilliges-sozialjahr-im-inland/> (German); <https://bel-j.be/fr/ce-que-nous-faisons/>; <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/youth/canada-service-corps/about.html>; <https://www.injuv.gob.cl/historia-vivetusparques> (Spanish); <https://kogukonnapraktika.ee/> (Estonian); <https://www.service-civique.gouv.fr/agence-du-service-civique/presentation>; <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/germany/22-administration-and-governance-of-youth-volunteering>; https://www.gov.il/he/departments/authority_for_national_civic_service/govil-landing-page (Hebrew); <https://www.politichegiovani.gov.it/> (Italian); <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/lithuania/22-administration-and-governance-of-youth-volunteering>; <https://www.volontaires.lu/moi-volontaire/>; <https://seduc.edomex.gob.mx/servicio-social> (Spanish); <https://www.doemeemetmdt.nl/> (Dutch); <https://ipdj.gov.pt/voluntariado> (Portuguese); <https://wearencs.com/about-us>; <https://americorps.gov/about>.

Beyond the identification of the lead entity, the distribution of competences and broader set-up of the programmes can also vary widely (See Box 3.5). In certain cases, government authorities have significant competences in the programme's implementation: for instance, in Italy, young participants receive their allowance from the Department for Youth Policy and the Universal Civil Service. In other cases, more competences are delegated to the host organisations, such as in Canada.

Box 3.5. Distribution of competences

Canada Service Corps (CSC)

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the Department of the Government of Canada responsible for developing, managing and delivering social programmes and services, is responsible for the CSC, which is primarily a programme based on contribution agreements²⁰ (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023^[22]). ESDC is responsible for designing and implementing calls for proposals for the selection of organisations to provide volunteer opportunities to young people through the CSC. ESDC provides funding to selected organisations, monitors organisations' activities on a quarterly basis and identifies opportunities to continue developing the programme and supports financial and policy management for the CSC. It also promotes awareness about the programme and shares volunteer service opportunities through its website. In turn, CSC-funded organisations are responsible for co-creating volunteering placements with youth and disbursing micro-grants for youth-led projects. CSC-funded organisations also provide young people with access to tools and support to successfully implement and complete their service placements and micro-grant projects. These can include training, living expenses, mentorship, coaching and mental health support. Organisations are also responsible for developing outreach and engagement strategies for target demographics, supporting programme scale-up and ensuring they have adequate human resources in place to carry their projects forward. ESDC undertakes the programme's ex-post evaluation to ensure alignment with overarching government policy goals on a 5-year cycle. ESDC staff in charge of the CSC conduct

²⁰ A Contribution Agreement allows the recipient to undertake an activity that furthers departmental objectives by claiming for the reimbursements of their costs incurred. The results are monitored on a project-specific basis and through programme evaluation. All CSC projects are contribution agreements.

regular communication and meetings with Canada's Youth Secretariat, the government entity in charge of youth policy.

France's Civic Service

In France, the Civic Service Agency (*Agence du Service Civique*) was created in May 2010 as a Public Interest Grouping, which allows to bring together public and private partners in the implementation of objectives of public interest. The Agency falls under the administrative, legal, and financial mandate of the French Ministry of Sports, Youth and Community Life (Agence du Service Civique, 2023^[38]). It is charged with defining the strategic direction and priorities of the Civic Service, managing agreements and financial support provided by the State and promoting the Civic Service among interested parties. It is also charged with ensuring equal access to all eligible people to volunteering opportunities, facilitating contact between volunteers and host organisations, monitoring and evaluating the Civic Service, promoting social diversity among beneficiaries, and managing alumni and current volunteers' networks (Agence du Service Civique, 2023^[38]). Since 2016, the Civic Service Agency is also responsible for managing the Erasmus+ Youth and Sports programmes. It also serves as the national French agency for the European Social Corps since 2019 (Agence du Service Civique, 2023^[38]). The Civic Service Agency is responsible for guiding host organisations to ensure they deliver quality opportunities for young people engaging in the programme. An online support mechanism provides guidance and advice to host organisations on a variety of topics. Furthermore, the Agency has elaborated guidance documents for host organisations which include information about the Civic Service, advice on becoming an accredited organisation, instructions to enter into an agreement with the Civic Service, advice on finding volunteers, information on managing and monitoring programmes, and steps on institutional reporting (Service Civique, 2023^[39]). The Agency provides documents to help orient volunteers, forms to apply to become a host organisation and information on programme initiatives.

Italy's Universal Civil Service (UCS)

In Italy, the State is responsible for planning activities and UCS interventions in Italy and abroad, for identifying quality standards and for enforcing them, in cooperation with the Regions and Autonomous Provinces.²¹ In particular, the Department for Youth Policy and Universal Civil Service is responsible for planning the overall strategic programming, proposing monitoring and evaluation modalities, conducting the calls for projects and for volunteers, and assessing and selecting projects. It is also in charge of administering the allowance payment to volunteers and training remuneration to entities, managing the regulatory enforcement and inspection system, supporting the national consultation bodies (further information in section on participatory approaches) and ensuring co-ordination across the national government and with Regions and Autonomous Provinces. The Regions and Autonomous Provinces are mandated by law to offer training to the personnel of host entities and promote activities and inspections in their territorial areas, among others. Host entities design and implement projects, select and oversee the service of young participants, train their personnel, manage provide training or tutoring activities to young participants, are involved in skills certification and support outreach and dissemination activities.

