



Youth Volunteer Survey

Structured Volunteering and Social Resilience

A Survey Report under WP3 of the Social Preparedness and Resilience Initiative

September 2026



SPIRIT

SOCIAL PREPAREDNESS AND
RESILIENCE INITIATIVE



Co-funded by
the European Union

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Background and Objectives	4
<i>The Social Resilience and Preparedness Initiative (SPIRIT).....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Pillar: Social Resilience through Structured Volunteering</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Rationale</i>	<i>5</i>
3. Methodology	5
<i>Research design and context.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Target population and sample.....</i>	<i>6</i>
4. Respondent Profile / Demographics	7
5. Key Findings	8
5.1 <i>Volunteering is passed on</i>	<i>8</i>
5.2 <i>Main motivation is socially driven</i>	<i>8</i>
5.3 <i>Large potential for volunteering in the social sector.....</i>	<i>9</i>
5.4 <i>Development of social and civic skills</i>	<i>9</i>
5.5 <i>Strong sense of community and social resilience</i>	<i>10</i>
5.6 <i>European projects to improve resilience.....</i>	<i>11</i>
6. Conclusion and next steps	12
7. Recommendations	13
8. Annex.....	13

1. Executive Summary

This survey gathered responses from 105 young volunteers from 12 European countries taking part in the SAMARITAN Youth Contest, exploring how they got involved in volunteering, what motivates them, and how they see its value for their community and for society. Volunteering proves strongly self-perpetuating: most respondents were introduced to it through friends or family, and almost all intend to keep volunteering in the future. Their motivation is driven far more by helping others and gaining experience than by personal or career gain, and there is considerable untapped potential, as most young people not yet active in the social sector could see themselves taking it up.

Beyond its immediate social benefit, volunteering builds skills relevant to school and career alongside social and civic competencies, strengthens connections across generations, backgrounds and cultures, and measurably increases participants' confidence and resilience. Respondents overwhelmingly link their personal engagement to a broader sense of civic responsibility and social cohesion. Together, these findings support SPIRIT's Priority 2 objective of reinforcing structured volunteering as a pillar of social resilience and point to the need for stronger EU-level recognition and strategic support for the civil society organisations that sustain these volunteering opportunities.

2. Background and Objectives

The Social Resilience and Preparedness Initiative (SPIRIT)

Samaritan International (SAM.I.) is a network of 23 aid- and welfare organisations in 21 European countries (15 of which are EU Member States). The member organisations are active in a wide variety of social services, from day-to-day operation of in- and out-patient care and service facilities for elderly people, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, to a large number of more specialised services on a permanent or project basis. Many member organisations also provide first aid training, rescue- and paramedical services and are active in civil protection, including disaster preparedness and response. All members are not-for-profit civil society organisations (CSOs) and conduct their work with the support of well over 3 million individual members and about 150.000 citizens structurally engaged as volunteers.

The “Social Preparedness and Resilience Initiative” (SPIRIT) has been developed by Samaritan International under a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission. Through SPIRIT, Samaritan International addresses five principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), strengthening the connection between social services and civil protection to increase social resilience.

SPIRIT draws on the Niinistö report's “whole-of-society approach” to preparedness, placing a strong emphasis on the value and importance of civic engagement. The initiative addresses challenges threatening our social model - both internal challenges, such as demographic change and labour shortages, and external threats, such as increasingly frequent natural disasters that can disrupt social service provision for vulnerable groups - and aims to increase the resilience of the services covered by the EPSR, as well as to increase social cohesion in general.

SPIRIT builds capacity among Samaritan International's membership so that they can meaningfully contribute to the EU policy debate and provide insights and expertise supporting the sustainable implementation of the EPSR principles. The initiative's objective is to advance the approach to preparedness in the social sector, reflecting the importance of the individual citizen and of voluntary engagement in making social services, and the social model in general, more resilient.

Pillar: Social Resilience through Structured Volunteering

This survey is carried out under WP3 and falls within the Volunteering Pillar of SPIRIT, which examines the importance of structured volunteering for social resilience along two dimensions: (i) structured and qualified volunteering in the social services sector, with the potential to complement the paid workforce and thereby help ease labour shortages; and (ii) structured and qualified volunteering in civil protection and first aid, which contributes to societal resilience both through volunteers' expertise and through the social cohesion it fosters.

