

Volunteering in social action in Brussels

Collaborative research about issues and challenges faced by
organizations & volunteers: recommendations

With the support of:



Context

In 2024, la Plateforme francophone du Volontariat conducted a collaborative research with its network "VolontariAS" & le CREBIS (Research center in Brussels about social inequalities). This research aimed to a dual objective:

- The qualitative analysis of the difficulties and needs of both volunteers and organizations operating on volunteering in social action in Brussels, especially about obstacles to participate actively in volunteering
- Updating and deepening the action-research "Volunteers in social action: a not-so-simple commitment" conducted in 2018 by our network "VolontariAS" among organizations fighting poverty in Brussels.
- Bringing together knowledge, viewpoints and experiences of researchers, employees and volunteers

Key recommendations

For volunteers organizations/organizations with volunteers

- **Strengthen volunteers' support**
 - Recruitment: identify the motivations of future volunteers to assess their alignment with the organization's needs and values; discuss about practical aspects and potential fears/questions to allow participation by all volunteers, including those with specific needs or disabilities.

- Integration: organize collective initial training sessions presenting the organization's mission, values, and functioning.
 - Continuous support: implement an individual follow-up system (regular meetings) and collective support mechanisms (group exchanges); offer ongoing training regarding the needs expressed by the volunteers; adapting tools/training & discussion methods regarding disabilities (e.g. audio versions, visit with expert, IT used by volunteers themselves in daily life); establish mentorship or buddy systems to facilitate integration and support volunteering experience.
 - Recognition: encourage convivial moments to reinforce cohesion and recognize volunteers' contributions.
 - Well-being & protection: inform volunteers about potential risks and challenging situations they might encounter; provide spaces for dialogue to facilitate disengagement if necessary
- **Define a clear and adaptive framework for volunteer activities/roles**
 - Roles & responsibilities: develop clear internal regulations while avoiding excessive rigidity; Incorporate flexible guidelines allowing adaptation to unforeseen situations.
 - Importance of the collective dimension: promote exchanges among volunteers to create shared understanding and harmonized practices; involve volunteers in decision-making processes when feasible.
 - Flexibility: offer tasks tailored to the skills and capacities of volunteers with disabilities; allow flexible schedules to accommodate individual needs
- **Improve Relationships Between Volunteers and Beneficiaries**
 - Train volunteers on essential relational skills (respect, empathy, managing boundaries).
 - Raise awareness of maintaining professional distance to avoid dependency or emotional overload.
 - Provide mediation tools to handle potential conflicts between beneficiaries and volunteers.
- **Support diversity & inclusion**
 - Fund necessary adaptations to make organizations accessible (e.g., ramps, specialized software).
 - Promote programs aimed at including people with disabilities in volunteering activities.
 - Train teams to better understand and address the specific needs of volunteers with disabilities.

For policymakers

- **Stabilization of funding**
 - Allocate multi-annual grants to ensure the sustainable functioning of social action organizations.
 - Simplify administrative processes for funding applications.
- **Recognize and value volunteers' contributions**
 - Incorporate volunteering into social action strategies while recognizing its limitations and complementarity to salaried work.
 - Launch campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of inclusive volunteering.
 - Celebrate contributions of volunteers with disabilities through public events and recognition initiatives.
- **Inclusion incentives**
 - Provide grants or incentives to organizations actively integrating volunteers with disabilities.
 - Support innovative initiatives that enhance their participation.
- **Clarify roles between state and associations**
 - Clearly define responsibilities between public duties and those entrusted to volunteer organizations.
 - Foster equitable partnerships with associations in developing social policies.
 - Invest in structural social policies to reduce the pressure on associations caused by increasing social demands.
 - Ensure adequate support for vulnerable populations, enabling associations to focus on complementary missions.