The Netherlands' Civic Service for the Youth (MDT)

Programme responsibilities of the MDT are distributed across the MDT-core team (*MDT-kernteam*), which includes the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Services Implementing Subsidies to Institutions (*Dienst Uitvoering Subsidies aan Instellingen, DUS-I and ZonMw*), the Dutch National Youth Council (*Vereniging Nationale Jeugdraad, NJR*), Verian (formerly Kantar Public) and Impact Centre

²¹ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/04/03/17G00053/sg>

Erasmus. The State Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education and Equal Opportunities is responsible for the MDT within the Cabinet of the Netherlands. Co-ordination with other ministries takes place in the context of specific MDT programmes (such as with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment on newcomers). DUS-I and ZonMw are the agencies responsible for disbursing MDT grants to host organisations, the NJR hosts the MDT's Youth Panel and Verian and Impact Centre Erasmus are contracted research agencies. To achieve a sustainable programme with shared ownership from civil society, host organisations must commit to co-financing 25% of their MDT project (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]). This mechanism can create positive incentives within civil society organisations that decide to engage in the MDT and mitigate the risk of dependence on state grants. At the same time, to avoid creating unwanted entry barriers for smaller organisations, the co-financing obligation can partly be fulfilled through in-kind contributions.

The European Solidarity Corps

The European Commission is ultimately responsible for the running of the European Solidarity Corps, managing the budget, proposing policy priorities to the co-legislators, supervising and coordinating the implementing structures and ensuring overall monitoring and evaluation (European Commission, 2024^[19]). The European Solidarity Corps is co-implemented by a variety of bodies, including the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), National Agencies in participating countries, SALTO²²-YOUTH Resource Centres and the European Solidarity Corps Resource Centre. The EACEA directly manages certain centralised projects and contributes, along with National Agencies, to improving the overall visibility and impact of the European Solidarity Corps. National Agencies promote and implement the European Solidarity Corps at national level (in terms of calls for proposals, selection processes, grant agreements, issuing quality labels, dissemination, etc.), monitor national projects and actions and contribute to policy development. SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres offer resources, tools and training activities in selected areas, support measures for inclusion and diversity, facilitate networking and capacity building and co-ordinate the implementation of Youthpass for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the programme.

While the distribution of competences varies across programmes, institutional silos can create fragmentation and obstacles (for instance in administrative procedures) or generate un-coordinated duplication of efforts (for instance on outreach efforts). Instead, the capacity of governments to promote co-ordination by involving all relevant stakeholders across government and civil society can support a common strategic vision, smooth administrative processes, and efficient use of resources, hence representing a key success factor for the effective implementation of youth volunteering and civic service programmes. When surveyed by the OECD in 2019, the lack of effective co-ordination between relevant stakeholders was recognised as a challenge to promoting youth volunteering by 28% of OECD entities in charge of youth affairs (OECD, 2020^[4]). In Austria, cross-sectoral co-operation on youth volunteering is institutionalised through the Austrian Council for Voluntary Work (*Österreichischer Freiwilligenrat*). This advisory body is chaired by the Minister of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection with representatives from “the federal government, the provinces, the cities and municipalities, the social partners, the political parties as well as representatives from all important areas of voluntary engagement, such as voluntary welfare; non-profit and social services; families, women; education, children’s and youth work; culture; environmental, nature and animal protection; migration, volunteer centres, etc.”²³

In some countries, the government entity overseeing the youth volunteering or civic service programme has collaborated with other government entities for the implementation of specific (at times *ad hoc*) “tracks”.

²² SALTO stands for “Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities.”

²³ <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/austria/22-administration-and-governance-of-youth-volunteering>

This is the case in Austria's Voluntary Environmental Protection Year and Chile's Live Your Parks, where co-ordination occurs with federal entities responsible for climate protection and national forests, respectively. Similarly, in the United States' AmeriCorps NCCC programme, the Traditional Corps is implemented exclusively by AmeriCorps, while the FEMA Corps is implemented in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).²⁴ In Italy, the Environmental Civic Service is jointly delivered by the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service and the Ministry of Environment and Energy Security.²⁵ The programme supports capacity-building efforts in alignment with the Universal Civil Service and orients young people toward "green jobs," with a specific focus on young women. Similarly, Italy's Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service co-operates with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forestry on the Agricultural Civil Service, with the Department for Digital Transformation on the Digital Civil Service as well as with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for civic service opportunities outside of Italy.

Strategic planning can enable a common vision and strengthen implementation

Identifying strategic goals and objectives is critical to ensure youth volunteering and civic service programmes have a positive impact on young people. Strategic planning can enable a common vision and promote co-ordinated action in implementation, as also recognised in the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People (OECD, 2022^[5]).

Only a few countries with such programmes in place provide easily accessible information on their strategic orientations (for instance in the form of multi-annual strategies, action plans, etc.). Available information suggests that at least six countries and the European Union formulate and use strategic documents to plan the programme's implementation more effectively. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the National Citizen Service Trust (the entity with formal responsibility for the youth volunteering programme) prepares an annual "business plan" which must include strategic priorities and proposed main activities, in line with the National Citizen Service Act 2017: the plan is then submitted to each House of Parliament (Government of the United Kingdom, 2017^[40]). In some countries, strategic plans cover multi-year periods, as is the case in Italy, where the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service is responsible for preparing three-year plans, alongside yearly financial programmes. The strategic plans include data on the general context, outline strategic objectives and provide implementation guidance (DPG&SCU, 2022^[41]). Similarly, the European Solidarity Corps is underpinned by a regulation covering the period 2021-2027 which includes a general programme objective, a specific programme objective, 10 quantitative indicators for monitoring and evaluation and a EUR 1 009 billion budget for the entire programme duration (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2021^[10]). In addition, a work programme is adopted every year, outlining budget allocations and implementation information. In Canada, planning of the Canada Service Corps is informed by the Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus), an analytical process used across government policies and plans to assess systemic inequalities in policymaking (Box 3.6).