The Niinistö report stresses that the “participation of citizens in different roles, including through voluntary means, is crucial also for social cohesion in crises” and that “preparedness requires common responsibility.” It recommends reinforcing channels and opportunities for the active participation of young people in preparedness action by stepping up support to the voluntary sector.

Rationale

All member organisations of Samaritan International rely on structurally engaged volunteers. While volunteers offer their time for free, attracting, managing and retaining them requires significant organisational resources. This investment is nonetheless essential: without volunteers, member organisations would not be able to offer as diverse a range of services, nor maintain their current geographic coverage.

In order to gain more insights into the motivation of young volunteers, as well as their perception and awareness of their engagement's value for social cohesion and social resilience, Samaritan International decided to carry out a Youth Volunteering Survey among the participants of its biennial Samaritan Youth Contest.

The survey's specific objective was to understand how young persons first get into volunteering, how they choose the activities/sectors, what they gain through volunteering, their view on civic responsibility and community, as well as their view on the role of the European Union.

3. Methodology

Research design and context

The questionnaire's development was carried out by a student project team under academic supervision from Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU Wien - Institute for Nonprofit Management and Governance) as a commissioned project for Samaritan International and Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Austria. The student team consisted of Leah Bröderbauer, Laetitia Kaufmann, Antonia Puntigam, Milica Stanisic, Kristina Stindl and Alexander Stippl and was led by Berta Terzieva, MSc (WU). Agnes Riha and Lukas Buzetzki were involved in the development on behalf of Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Austria. For Samaritan International Paul Wardenga and Anne-Rieke Stuhlmann reviewed the developed questionnaire.

This survey was developed to be carried out at the international youth first aid competition "SAMARITAN Contest," hosted by the Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Österreichs (ASBÖ). Around 100 young volunteers from different European countries active in first aid services are participating at the contest, which presents a good occasion to survey the participants.

The academic team took into consideration the challenges of how to transpose complex theoretical concepts — social resilience, civil-society engagement, and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) —into a standardised questionnaire that validly measures them across differing knowledge levels and life realities.

In terms of content, the questionnaire focuses on identifying patterns of motivation in voluntary work, the extent of social resilience and perceptions of civic engagement, particularly in the context of the European Union. The aim is to integrate the role of the EU, as well as EU-level initiatives such as the "European Pillar of Social Rights", into the questionnaire in a scientifically sound manner, and in an adequate way for the respondents' age group.

To provide well-founded answers to the research questions, a quantitative research design has been chosen. The methodological basis for this is the development of a standardised online questionnaire,

which is specifically tailored to the 'SAMARITAN Contest' event and the target groups described above. The methodological approach is divided into three key phases:

- 1. Content development and formulation of questions:** In the first step, theoretical topics such as social resilience and civic engagement were translated into specific questions. The guidelines of the 'European Pillar of Social Rights' served as a particular reference point here. The aim was to transform abstract concepts into tangible possible answers that reflect the real-life experiences of the young people.
- 2. Target-group-specific design:** A key component of the methodology was to tailor the questionnaire specifically to the different target groups. Whilst a core section remained the same for all participants, the specific questions were adapted in terms of language and content to suit the respective age group. This ensured that the questions are easy for younger participants to understand, whilst for the older group they offered the necessary level of complexity.
- 3. Quality assurance and technical implementation:** The questionnaire was created using the Qualtrics tool in two languages (German/English) and designed to consist of multiple-choice questions only. Prior to final publication, the questionnaire underwent an internal review by the project group (a two-week trial phase) to ensure that there are no barriers and that the questions are clearly understood within the international context of the 'SAMARITAN Contest'. Technical implementation was arranged so that participants could access the questionnaire easily via a QR code.

