

EESC study reveals mismatch between volunteer energy and volunteering opportunities

Support needed for volunteer organisations and individual volunteering initiatives

People in all European Member States are willing to volunteer, a recent EESC study on '[New trends in the development of volunteering in the European Union](#)' confirms. However, though there is plenty of 'volunteer energy', actual volunteering rates vary across Member States, in large part due to varying levels of volunteering tradition and infrastructure. The study also reveals two pan-European trends in volunteering infrastructure: New players are becoming more involved in creating volunteer energy and matching it to volunteer opportunities, and spontaneous volunteering is increasing due to new technologies and social media. The study therefore suggests investing in the development of third-party involvement and removing barriers to spontaneous, individual volunteering. It also recommends helping volunteer organisations to better tailor volunteer activities to the preferences of potential volunteers.

The [Diversity Europe Group](#) of the European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) organised a presentation on the EESC study, which was published in the context of International Volunteer Day. The event was moderated by the vice-president of the Diversity Europe Group, Kinga Joó; it featured an introduction by the president of the Diversity Europe Group, Séamus Boland, and a presentation by the lead author of the study, Dr Lucas Meijs, and the rapporteur for the latest EESC opinion on *Volunteers – Citizens building the future of Europe*, Krzysztof Pater.

Dr Lucas Meijs, professor at the Rotterdam School of Management (Erasmus University), gave an overview of the study's main findings and recommendations. Talking about the main trends in volunteering, he said: "Companies are organising corporate volunteering, schools and universities community service and service learning and national organisations national days of service. This leads to an increased involvement of third parties in the sector. In addition, all over Europe citizens are creating new ways to become active autonomously." **Dr Meijs** explained that this last aspect had been accelerated by the lockdown measures associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

From the main findings of the study, **Dr Meijs** concluded: "We do not need to invest in the development of volunteer energy. The problem is not the willingness of people to volunteer. The problem is much more that the volunteering infrastructure is not capable of matching volunteer energy with volunteer opportunities. In many cases, the infrastructure does not offer opportunities that people are willing to do."

The study was commissioned by the EESC at the request of the Diversity Europe Group, whose members are in close contact with volunteers on a daily basis and play a crucial role in organising and sustaining volunteer energy. **Séamus Boland** spoke about the value of the study for policy-making: "The study offers valuable insights into the different kinds of volunteers and volunteering activities, as well as into the major changes, challenges and opportunities of the sector. I hope that it will stimulate the debate and lay the ground for informed policy decisions, especially as volunteering has been less present in the European debate in recent years."

Regarding the value of volunteering in the context of recent environmental disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, **Mr Boland** stressed that it had helped create social cohesion and was an example of active participation in shaping societies. Despite its enormous socio-economic potential, the Group president warned that "volunteering should not be used to replace basic services of national and local authorities".

Presenting the main findings and recommendations of the EESC opinion [Volunteers – Citizens building the future of Europe](#), the rapporteur **Krzysztof Pater**, who is also a member of the EESC Diversity Europe Group, said: "Policy-makers must be aware that Europe's future will be shaped not only by politicians and institutions, but also by millions of ordinary citizens, volunteers, acting in solidarity for the common good". The opinion therefore calls for systematic and thoughtful support for volunteering at European and national level. **Mr Pater** urged the European Commission to take action and to declare 2025 the European Year of Volunteers. It would be a way to pay tribute to the millions of volunteers who have demonstrated their significant social role and to reap the full potential of volunteering in the future.

Background information

The study was carried out by the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. It combines a broad review of literature with focused data gathering in five European Member States (Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Spain and the Netherlands). The study creates a classification of volunteers and volunteering opportunities and provides a qualitative overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) that the sector is facing in the EU. In doing so, it reveals new processes and challenges that have been affecting the sector and will presumably continue to do so in the next 10 years.

The study and the executive summary can be download from the [EESC website](#).

The [opinion](#) was adopted by the EESC plenary on 8 December 2021.

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