²⁴ <https://www.fema.gov/>

²⁵ <https://www.politichegiovani.gov.it/comunicazione/news/2023/7/avviso-programmi-sca/> (Italian); <https://www.mase.gov.it/notizie/al-il-servizio-civile-ambientale> (Italian); <https://www.ticonsiglio.com/servizio-civile-ambientale/> (Italian)

Box 3.6. Canada: informing planning through assessments of inequalities

The Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) is an analytical process utilised by the Government of Canada to assess systemic inequalities and to understand how diverse groups of women, men, and gender diverse people may experience policies, programmes and initiatives (Government of Canada, 2022^[42]). The process takes into consideration a variety of identity factors including gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity and mental or physical disability, among others, and looks at the differentiated impact of government policies across population groups.

As part of the programme's policy development process in 2019 to expand CSC programming which involved co-creation with more than 800 young Canadians,²⁶ a GBA Plus analysis recommended dedicated funding for service projects focused on reconciliation with Indigenous people and also highlighted the potential positive impacts of the programme on Indigenous groups, visible minorities, young people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQI+ youth,²⁷ immigrant young people, rural and remote youth and young people from low-income families. The analysis also suggested that young women and girls were expected to participate in CSC in higher numbers than young men and boys and that targeted outreach could help increase participation among men and boys. In addition, the analysis also identified the barriers to participation that each demographic group may face and outlined incentives and support actions to address them.

As of April 2021, ESDC has been collecting anonymous demographic data about participants under the CSC program consistent with GBA Plus needs. The collection process allows young people to indicate, on a voluntary basis, their gender, if they identify as 2SLGBTQI+, if they identify as Indigenous, are Black, are part of a racialized group, have a disability, are part of an official language minority community, are a newcomer to Canada, are from a rural or remote area or identify as from a low-income household. Building on this work, as of December 2022, new data elements are collected, allowing ESDC to assess the differences between respective demographic groups and their experiences in service placements and microgrants. The department will continue to examine participation rates based upon disaggregated programme data. All of these elements help ensure that CSC is reaching its intended target of having at least 50% of CSC participants from Indigenous or under-served populations.

Targeted public communications and youth participatory approaches remain sporadic

Youth-friendly public communications can help promote awareness and outreach of youth volunteering and civic service programmes. Youth participatory approaches can help inform and support programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In addition, they can also help strengthen the civic skills of those young people taking part in these participatory processes (OECD, 2023^[7]). Countries such as Canada, France, Italy and the United States have taken significant steps to promote youth-friendly communication to ensure more young people are aware of existing opportunities (See Box 3.7). Civil

²⁶ <https://www.budget.canada.ca/2019/docs/gba-acsc/gba-acsc-chap01-en.html>

²⁷ It is the acronym used by the Government of Canada to refer to the Canadian community. 2S: at the front, recognises Two-Spirit people as the first 2SLGBTQI+ communities; L: Lesbian; G: Gay; B: Bisexual; T: Transgender; Q: Queer; I: Intersex, considers sex characteristics beyond sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; +: is inclusive of people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities, who use additional terminologies. <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/free-to-be-me/2slgbtqi-plus-glossary.html>

society organisations can also be key to delivering targeted messages through youth-friendly channels to boost recruitment and raise awareness about programmes.²⁸ Other programmes provide opportunities to young participants to connect with each other: for instance, the European Solidarity Corps has created an official Facebook Group²⁹ for young volunteers to connect with each other, share news and experiences from placements, find new volunteering opportunities and get advice.

Box 3.7. Youth-friendly public communication

Canada Service Corps

The Canada Service Corps has developed a comprehensive social media strategy aimed at creating networks of solidarity among young people. The programme notably benefits from the social media channels on Instagram and Facebook of “Leaders Today” which also includes an interactive platform and regular in-person meetings (Government of Canada, 2023^[43]). These channels use hashtags like #CdaYouthAction and #LeadersToday to unify conversations and highlight shareable content such as short video testimonials and engaging graphics. Leaders Today also offers a newsletter with the latest updates on government opportunities, federal news, and youth programs. Moreover, young people in Canada can find jobs, volunteering opportunities, educational resources, and community support through the Youth Digital Gateway website, which provides detailed how-to guides to help them prepare for their future, one step at a time (Government of Canada, 2024^[44]). Additionally, the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) YouTube channel provides useful videos on ESDC’s programs and services that can assist young Canadians in navigating life transitions (Employment and Social Development Canada, n.d.^[45]).

France’s Civic Service

In May 2024, France introduced a new communication campaign for its Civic Service Programme. Shaped around the slogan “Get into Civic Service mode” (*Passez en mode Service Civique*), it aims to encourage young people to enjoy the unique experience of a voluntary mission by finding the project that suits them best (Service Civique, 2024^[46]). The communication campaign includes digital, media and outdoor print advertisement channels, including through social networks, public posters in railway and underground stations as well as advertisements on the radio and television. Moreover, 8 young people were selected for each of the 6 areas of missions to share their previous experiences with other youth. The Civic Service has also established an ambassadors’ network that consists of volunteers who are either currently engaged in a mission or have completed one and wish to continue their commitment. They contribute to the dissemination, promotion, and enhancement of the Civic Service by sharing their experiences and the benefits they have gained. They aim to reach out to other young people, especially those who are harder to reach, to discuss their experiences and encourage participation.