The final questionnaire was set up on Microsoft Forms and translated into all participants' native languages by Samaritan International. (Available languages: English, German, French, Italian, Polish, Slovak, Serbian, Hungarian, Latvian, and Romanian)

Target population and sample

The target population comprises 105 young participants of the international SAMARITAN Contest, coming from 12 different European countries. The target group was surveyed on 24 July 2026 during a dedicated session, which included a presentation of the context and development of the questionnaire, as well as the conduct of the survey. Two distinct age groups were addressed, reflecting differing language requirements and levels of prior knowledge: 12–15 year-olds and 16–21 year-olds.

The questionnaire contained a common first part for both age groups, as well as a second part divided by age group.

The sample is varied in terms of geographic distribution. For the analysis of the results, a specific characteristic of the target group must be taken into consideration: the participants are young volunteers who are all active in first aid-related activities or services within their organisation.

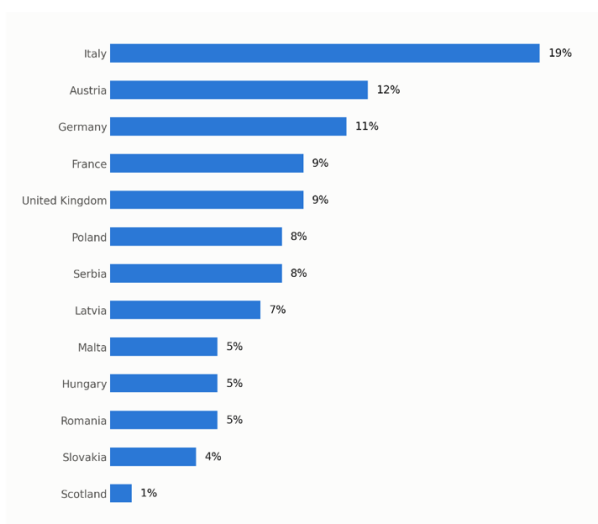
In addition, the uneven distribution across age groups was rooted in the difference of team sizes, which led to more participants aged 16-21. The gender distribution resulted from the composition of the national teams, which do not have any specific requirements in this regard.

4. Respondent Profile / Demographics

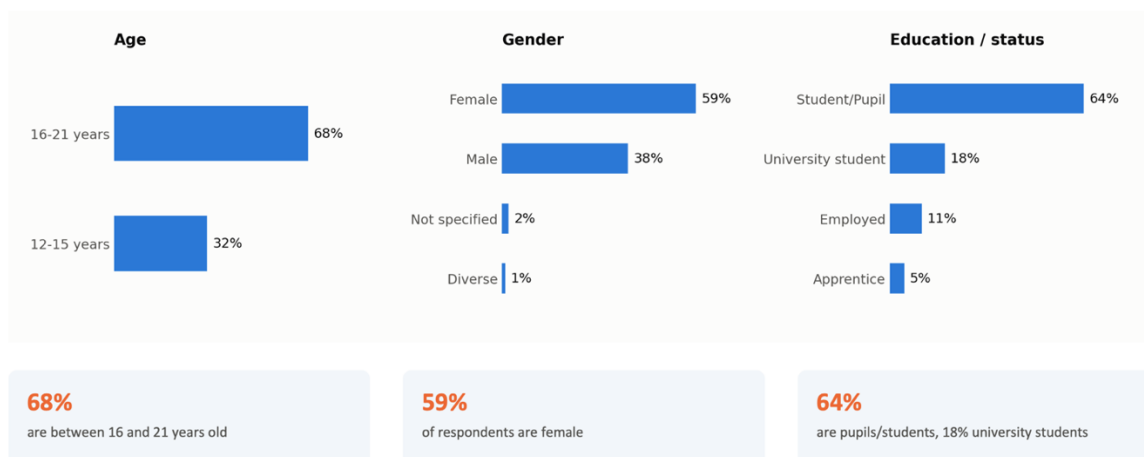
The young volunteers participating in the survey came from the following organisations and countries:

Associazione Nazionale Pubbliche Assistenze (ANPAS, Italy); Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland e.V. (ASB, Germany); Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Österreichs (ASBÖ, Austria); Asociácia Samaritánov Slovenskej Republiky (ASSR, Slovakia); Fédération des Secouristes Français – Croix Blanche (CB, France); Dollar Academy (Scotland, UK); Federatia Samaritenilor Romani (FSR, Romania); Inicijativa za razvoj i saradnju (IDC, Serbia); Latvijas Samariesu apvieniba (LSA, Latvia); Malta Rescue Corps (MRC, Malta); Samarytańska Federacja Organizacji Pożarzadowych (SFOP, Poland); Országos Szamaritanus Társaság Szövetsége (USB, Hungary); Landesrettungsverein Weißes Kreuz (WK, Italy).

