



PUBLIC HEARING

Volunteering for European Population Preparedness

#volunteering #EUpreparedness

24/06/2026 | 10.00 – 13.00 | EESC VMA 23 and online

EESC - Rue Van Maerlant 2, 1040 Brussels



European Economic
and Social Committee



Expert hearing on: The role of volunteering for European Population Preparedness in an increasingly dangerous world

Wednesday 24 June 2026 | 10:00 - 13:00

Room VMA 23 and online

Volunteering is vital for Europe's resilience, preparedness, and solidarity, connecting institutions and communities for prevention, crisis response, and recovery. Recognising its role serves the EU's goals for security, opportunity, and resilience, requiring reflection in EU policy and funding. Although civil protection and social support are largely national competences, they heavily rely on volunteer-driven preparedness and response across Europe, though this is not fully recognized in legislation, funding, or public debate. Volunteers of all ages are a fundamental building block of democratic and resilient societies.

Despite the indispensable role demonstrated by volunteers in recent major crises (COVID-19, refugee arrivals, climate disasters), the importance of volunteering has largely faded from the European agenda since 2011, appearing only fragmentarily in specific EU instruments. Policy-makers often underestimate the real economic and social value of volunteers, who contribute the equivalent of over 2% of GDP in many Member States. Volunteer action is practically essential for meeting basic needs and ensuring safety in critical fields, contributing directly to all UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN's proclamation of 2026 as the International Volunteer Year (IVY 2026), alongside the EU's call for a whole-of-society approach in its Preparedness Union Strategy, offers a unique opportunity to formally recognize, support, and value volunteering as a key component of European Population Preparedness.

This expert hearing aims to identify policy gaps, enabling conditions and practical solutions to strengthen the role of volunteers in population preparedness towards a common European strategy and approach. The discussions held in the expert hearing will inform the discussion of the EESC study group for [Opinion SOC/864 on the role of volunteering for European Population Preparedness in an increasingly dangerous world](#), to be adopted in December 2026.

Participants may speak in: ES, EN, FR, IT, PL, SK

Participants may listen in: EN, FR, IT, PL, SK

Programme

10:00-10:05 | Welcome

- **Juraj STODOLOVSKÝ**, EESC Member (SK-II), President of the SOC/864 Study Group
- **Krzysztof PATER**, EESC Member (PL-III), SOC/864 Rapporteur

10:05-10:30 | Case study - Mobilising Society in Crisis: Insights from the 2024 Flood in Poland

- **Iwona NOWAKOWSKA**, Ph.D., Maria Grzegorzewska University, Institute of Psychology – *online*

10:30-11:30 | Panel 1 - Continuous threats

This panel will address the role of volunteers in combatting the continuous and chronic crises that erode security and resilience over time including: the rise of hate speech, racism and other forms of discrimination; attacks on democracy, democratic institutions, independent media and the rule of law; foreign interference and disinformation campaigns; digital and financial fraud; and the long-term effects of poverty, inequality, social exclusion and loneliness.

- **Lejla ŠEHIĆ RELIĆ**, President, Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) – *online*
- **Mei Li POWELL**, Chief Executive Officer, Euroclear Foundation
- **Kristyna STECOVA**, Youth Engagement Officer, Caritas
- **Ayowunmi NUGA**, Safeguarding and Child Protection Consultant, World Scout Bureau Europe Support Centre – *online*

Q&A

11:30-11:45 | Coffee break

11:45-12:45 | Panel 2 - Crisis moments

This panel will address the role of volunteers in preparing for and responding to sudden crisis moments and disasters, such as floods, wildfires, storms, heatwaves, earthquakes, industrial accidents, pandemics, terrorist attacks and other large-scale violent incidents.

- **Angel RUBIO GONZÁLEZ**, Head of Climate Transition, Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) / General Union of Workers, Spain – *online*
- **Lucia MORTARA**, Member of the national civil protection coordination team, Associazione Nazionale Pubbliche Assistenze (ANPAS) / National Association of Public Assistance, Italy – *online*
- **Maria VALLSTRÖM**, Associate Professor in ethnology, Södertörn University Stockholm – *online*

Q&A

12:45-13:00 | Closing remarks

- **Krzysztof PATER**, EESC Member (PL-III), SOC/864 Rapporteur
- **Juraj STODOLOVSKÝ**, EESC Member (SK-II), President of the SOC/864 Study Group