Italy’s Universal Civil Service

Italy has taken a number of diverse initiatives aimed at enhancing promotion efforts around its Universal Civil Service (UCS). In 2021, Italy updated the website of UCS (www.scelgoilservizocivile.gov.it) to include more attractive graphics, simpler and more direct language. In 2022, Italy promoted the UCS through TV and radio campaigns. In 2023 and 2024, workshops and fora were organised throughout Italy to raise awareness about the UCS, also with the support of testimonies from former volunteers. In early 2024, a new outreach campaign was launched through TV, social media and mobile application to promote applications to the programme. The number of applications significantly increased on the

²⁸ See for example: <https://www.volunteero.org/volunteer-app>

²⁹ https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/useful-links_en

days when Department featured interviews, videos and targeted commercials on national and regional TV channels. Finally, in the context of a project implemented in 2022-24 in collaboration with the OECD and financed by the European Commission, a pilot project was conducted to improve visual communication of the UCS platform for online applications, introducing visual maps to support the identification of projects' location.

US Peace Corps

The US Peace Corps developed a communications toolkit to revitalise its recruitment and appeal to a broader audience of potential volunteers. It sets out guidelines to disseminate information on applications and the selection process, invites Peace Corps members to share messages from elected officials and senior members of the Peace Corps, and develops infographics to better understand the programme (Peace Corps, 2010^[47]). These guidelines also enable young people to share their stories and the impact of volunteering experiences as part of broader communication strategies.

When considering participatory approaches, it appears young people and youth stakeholders are often consulted in the design stage of the youth volunteering or civic service programmes. In Canada, young people were consulted early in the design of the Canada Service Corps in 2018: feedback received from consultations provided concrete suggestions to involve under-served young people in the programme (e.g. through social media and targeted outreach efforts, through personnel from the same communities and groups, through flexible scheduling options, etc.) (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023^[22]). In response to the outcomes of early consultations in 2018, the CSC also committed to testing new approaches to address barriers to participation, such as financial incentives and pilots. The Netherlands' MDT programme was also first designed with the involvement of the Dutch National Youth Council (NJR). For instance, young people were consulted in deciding the number of hours and duration of the MDT placements to ensure the programme meets their needs and expectations. As a part of the MDT-core team (*MDT-kernteam*), the NJR continues advising on youth participation and young people's perspectives through dedicated NJR's staff members that follow the work of the MDT.

Beyond the initial design phase, only a few countries have specific structures in place to enable young people to be part of informing the strategic direction of youth volunteering and civic service programmes. Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have leveraged youth advisory bodies in this process. For instance, in Italy, the *Consulta* is an advisory body comprised of representatives of volunteer host organisations and representatives of young volunteers; the Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service performs secretariat functions to support the *Consulta*'s work. Among the latter, three young representatives are elected by the delegates of volunteers of the regions and autonomous provinces of Italy and one is elected by the delegates of the volunteers serving abroad.³⁰ In the Netherlands, a Youth Panel advises on and can propose new policies for youth volunteering; it also supports awareness-raising efforts and ensures that communication campaigns connect with the target group (See Box 3.8). In France, young people are part of the Civic Service Strategic Committee, which brings together all the stakeholders of the Civic Service, including host organisations, the volunteers' advisory body,³¹ members of parliament and other relevant stakeholders to discuss strategic orientations and formulate recommendations (Agence du Service Civique, 2023^[38]). The representation of young people in the Strategic Committee is mandatory

³⁰ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/04/03/17G00053/sg> (Italian)

³¹ The volunteers' advisory body serves to represent the voices of young people in the Strategic Committee. Among other efforts, they focus on solutions to strengthen alumni networks and on identifying and supporting young Civic Service ambassadors.

by law (Government of France, 2023^[17]). In the United Kingdom, the National Citizen Service Trust launched applications in 2023 for an inaugural Youth Advisory Board.³²

Some countries involve young people as part of the implementation and evaluation stages of the programme. In the Netherlands, DUS-I, the agency responsible for disbursing MDT grants to host organisations, ensures that two out of five positions on each project selection committee are young people (most commonly until now people from the MDT Youth Panel). In addition, as one of the requirements to receive the MDT-proof label (see below), host organisations must involve young people in more ways than just as volunteers in the project. For instance, organisations set up their own youth councils, collaborate with former volunteers as peer coaches or ambassadors for their projects or, in some cases, empower young people to design the entire MDT project (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]; Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[48]). In the Netherlands, young people also participate in monitoring and evaluation efforts, mostly through the Youth Panel and the MDT-proof label (see further below). As of 2022, 79% of MDT projects consulted young people in the evaluation phase of the project (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[49]).