Who took part? Countries of origin



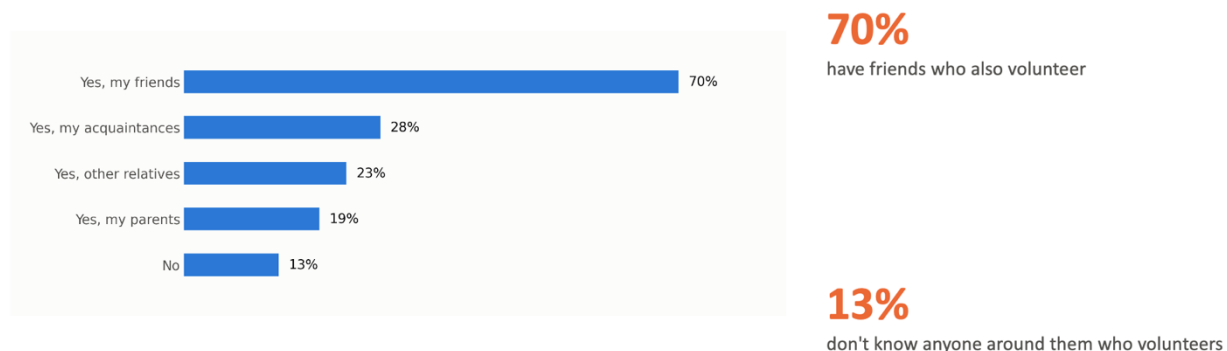
Age, gender and education



5. Key Findings

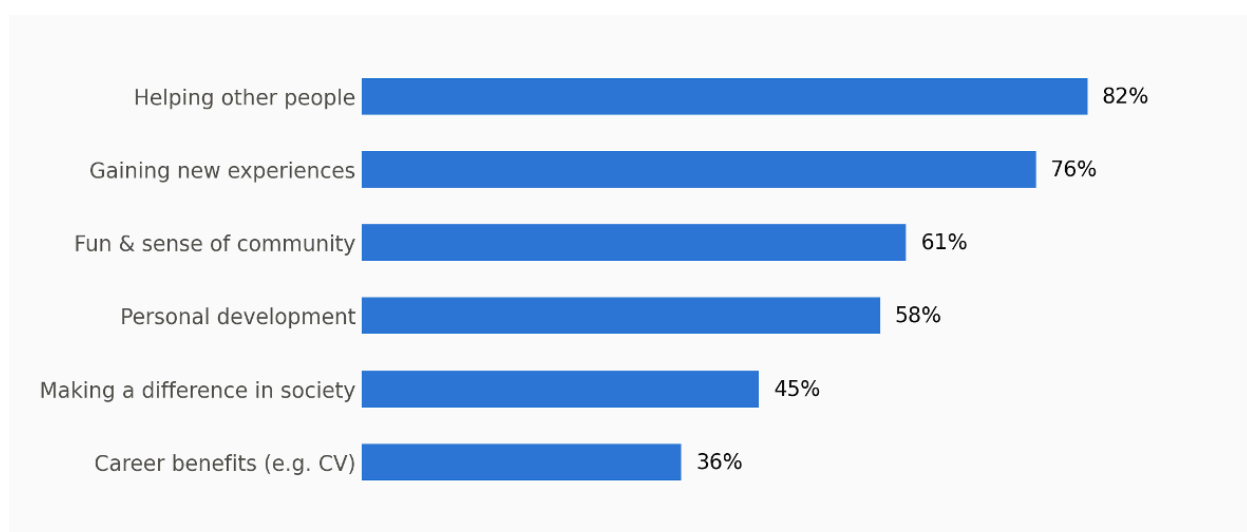
5.1 Volunteering is passed on

Volunteering runs strongly through respondents' social circles: 70% report that friends also volunteer, alongside acquaintances (28%), other relatives (23%) and parents (19%); only 13% know no one else who volunteers. This peer-to-peer and intergenerational pattern suggests that structured volunteering spreads substantially through existing social networks rather than through outreach to first-time volunteers alone. Once formed, the commitment is lasting: 97% of respondents plan to stay active as volunteers in future, with 65% saying "definitely" and 32% "probably."



