

# Policy recommendations for the promotion of inclusive volunteering

## Preamble

Volunteering is a key expression of active citizenship that builds social cohesion, supports individual empowerment, and facilitates skill-building and social inclusion. Voluntary work is important both for our society and for individuals. Participation in such can enrich a life through social integration and the development of personal skills, but people with disabilities or mental health problems are often excluded from this. Most of the time they encounter barriers that prevent them from accessing the personal growth and community involvement that volunteering provides. European policies recognize the value of inclusive volunteering, yet significant gaps remain between commitment and practice. To address this, the IMProVE 2.0 project aims to eliminate these barriers by developing training, support, and promotional tools to foster inclusive volunteer opportunities, empowering people with disabilities to fully engage as active, contributing citizens across Europe.

Everyone, regardless of age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, origin, religion or disability can make a contribution to our society and play an active role. We deeply believe: everyone can and should be able to volunteer!

## About the IMProVE 2.0. project

The IMProVE 2.0. project stands for inclusion and equality and is intended to enable people with disabilities to enter voluntary work. In our Erasmus+ project “Improve 2.0.” two volunteer centres from Czech Republic and Germany and two disability organisations from Lithuania and Italy worked hard together to overcome existing barriers and increase the number of people with disabilities volunteering and becoming active citizens in their local communities. We want to showcase: Inclusive volunteering can be normal across Europe. The initiative, possessing a multicultural footprint and an international perspective, offered not only a subjective view of the work done with people with disabilities, but also an objective view of our goal: anyone can volunteer.

The result of our IMProVE 2.0. project is a comprehensive approach to promote and support volunteering of people with disabilities and mental health issues and increase their participation rate in volunteering. Support structures have been developed to enable people with disabilities or mental health issues to access advice and training and to be matched with volunteer involving

organisations, and have the support of inclusion buddies, if this was needed. Information events, training sessions and counselling services for caregivers and parents have helped them to recognise the importance of volunteering for their clients and children and to actively promote and support their volunteering. Through and caregivers will improve skills and thus facilitate the path to volunteerism. In order to change the perception on people with disabilities from support takers to support givers a whole series of public relations activities were implemented.

Based on the insights, achievements, and tools developed in the IMProVE 2.0 project, here are key policy recommendations for enhancing inclusive volunteering. These policies aim to remove barriers, promote accessibility, and support people with disabilities in actively participating in volunteer roles that benefit both individuals and society. These recommendations provide a roadmap for making volunteering accessible and meaningful for people with disabilities across Europe. By adopting these approaches, policymakers and organizations can build an inclusive culture where every person can contribute to their community, enriching their lives and fostering a more equitable society.

## Recommendations

### ***Provide Accessible Information and Training and forms of recognition for Volunteers with Disabilities and Mental health issues***

**Volunteer's Rights and Responsibilities Presentation:** Distribute a simplified guide on the rights and responsibilities of volunteers in easy-to-read language, ensuring accessible communication for all.

**Training Courses Tailored to Volunteer Needs:** Offer tailored training sessions for volunteers with disabilities, helping them gain the skills and confidence needed to thrive in their roles.

**Inclusive Recruitment Processes:** Create a framework to recruit volunteers through accessible platforms, using inclusive language and visuals that welcome people from underrepresented backgrounds.

**Support for Volunteering Agencies:** Agencies should be equipped with a detailed manual and policy recommendations for supporting volunteers with disabilities and mental health issues, providing a foundation for understanding, support, and resource-sharing.

**Volunteer Recognition Programs:** Develop awards or recognition programs for volunteers and organizations that excel in fostering inclusive environments, with specific categories that highlight diverse backgrounds and abilities.

### ***Redefine the Role of Volunteers with Disabilities or Mental Health Issues as Active Citizens***

**Promote Inclusive Roles and Active Citizenship:** Encourage a shift in public perception by showcasing individuals with disabilities or mental health issues as valuable volunteers who contribute, not just receive. Emphasize through policy and promotional efforts that everyone, regardless of ability, can play an active role in society.

**Create Support Structures for Caregivers:** Develop manuals and counselling services aimed at caregivers to overcome concerns and create a positive environment that encourages individuals with disabilities to participate in volunteering.

### ***Strengthen Infrastructure for Inclusive Volunteering***

**Physical and Digital Accessibility:** Ensure volunteer facilities and online resources meet universal design standards, catering to those with disabilities. Provide clear, accessible information and infrastructure to make participation easy for all.

**Establish Accessible Support Centres:** Develop volunteer centres or resource hubs where individuals with disabilities can access advice, training, and support for volunteer participation. These centers should also offer:

**Counselling Services for Parents and Caregivers:** Provide information sessions and support resources, addressing fears and misconceptions and building confidence in volunteering as a valuable, enriching experience.

**Accessible Volunteer Matching:** Implement a robust “matching strategy” to connect individuals with disabilities to volunteer opportunities suited to their skills, interests, and support needs. Inclusion buddies can assist during these placements, enhancing comfort and integration.

**Certification for Inclusive Organizations:** Implement a certification or recognition program for organizations that meet inclusive volunteering standards, incentivizing inclusivity through public recognition and funding preferences.

### ***Expand the Volunteer Pool through Inclusive Outreach and Accessible Resources***

**Establish a Pool of Accessible Volunteer Positions:** Work with local organizations to build a database of inclusive volunteer roles, ensuring a variety of opportunities suitable for diverse needs and abilities.