Box 3.8. The Youth Panel in the Netherlands' Civic Service for the Youth (MDT)

The MDT's Youth Panel consists of 20-30 young people between the ages of 12 and 30 from across the Netherlands. They advise on and can propose new policies for youth volunteering; they also support awareness-raising efforts around the MDT and ensure that communication campaigns connect with the target group (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[14]). For instance, previous participants and the Youth Panel support the programme as "Ambassadors" during awareness-raising campaigns in schools and municipalities (e.g. "MDT city take-over" focused on municipalities; or "MDT on tour" targeting schools). As previously mentioned, it was also based on the advice from the Youth Panel that "mental health among young people" was included as one of the five social themes of the MDT. The Youth Panel is hosted and supported by the Dutch National Youth Council, with one of their staff members providing organisational support and guidance to the Youth Panel (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[50]; National Youth Council, 2023^[51]). Youth Panel members serve for three-year mandates. The Panel is renewed in a staggered manner, with a few members being replaced every year as their mandate ends. New members are selected by the current Youth Panel itself, with the support of the staff member of the Dutch National Youth Council.

Quality labels and controls can help promote regulatory compliance

Quality labels and controls can help promote compliance with regulations and ensure enforcement. The *OECD Regulatory Enforcement and Inspections Toolkit* (OECD, 2018^[52]) provides a useful guide and practical checklist of criteria to assess inspection and enforcement systems. Some youth volunteering and civic service programmes, including the European Solidarity Corps, France and the Netherlands, have developed systems of quality labels and controls to favour regulatory compliance of host organisations.

The European Solidarity Corps and the Netherlands' Civic Service for the Youth (MDT) have developed quality labels to certify that organisations carry out activities in compliance with the programme's regulation. Within the European Solidarity Corps, the Quality Label certifies that host organisations can carry out high-quality solidarity activities in compliance with the principles, objectives and requirements of the European Solidarity Corps (European Commission, 2024^[19]). Obtaining a Quality Label for a lead role

³² <https://wearencs.com/passionate-about-youth-voice>

is a precondition for organisations to apply for funding for volunteering activities. In the Netherlands, host organisations must apply for an MDT-proof label (*MDT-prooflabel*) within 12 months after the start date of their MDT project. The MDT-proof label is a minimum quality label based on six main standards.³³ Interestingly, the process behind the MDT-proof label itself aims to empower young people: indeed, within the process, host organisations receive an assessment visit from a team of field researchers, which is comprised of two young people who have completed an MDT placement in the past and one professional researcher. The team visits the MDT project site to assess the six MDT-proof label standards through documentation requests and interviews. Young people lead the visits, conduct the research, help host organisations strengthen their MDT project and decide, together with the professional researcher, on whether to grant the MDT-proof label to the host organisation (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[48]).

Risk-based controls are also an effective tool to strengthen regulatory compliance. However, in order to avoid burdens for all stakeholders, risk-based controls should address risks proportionally and be evidence-based (OECD, 2021^[53]). In France, the Civic Service Agency is entitled to conduct controls and other monitoring activities on host organisations at any point in time to check compliance with the regulatory framework and that activities meet quality standards of the overall programme (Service Civique, 2019^[54]).³⁴ Host organisations are informed of controls by a letter sent at least 10 days before the date of the control. Controls are carried out on site and are based on interviews and examination of supporting documents to be provided by the host organisation. In the event of complaints from volunteers or suspected malpractice in the organisations, further controls may be carried out without having to provide a 10-day notice. The results of the control may lead to a temporary suspension from receiving new volunteers or a procedure for withdrawal of accreditation (Service Civique, 2019^[54]). Controls are recognised as a strategic priority by the Civic Service Agency, which has made efforts to modernise and rationalise them since 2018. For instance, since 2019, the Agency has been using a risk-based dashboard to identify structures to be inspected at national and local level. Each year, the Agency reports on all its inspection activities for the previous year in a national report presented to the Board of Directors. The Agency has also undertaken efforts to promote a common culture and working methods to harmonise inspections across inspecting agents and teams, including through the formulation of an operational guide for inspectors, through online training programmes and through the establishment of a working group aiming to harmonise practices (particularly on sanctions decision-making). At the same time, regulations should not over-reach or curb host organisations' civic space: alignment with international standards, clear and transparent control processes, adequate warning systems and ample opportunity to correct (minor) infringements as well as public availability of the reasons for a decision to revoke accreditation are all key elements to consider when conducting controls (OECD, 2022^[8]).

Practices for monitoring implementation and for evaluating results are common across programmes

Sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems can generate useful evidence on actual outcomes of programmes and interventions, enabling policy makers to track whether initial objectives are being met and where further action is required. M&E activities can also help demonstrate impact and sustain transparency and accountability to stakeholders, and ultimately citizens.

At least nine OECD countries and the European Union have specific measures in place for M&E. In Austria, Lithuania, Italy, the United Kingdom and the European Union, M&E mechanisms are placed on a statutory

³³ (1) Focus on social task; (2) Inspire, interest and customise; (3) Proper execution of the process; (4) Good supervision; (5) Collaboration; and (6) Meaningful network.

³⁴ This provision is established by Article R 121-44 of Decree no. 2010-485 of 12 May 2010 on Civic Service.

footing through the corresponding legislative framework. In the United Kingdom, M&E mechanisms have a legal underpinning within the National Citizen Service Act 2017: annual audits and the reporting on strategic priorities and main activities are made available to the public (Government of the United Kingdom, 2017^[40]).