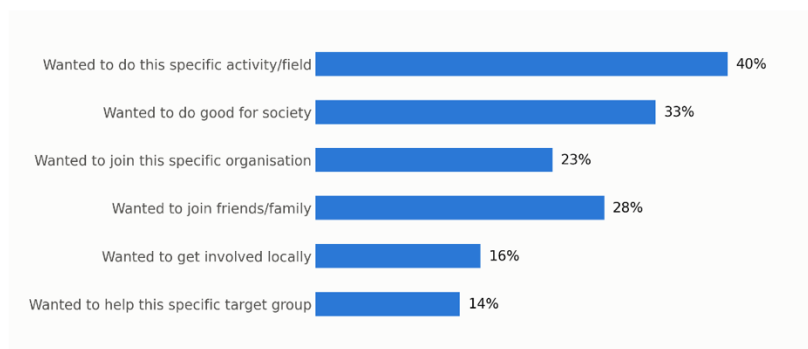
5.2 Main motivation is socially driven

Asked what motivates them most, respondents point overwhelmingly to social and community-oriented drivers rather than personal gain: helping other people (82%), gaining new experiences (76%), outrank career benefits such as CV-building (36%). This is echoed in participants' own assessment of their impact: 96% feel they are doing something useful for their community through their volunteering — 57% "fully" and 39% "rather."



5.3 Large potential for volunteering in the social sector

Respondents see the greatest societal relevance of volunteering in rescue services and first aid (62) followed by social support such as care and poverty relief (53), education and youth work (44), disaster protection and crisis aid (42), and environmental and climate protection (33). This perceived relevance is matched by real openness among those not yet active in the social sector: 86% of respondents who do not currently volunteer socially could imagine doing so in future — 40% "definitely" and 46% "maybe" — with only 12% ruling it out. Among those who already volunteer in the social sector, motivations for taking up volunteering in that sector point the same way: 40% joined because they wanted to do that particular activity, 33% wanted to do good for society, 28% wanted to join friends or family, and 23% wanted to join a specific organisation.



