

# VOLUNTARY ENGAGEMENT, SOCIAL COHESION AND CIVIC ACTION

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## Volunteering always offers a relevant and positive response to crises

In contrast to the current image of a French society that is democratically exhausted, a society turning in on itself, one looking for meaning in work and where everything is commodified, the “joyful impulse” of volunteering brings real solidarity to our country.

**22 MILLION VOLUNTEERS**

aged 18 and over are active in France.

Volunteering unifies society through the daily connections it creates between citizens of all ages: 22 million people aged 18 and over are active in associations, trade unions, mutual societies and political parties. Volunteer involvement, highlighted during the Covid-19 health crisis, is also showing the signs of its fragility.

These organisations are committed to the public interest and work in a wide range of fields (education, social work, disability, health, culture, protecting biodiversity, food aid, etc.). The voluntary sector also has to deal with the ageing and departure of its leaders, with training needs (administrative complexity, responsibility, financing, etc.), and with the crisis of individual and collective recognition.

half of the total volume of formal volunteering in France is carried out by volunteers

**AGED 55 AND OVER**

**Faced with these necessary changes, how can we support and renew volunteer engagement?**

THE EESC PROPOSES A NEW DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING:

Volunteering is the action of a person who freely commits themselves, on their own time, to carrying out an unpaid action for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of a cause or a collective interest.

The EESC is putting forward **19 recommendations** to give every citizen the opportunity and freedom to be a better trained, better recognised and highly valued volunteer.

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# EESC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING, SOCIAL COHESION AND CIVIC ACTION

## 1 FACILITATING ACCESS TO VOLUNTEERING THROUGH BETTER INDUCTION, SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

- Propose to the social partners that they assess and evaluate the **establishment of a new cross-industry right** for trade union representatives, employees and employers to carry out tasks in the public interest related to social dialogue, outside of companies and public authorities.
- **Prohibit the performance of voluntary activities in return for receiving social benefits**, with the EESC stressing that voluntary work should be a disinterested act that cannot give rise to financial remuneration.

## 2 VALUING VOLUNTEERS COLLECTIVELY AND INDIVIDUALLY

- **Significantly increase the human and financial resources** of the Youth and popular education cooperation fund and double the amount allocated in the first year.
- Establish a prior **mediation procedure with the representative of the Défenseur des droits** (Defender of Rights) in the département, in the event that a local authority or the State asks an association to reimburse all or part of a grant.
- Raise awareness of **representation and engagement leave** among working people and their public and private employers by conducting a national information campaign. Initiate a study to ensure that employees taking leave for voluntary duties continue to be paid.
- **Transform the tax deduction into a tax credit** for volunteers who incur expenses as part of their volunteer work.



## 3 BETTER TRAINING AND RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTEERS' SKILLS

*It's crucial to maximise engagement by developing training for volunteers and their managers in the legal and financial areas (preparation of complex applications for grants or partnerships, etc.) and the managerial field (some associations have to manage thousands of volunteers). The EESC recommends:*

- Simplify and promote the training component of the **Fonds de développement de la vie associative** (Fund for the development of associative affairs - FDVA-1), particularly for small and medium-sized associations, by significantly increasing the budget allocated to support the extension of the Fund.
- **Facilitate the creation, use and dissemination of open badges** to recognise and showcase the training developed by volunteers.
- To support volunteers in **their efforts to have their acquired skills recognised through a skills assessment or the validation of acquired experience (VAE)**, supported by public funding, pool and coordinate human and financial resources at a national level for all organisations that use volunteers and for public bodies that contribute to VAE (taking into account the contributions of volunteer passports and open badges).

## 4 IMPROVING THE MEASUREMENT OF VOLUNTEERING AND OF ITS IMPACT