M&E efforts of the programmes may be framed by broader government policies and tools. For instance, requirements for evaluation on the performance of the Canada Service Corps are outlined in the 5-year Departmental Evaluation Plan of the ESDC, which every Government Department must develop in the framework of the government-wide Policy on Results to support transparency, accountability and evidence-based policymaking (Government of Canada, 2016^[55]).³⁵ In the Netherlands, M&E efforts of the MDT fall mostly within the larger M&E and financial cycle of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science as part of the national budget processes, including through annual, publicly-available evaluation reports, also shared with the House of Representatives of the Netherlands.³⁶

Collaboration with, and support to, host organisations can enable the collection of quality monitoring data

Across youth volunteering and civic service programmes that involve host organisations in its implementation, it is especially important to co-ordinate monitoring and evaluation efforts to ensure relevant evidence is generated, gathered and fed back into programme design to ensure impact.

In Canada and the Netherlands, M&E mechanisms are outlined in the financial agreements with host organisations. In the Netherlands, for instance, M&E mechanisms are outlined in the host organisations' grant applications, which stipulate that host organisations that fail to fulfil certain reporting obligations must pay back part of their grant (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[27]). In Italy, host organisations have to submit an annual report on the results achieved with projects in the previous year to the Department of Youth Policies and the Universal Civil Services, which is also responsible for assessing the adequacy of the monitoring system of host organisations (OECD, 2024^[56]). In the European Solidarity Corps, proportionate reporting requirements are placed on all recipients of ESC funding, which must demonstrate their capacity to carry out monitoring, reporting and evaluation as part of their Quality Label application (European Commission, 2024^[19]).

The collection of monitoring data from host organisations is often enabled through digital means. For instance, within the European Solidarity Corps, host organisations feed their data through a centralised IT system. In Canada, CSC-funded organisations provide monitoring data on a quarterly basis through online quarterly activity reports and Excel files sent via email. Quarterly activity reports include qualitative information on the projects, their financial situation and the participants' progress, including success stories and lessons learnt. In addition, data on participants (e.g. age, starting/end dates, update on placement, type of placement, etc.) is gathered at the end of each quarter through an easy-to-use Excel template (known as Organisation Data Input Window). The evidence collected helps identify administrative needs, inform programme and policy design, and orientate research and evaluation efforts. The programme also includes key results in the publicly available Departmental Results Reports which are published on an annual basis by the ESDC.

³⁵ The CSC is also subject to evaluation under section 42.1 of Canada's Financial Administration Act (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023^[22]).

³⁶ https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2023D20295&did=2023D20295 (2022); https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2021Z04930&did=2021D10918 (2020); https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020D28636&did=2020D28636 (2019); https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2019D13080&did=2019D13080 (2018).

Public authorities can support host organisations with training opportunities and accessible guidance material to ensure quality monitoring data is provided to the responsible authorities. For instance, in Canada, CSC-funded organisations are provided with a template for the quarterly activity reports, and they receive guidance on their reporting and monitoring obligations as part of the on-boarding process through meetings and implementation guides. In addition, organisations can claim some of the financial expenses for their monitoring efforts as part of the funding received through the CSC. In France, host organisations must provide an end-of-year report of activities carried out under the Civic Service: the Civic Service Agency provides online templates with detailed guidance on how to collect data and prepare the reports, including a set of guiding questions that should be answered by the organisation (Service Civique, 2019^[54]).

Questionnaires for young participants are often used to collect data on outcomes

Listening to the experiences of young participants can help understand the drivers of young people's participation in the first place, reasons for their (dis)satisfaction with the programme, results and outcomes of the placements as well as areas for improvement. Several youth volunteering/civic service programmes use questionnaires to gather the perspectives of young participants.

In Canada, CSC funded organizations are also required to collect the contact information of participants that consented to sharing their information with CSC. CSC uses the contact information of participants to distribute, on an annual basis, a participant survey collecting socio-demographic, attitudinal and performance data to help with programme evaluation and future policy development. The data collected is used to inform the ESDC's understanding of the impact of youth volunteering placements on different target groups of young people.

In the Netherlands, all MDT young participants must complete an initial questionnaire at the start of their MDT placement and a final questionnaire upon completion of their placement. MDT-funded host organisations are responsible to ensure an average response rate of at least 70% to the initial and final Youth Questionnaires. Failure to achieve a 70% response rate can lead to a request of reimbursement of part of the original grant awarded. The Youth Questionnaire is implemented by an independent research agency. If there are sufficient responses to guarantee anonymity, MDT-funded host organisations also have access to a dashboard with results from the Youth Questionnaire for their own organisation (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023^[27]).

In Italy, questionnaires (in paper or online) are sent out to young participants every three to four months: at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the service. These questionnaires can help provide data on similar elements at different points in time and allow to detect any issue that may emerge over the course of a project (OECD, 2024^[56]). Additionally, monitoring questionnaires are implemented yearly, gathering relevant data to feed back into the programme's design and governance.

A few programmes have taken steps to evaluate outcomes and impact

Programmes evaluations are structured and evidence-based assessments that can help understand strengths and weaknesses of the programme, identify lessons learnt, gather data on outcomes and impact and ultimately promote evidence-based decision-making and accountability. However, only a few programmes have taken steps to evaluate outcomes and impact of their national youth volunteering/civic service programmes. Lack of human and financial resources, lack of political will and leadership, and complexities in collecting, sharing and using personal data across stakeholders have been pointed to as significant barriers in interviews conducted by the OECD with peers.