40%

wanted to do this specific activity

33%

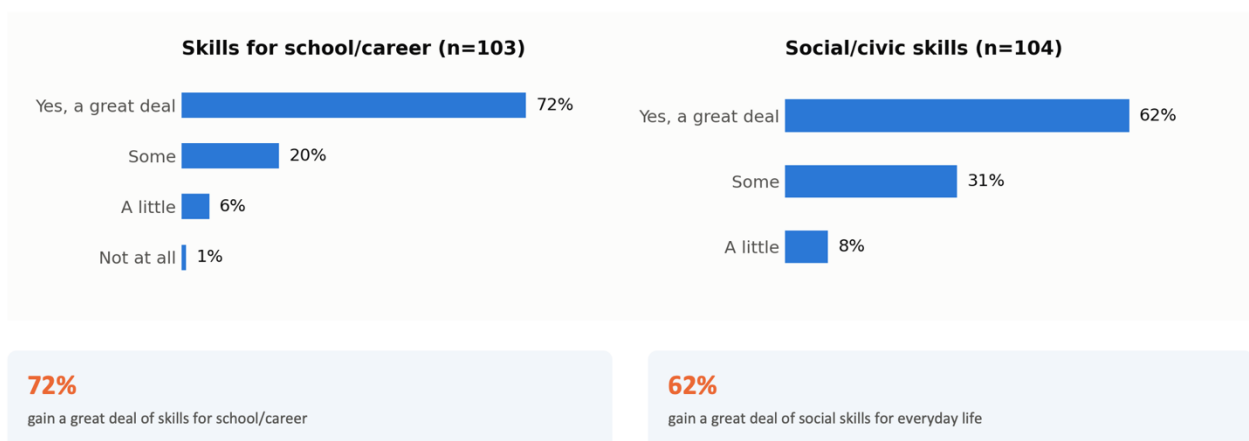
wanted to do good for society

23%

wanted to join the organisation

5.4 Development of social and civic skills

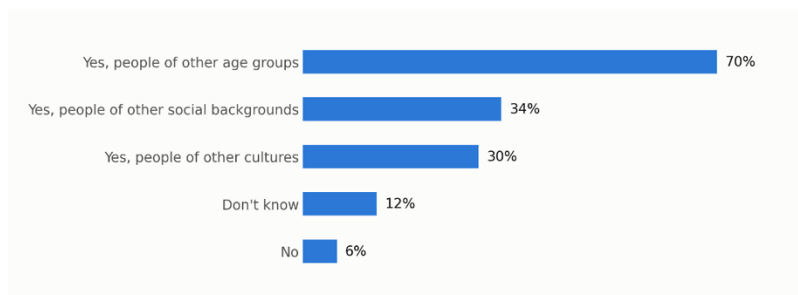
Volunteering delivers skills gains on two fronts. While a large majority of respondents report gaining a great deal of skills relevant to school or career (72%), the social and civic skills learning for everyday life are experienced at almost the same level (62%); adding those who gained "some" skills increases the result to 92% and 93% respectively. This dual return — practical, employability-relevant skills alongside social competence — underscores structured volunteering's value as an informal learning pathway that complements formal education and is essential in building value-based societies with engaged citizens.



5.5 Strong sense of community and social resilience

Community

Volunteering acts as a bridge across social divides: 70% of respondents met people from other age groups through their volunteering, and around a third also met people from other social backgrounds (34%) or other cultures (30%). Only 6% report meeting no new people through their engagement.



70%

met people from other age groups

34%

also people from other social backgrounds

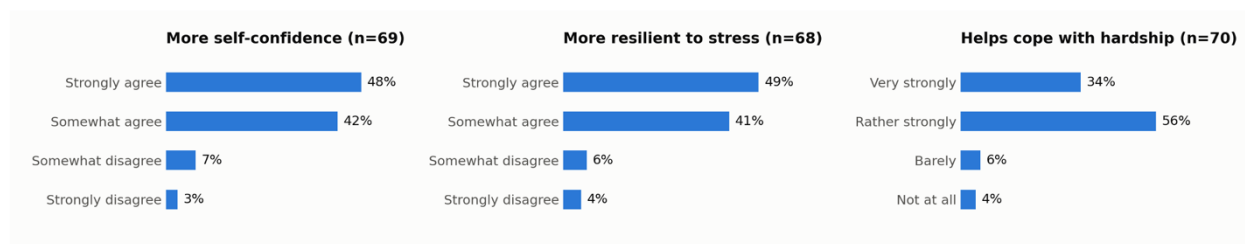
30%

also people from other cultures

Personal resilience

Age 16–21: among the older age group, volunteering universally builds confidence in emergencies — 100% feel more confident, with 74% feeling "much more confident" and 26% "somewhat more confident."

Age 12–15: younger respondents report comparably strong gains — 90% agree volunteering gave them more self-confidence, 90% agree it made them more resilient to stress, and 90% agree it helps them cope with hardship more broadly, with roughly half of each group agreeing "strongly."