**Information Sessions for Individuals and Families:** Regularly host accessible information sessions that educate people with disabilities, caregivers, and parents on available volunteer roles, support structures, and the mutual benefits of volunteering.

### ***Provide Financial and Logistical Support for Participation***

**Grant Funding for Inclusive Projects:** Allocate funds specifically for volunteering projects that are designed to be inclusive, with an emphasis on proposals targeting historically underrepresented or marginalized communities.

**Financial Assistance:** Offer reimbursement of expenses, stipends, transportation support, and resources for those who may be unable to volunteer due to financial constraints, ensuring participation isn't hindered by socioeconomic status.

**Accessible Equipment and Tools:** Create a fund or grant program to help organizations afford adaptive technologies and accessible equipment to accommodate volunteers with disabilities.

**Tax Benefits for Inclusive Practices:** Introduce tax incentives for organizations that meet inclusive volunteering benchmarks, encouraging more widespread adoption of inclusive practices.

### ***Implement Comprehensive Training for Volunteer Coordinators and Inclusion Buddies***

**Curriculum for Coordinators on Inclusive Volunteering:** Include detailed training for volunteer coordinators on best practices for accessibility, rights, and responsibilities to create and foster a welcoming, empowering and inclusive environments for volunteers with disabilities, and to better handle diverse needs sensitively, and address biases.

**Inclusion Buddy Training Programs:** Establish structured training for inclusion buddies who can accompany volunteers with disabilities, ensuring consistent, reliable support that enables volunteers to contribute meaningfully and gain skills.

**Counselling Services for volunteer involving organisations:** Provide information sessions, training and support resources, addressing fears and misconceptions and building confidence in accepting volunteers with disabilities or mental health issues.

**Eliminate Biases in Application Processes:** Ensure application and interview processes are bias-free by adopting standardized questions and encouraging diversity training for those responsible for recruitment.

**Guidelines for Hosting Organizations:** Develop and distribute guidelines that assist organizations in adjusting recruitment and workplace practices to welcome volunteers with disabilities, from physical accommodations to inclusive communication methods.

**Diversity and Sensitivity Training:** Regularly offer or mandate training sessions on inclusivity, unconscious bias, and cultural sensitivity for both volunteers and staff.

**Skill-Building Workshops:** Provide ongoing skills workshops, ensuring volunteers from different backgrounds feel empowered, regardless of their previous experience levels. Highlight inclusivity and respect in all training modules.

**Engage with Educational Institutions:** Encourage schools, colleges, and training programs to promote inclusive volunteering as part of curricula, focusing on the values of diversity and community service.

### ***Expand Inclusive Volunteering Networks through Stakeholder Collaboration***

**Collaborate with Community Organizations:** Form partnerships with community-based volunteer involving organizations, to help with outreach, trust-building, and targeted recruitment.

**Conduct Stakeholder Events:** Facilitate events such as stakeholder breakfasts and local volunteer fairs to bring together organizations, community leaders, and disability advocates, fostering partnerships that support inclusive volunteering.

**Host Inclusive Volunteering Conferences:** Support national and international conferences like the one held in Prague, to promote shared learning and establish guidelines that make inclusive volunteering feasible and beneficial across countries.

### ***Promote Public Awareness and Shift Perceptions***

**Educational Campaigns on Inclusive Volunteering:** Run public awareness campaigns that highlight the benefits of inclusive volunteering, featuring diverse volunteer role models to inspire participation from various communities.

**Highlight Positive Examples through a Photobook and Exhibition:** Use tools like the “Everyone Can Volunteer!” photobook and exhibition to showcase success stories of inclusive volunteering. These visual resources can challenge stereotypes, highlighting that individuals with disabilities are active citizens contributing to their communities.

**Run Awareness Campaigns:** Leverage promotional videos, social media, and community events to normalize the concept of inclusive volunteering across Europe, shifting the perception of people with disabilities from passive recipients of assistance to active contributors.

Diverse Representation in Campaigns: Use promotional materials that showcase diversity across age, gender, ethnicity, and ability. Including people with disabilities and mental health issues can help challenge stereotypes and make underrepresented groups feel welcome.

### ***Integrate Inclusive Volunteering into Local and National Policy Frameworks***

**Align with Broader Social Policies:** Ensure that volunteering inclusivity aligns with national social policies around diversity, disability, and equity, making it an integral part of broader social welfare goals.





**Promote Volunteering as Workforce Development:** Recognize inclusive volunteering as a pathway for skill-building and workforce readiness for underrepresented groups, providing certifications or credentials that recognize volunteer experience as a professional asset.

**Local Government Collaboration:** Work with local governments to make inclusive volunteering a core part of community development plans, enhancing civic engagement and fostering greater inclusivity at the grassroots level.

**Policy Alignment and Funding:** Advocate for inclusive volunteering to be embedded in social inclusion policies at the national and EU levels. Provide funding incentives for organizations that demonstrate effective inclusive practices and develop training on a local level to sustain these initiatives.

**Recognition Programs for Inclusive Organizations:** Develop certifications or recognition programs for organizations actively promoting inclusive volunteering. This could include prioritizing these organizations for government funding or grant opportunities, creating a network of inclusive volunteer hosts across sectors.



Project Title	IMProVE 2:0 – Inclusive Method in Professional Volunteering in Europe	
Lead partner organisation	Dobrovolnické centrum, z.s. Czech Republic	
Partners	Jaunuolių dienos centras (JDC) Lithuania	
	ASSOCIAZIONE UNIAMOCI ONLUS Italy	
	Gemeinsam leben und lernen in Europa e.V. Germany	



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.