Outlining the logic of a programme through a "Theory of Change" (ToC) can provide a useful analytical framework for evaluations, outlining inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, impacts and the interlinkages across these elements (OECD, 2024^[56]). In Canada, for instance, the CSC's ToC, found in its Performance Information Profile, drives its program evaluation. CSC's ToC identifies inputs and activities, outputs,

immediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes and ultimate outcomes as well as related indicators for each of them (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023^[22]). In the Netherlands, MDT programme evaluations are informed by well-defined three long-term objectives, 12 associated outcome indicators and respective targets (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2020^[57]). In addition, in an effort to develop impact evaluation, as of 2022, MDT host organisations are obliged to include a ToC in their grant application to facilitate impact measurement. Host organisations are permitted to follow any existing ToC their organisation uses. In addition, the MDT provides a template for host organisations to outline their ToC, the MDT Impact Journey, and it has set-up a training activity for host organisations to develop their ToC in 2023 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2022^[58]). Similarly, the European Solidarity Corps programme is evaluated based on 10 quantitative indicators³⁷ with disaggregation, where appropriate, by country, professional background, level of educational attainment, gender and type of action and activity.

Evaluations can be undertaken with different objectives, audiences and levels of analysis. For instance, France has carried out numerous evaluation initiatives on the Civic Service since inception (Box 3.9). Additionally, in Italy, the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies (*Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche*, INAPP) has produced evaluations on the impact of participation in the Universal Civil Service on the employability of young people, finding evidence that employability among UCS volunteers increases, on average, by 12% after their placement (OECD, 2024^[59]; De Luca and Ferri, 2021^[60]). The evaluation provided by INAPP was included as evidence in the development of the UCS' 2023-2025 plan (DPG&SCU, 2022^[41]).

Box 3.9. Evaluation initiatives in the French Civic Service

Understanding the level of awareness of the Civic Service among the general population

A barometer on public awareness of the Civic Service has been providing the Civic Service Agency with information on public perceptions of the programme since 2015 (IPSOS and Service Civique, 2023^[61]). The latest findings, from September 2023, reflect the views of 2 547 young people aged 16 to 25 who completed an online questionnaire.³⁸ A sample of 600 parents of children aged 16 to 25 was also surveyed to provide a cross-generational perspective.³⁹

The 2023 survey findings show that the Civic Service continues to be widely recognised by the public, with 91% of young people and 99% of the parents surveyed being aware of it. The barometer also provides data on how people learn about the Civic Service (e.g., by word of mouth, via the internet or through traditional media). The programme also enjoys a very positive image (86% of young people

³⁷ The following areas are to be monitored: (a) the number of participants in solidarity activities; (b) the share of participants with fewer opportunities; (c) the number of organisations holding a quality label; (d) the number of participants who are young people with fewer opportunities; (e) the share of participants reporting positive learning outcomes; (f) the share of participants whose learning outcomes have been documented through a Union transparency and recognition tool such as Youthpass, Europass or a national tool; (g) the overall satisfaction rate of participants with regard to the quality of activities; (h) the share of activities that address climate objectives; (i) the degree of satisfaction of volunteers deployed in the humanitarian aid field and of participating organisations with regard to the effective humanitarian contribution of the activities on the ground; and (j) the number of activities in third countries that contribute to strengthening local actors and local communities and complementing volunteering under the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

³⁸ The representativeness of the sample was ensured by the quota method (gender, age, profession of the head of household or of the person interviewed) after stratification by region and category of conurbation.

³⁹ The representativeness of the sample was also ensured by the quota method.

and 87% of parents), with favourable perceptions that unify the population across gender, age, socio-professional categories and political affiliations.

The barometer also sheds light on respondents' opinions regarding the programme's quality as well as their overall understanding of it. For instance, 32% of young people and 34% of parents of 16–25-year-olds view the programme primarily as a way for young people to gain work experience. It is also often seen primarily as a means for young people to be helpful to others (22% and 23%, respectively). Less frequently mentioned, the idea of a programme aimed at strengthening national cohesion is more emphasised by parents (17% versus 12% among young people), while, conversely, the view of Civic Service as a way for young people to earn money is more often highlighted by young people themselves (12% versus 7% among parents).

The barometer also regularly considers recruiters' opinions on the Civic Service. The latest data for this group is from 2021, when 400 human resources directors or managers were surveyed to gather recruiters' specific perspectives (IFOP, 2021^[62]). These individuals, selected from companies with 20 or more employees, were surveyed by telephone from May 31 to June 21, 2021.⁴⁰ Similar to general population findings, the 2021 study suggests a strong awareness of the Civic Service, with 90% of recruiters having already heard of it. Professional perceptions of the Civic Service are even more prominent than in the general population, with 44% viewing the programme as a means of acquiring professional experience. Confirming this outlook and the programme's positive perceptions, three-quarters of recruiters (76%) consider that this experience could be an asset on a young person's resume, to which they pay close attention.

Gathering evaluation data to build benchmarks for further evaluation

In 2018, the National Institute of Youth and Informal Education (INJEP) and the Civic Service Agency determined the need to produce a public survey to provide benchmarking data on the programme, and to enable adequate and ongoing evaluation of the programme. In this context, a polling company was contracted to collect data between 19 April and 8 July 2019, by telephone and online, from a sample of former volunteers who had been on placements lasting between 6 and 18 months. Of the 14,380 young people drawn at random from the civic service administrative database, 8,193 young people provided complete questionnaires, representing a response rate of 57% (INJEP, 2021^[63]).