90%

gained more self-confidence through volunteering

90%

feel more resilient to stress as a result

Societal resilience

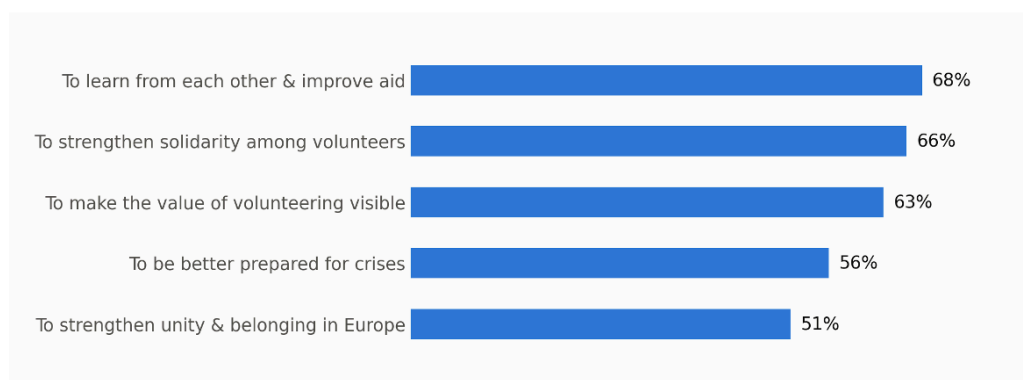
Respondents also connect their individual engagement to a wider societal effect. 93% feel a personal responsibility to contribute to society (51% "rather agree," 42% "fully agree"), and 90% believe their volunteering helps make society more crisis-resilient — for instance through contact with people at the margins of society or through first aid provision (59% "definitely," 31% "rather yes"). Nearly all respondents (97%) agree that volunteering strengthens social cohesion (61% "fully agree," 36% "rather agree").



5.6 European projects to improve resilience

Overall, the participants view international cooperation as extremely important and see the role and impact of European Union positively. Almost all respondents (97%) believe European projects help to increase solidarity during crises and crisis response. Given the importance of cross-border exchange and cooperation, 94% believe EU should invest more in volunteering. Questioned about their view on the current role of EU with regards to support for structural volunteering the perception is still very positive, yet lower: in total 64% rate the EU's support as "very strong" or "rather strong".

Why is international networking important?



6. Conclusion and next steps

Structured volunteering offers a unique potential to increase social resilience. It builds both community and personal resilience among those who take part, creates bridges between generations and between different social groups, teaches skills beyond the required expertise and fills gaps that would otherwise go unmet — from disaster response to social services.

Realising this potential fully, however, requires proper recognition and strategic support that goes beyond the focus on the volunteer experience itself. Volunteers are essential to the civil protection and social services sectors and their structural contribution needs to be valued as such. An EU strategy on structured volunteering would help set the framework conditions and support civil society organisations that offer such volunteering opportunities.

The survey was conducted among participants of the SAMARITAN Contest, all of whom were already actively engaged in volunteering activities. Results therefore reflect the views of young volunteers and cannot be considered representative of the wider youth population.

The survey findings will feed into a policy brief on structured volunteering planned for Q4 2026.

7. Recommendations

1. Volunteering is passed on

- *Recognise the multiplying effect of volunteer activation;*
- *Continue to fund programs such as EU Solidarity Corps as an entry point to experience volunteering;*
- *Support in a strategic way both at EU and national level CSOs that offer long-term structural volunteering opportunities.*

2. Main motivation is socially driven

- *Recognise the social and community-based motivation behind volunteering;*
- *Develop an EU strategic approach to volunteering that focuses on the value for society, rather than on the individual volunteer experience only.*

3. Large potential for volunteering in the social sector

- *Active volunteers (in different sectors) show high interest to also volunteer in the social sector;*
- *Promote at all levels (from EU down to organisational level) social volunteering opportunities;*
- *Increase the recognition of volunteers active in the social sector.*

4. Development of social and civic skills

- *Increase the recognition of non-labour market related skills at EU-level;*
- *Recognise the importance of volunteering to develop social and civic skills.*

5. Strong sense of community and social resilience

- *Structured volunteering is a unique lever to increase both personal resilience and contribute to societal resilience;*
- *Recognise the value of CSOs and include them as partners on equal footing in national, regional and local resilience efforts;*
- *Build a more resilient Europe through strategic support to CSOs offering structured volunteering in crucial sectors.*

6. European projects to increase resilience

- *Cross-border cooperation is vital to improve support services and increase solidarity in crises;*
- *The EU should increase its support for cross-border cooperation between CSOs offering structured volunteering and their volunteers.*

8. Annex

10.1 Questionnaire

10.2 Overview of results

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Co-funded by
the European Union