The survey enabled the INJEP and the Agency to evaluate the Civic Service programme against its most important dimensions and objectives, including the principles of universality, social diversity, non-substitution,⁴¹ engagement and insertion into the labour market (INJEP, 2021^[63]). The results of this survey have been disseminated through different channels, including through the INJEP website in 2019, as well as through three reports published from 2020 onwards and later consolidated in a single report in 2021. The report provides information on volunteer profiles, their motivations and data on volunteers with disabilities. It discusses information on host organisations and how volunteers experienced their engagement, including data such as the type of organisations, type of engagement, living conditions of volunteers during their placement and social diversity. Finally, it provides a post-placement evaluation, including information on how young volunteers were faring six months after the end of the placement, their geographic spread, and their engagement in civic life (INJEP, 2021^[63]).

Evaluating the impact of the Civic Service on volunteers in the long-term

⁴⁰ The representativeness of the sample was ensured by the quota method (salary size, business sector) after stratification by region.

⁴¹ Non-substitution refers to the principle of ensuring that host organisations provide meaningful and tailored opportunities to young volunteers rather than substitute employees with volunteers.

A study of the long-term impact of the Civic Service performed by the French Centre for Studies and Research on Qualifications (CEREP) engaged young people who conducted a Civic Service placement between 2017 and 2020 to better understand their professional and social integration in the three years following their engagement (Service Civique, 2022^[64]). One year after completing their Civic Service, 49% of former volunteers had a job, 20% were looking for one and 20% had pursued further training or study. Only 11% were inactive or in another situation. Positive impacts were more marked among the most vulnerable young people, with those with secondary education or without a diploma having higher rates of insertion into the labour market than what would be expected when compared to actual populations with similar profiles. The study also shows that, all things being equal, young people having completed a Civic Service programme were more likely than young people in the general population to return to education or training three years after completing their initial training.

4 Lessons Learnt

This working paper has taken stock of practices on youth volunteering and civic service programmes in OECD countries and the European Union across some key dimensions of comparison. The paper includes concrete examples from across OECD countries, several of which referring to the Canada Service Corps, France's Civic Service, Italy's Universal Civil Service, the Netherlands' Civic Service for the Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, thanks to engagement with policymakers from the respective programmes.

Data show that there is a positive and precise relationship between having a national youth volunteering or civic service programme in place and the extent to which young people volunteer more broadly. Youth volunteering can foster young people's further civic engagement, skills development, and association with democratic institutions, while also promoting solidarity, social inclusion and resilience. In this context, governments can continue investing in national youth volunteering and civic service programmes and adapt them to evolving challenges as tools for creating better opportunities for young people and achieving stronger societal outcomes. While youth volunteering and civic service programmes vary widely in their features, this working paper highlights common challenges and key lessons learnt to support further work in this area, promote peer-learning and inform countries' policy options and reform efforts. In particular, the experiences gathered in this paper demonstrate that:

- **Youth volunteering and civic service programmes can build young people's skills and promote social inclusion** as they offer training opportunities and hands-on experience. At the same time, it is important to understand the incentives and disincentives young people may face to participate in such programmes. In particular, targeted measures can be taken in the programme's design to ensure it supports the inclusion of young people from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds, such as young school-leavers and young people not in employment, education, or training.
- **Legislative frameworks can help clarify responsibilities across stakeholders**; yet authorities may face specific difficulties in the legal implications of definitions of "young volunteers." In addition, the complex structure of some of these programmes can risk leading to heavy administrative burden and red tape, hampering their impact.
- **Careful consideration should be put into designating the government entity responsible for the programme** to ensure alignment between the entity's broader mandate and the programme's core objectives. In addition, youth volunteering and civic service programmes often have complex set-ups, making **effective co-ordination a key factor for successful implementation**. Collaboration across government authorities is sometimes nurtured through the implementation of specific (although at times *ad hoc*) "tracks".
- While **strategic planning can help promote co-ordinated action around well-identified strategic goals and objectives**, only a few programmes have easily accessible information on such plans. Strategic planning can also be informed by assessments of systemic inequalities to ensure social inclusion.
- **Youth-friendly public communication and participatory approaches across the policy cycle remain sporadic among youth volunteering and civic service programmes**, although some of them have taken steps to strengthen youth participation in different steps of the programme

lifecycle, i.e., not only in programme design and orientation, but also in monitoring and evaluation processes.

- **Programmes oftentimes use quality labels and controls to promote compliance with regulations and ensure enforcement:** risk-based approaches, strategic planning and harmonised practices (including through common guidance and training) can make these controls more effective. International practices also point to **opportunities to empower young people within these processes**. In addition, the experiences gathered in the paper point to the need for balancing minimum quality standards while allowing flexible and agile programme design to be responsive to emerging events, priorities and policy challenges.
- **Ensuring shared strategic and measurable objectives, identifying indicators, investing in institutional capacities and forward-looking planning, gathering benchmarking data, providing host organisations with digital tools and clear guidance for data collection, and promoting the collection and use of time-series data** on youth experiences emerge as key actions to strengthen monitoring and evaluation practices. In addition, practices point to the opportunity of using impact assessments to understand the impact of youth volunteering and civic service programmes across different population groups.

Additional research is warranted in the area of youth volunteering and civic service programmes, notably to gather further comparative evidence on their features and governance arrangements as well as on the impact of these programmes on youth employment, social, health, well-being and civic outcomes. In particular, further work could focus on the impact of volunteering on young people from marginalised and under-represented groups, as well as on methods to better include them in national youth volunteering and civic service programmes. Finally, research could further explore the impact of youth volunteering at societal level, for instance in contributing to local development, promoting solidarity, reducing political polarisation, enhancing social inclusion and strengthening the resilience of democratic governance.

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