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EMPOWER 65

IT Training and Volunteering Integration for Seniors

VOLUNTEER WORK PROGRAMME



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This methodological support material has been developed to support the objectives of the Erasmus+ project “EMPOWER65: IT Training and Volunteering Integration for Seniors” within the activity “Volunteer Programme Production and Implementation.” Its purpose is to develop and implement a structured and sustainable volunteering system aimed at involving people aged 65 and above in socially meaningful activities within their communities.

EU Erasmus+ project: Empower65: IT Training and Volunteering Integration for Seniors

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Project Lead:

NGO The World of Seniors (Lithuania)

Project Partners:

- Zemgale Region Human Resource and Competences Development Centre (Latvia)
- Association ALTUM (Latvia)
- UAB MLM1 (Lithuania)



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INTRODUCTION

PROGRAMME OUTCOMES

- To empower older people to actively engage in voluntary activities, thereby promoting their social activity, involvement in public life, and strengthening their self-esteem.
- Strengthen social cohesion in local communities through intergenerational communication, cooperation, and the transfer of experience between different age groups.
- Contribute to the well-being of older people by creating opportunities for meaningful activities, self-fulfillment, and social connection.
- To create a sustainable volunteering system that will continue to function after the project ends – this will be achieved through cooperation agreements with at least three local organizations in each country participating in the project, where trained seniors will be able to continue their voluntary activities.

The document will also be used as a basis for planning, implementing, evaluating, and to ensure long-term sustainability.

DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATION

Volunteer coordination is a systematic and targeted process that includes attracting volunteers, training them, organizing their activities, supporting and motivating them to ensure their effective and meaningful involvement in voluntary activities. This process is an essential part of any volunteer programme, guaranteeing not only the quality of the activities, but also the satisfaction and long-term commitment of the volunteers.

The coordination process is organized to ensure the following aspects:

- Responding to individual needs: senior volunteers have diverse life experiences, competencies, and physical abilities. Effective coordination makes it possible to tailor tasks to each volunteer's strengths and interests, ensuring that the activities are both meaningful and suitable for them.
- Maintaining motivation: seniors' involvement in new activities may be accompanied by uncertainty or mistrust. The coordinator's support helps to overcome these obstacles, promotes self-confidence and a sense of community.
- Ensuring inter-institutional cooperation: coordinating volunteer activities involves cooperation with local organizations, social institutions, and community centers. The coordinator acts as a bridge between the volunteer and the host organization.
- Ensuring a quality experience: coordinated volunteering helps to clearly define the objectives, expectations, and responsibilities of the activity, making it easier for both volunteers and organizations to achieve mutual benefits and sustainable results.
- Ensuring programme continuity: effective coordination makes it possible to document good practices, evaluate results, and create a model that can be adapted and continued after the project has ended.

SUMMARY

Volunteer coordination is a key component of a successful, sustainable and senior-friendly volunteering programme. It creates an environment in which older people feel needed, safe, and motivated to share their time, knowledge and human connection.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ENGAGING SENIORS IN VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

In the EMPOWER65 project, we believe that older people are not only valuable sources of experience and wisdom, but also active members of society who can contribute to the well-being of the community through voluntary activities. However, involving seniors in volunteering requires a sensitive approach, an understanding of their needs and an appropriate structure.

CHALLENGES

- Physical and emotional health. Older people may face health challenges or lack of energy, so it is important to offer them flexible activities that are adapted to their physical abilities.
- The technology gap. Digital literacy remains a barrier for some seniors, so it is important to ensure human connection and provide simple, accessible tools for participation.
- Motivation and self-confidence. Many older people do not see themselves as "volunteers," especially if they have not volunteered before. This requires motivation, encouragement, and a clear presentation of the meaning of the activity.
- Transportation and mobility limitations. In regions or smaller towns where public transport is limited, seniors' opportunities to participate in activities depend on logistical solutions.
- Stereotypes in society and institutions. There is still a widespread perception that older people are mainly recipients of support rather than active contributors within their communities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- The value of life experience. Seniors are people with invaluable professional, personal and cultural experience. They can be mentors, storytellers, and intermediaries between generations.
- Closer community ties. Many seniors are long-term members of their local communities who know their neighborhoods, traditions and people. This is an excellent foundation to develop social initiatives.
- Time resources. Older adults often have more free time, which they can dedicate to meaningful activities when appealing opportunities are made available to them.
- Positive impact on emotional health. Getting involved in volunteering reduces social exclusion and feelings of loneliness, and boosts self-esteem and a sense of purpose in life.



- Intergenerational cooperation. Seniors can become a link between different generations, sharing values and traditions, learning together and creating dialogue with young people.

THE CONTEXT OF OLDER ADULT VOLUNTEERING IN LITHUANIA

Lithuania is one of the fastest-aging countries in Europe. Over the past 20 years, the proportion of people aged 65 and older has doubled, currently accounting for approximately 19% of the total population. It is predicted that by 2040, one in three people in the country will be aged 65 or older (Eurostat, 2023; Lithuanian Department of Statistics). Despite this, the participation of older adults in social life, including voluntary activities, remains significantly lower in Lithuania than the European Union average. According to European Commission data, only about 11% of older Lithuanians are actively involved in social activities, while the EU average is approximately 27% (EC Active Ageing Index, 2021).



This is due not only to health and mobility challenges, but also to a historically rooted distrust of volunteering, especially among older generations, for whom "compulsory community work" during the Soviet era was associated with coercion (NGO Avilys, 2020). On the other hand, initiatives such as the Silver Line, Caritas home help programmes and the Erasmus+ projects In Visible Talents and Keep Going show that appropriately adapted volunteering for older adults can significantly reduce loneliness, strengthen social connections, and increase their satisfaction with life. Such examples prove that empowering older people through volunteering is not only a social necessity but also an opportunity to create an inclusive and supportive society.

Given the rapid aging of society and the low level of involvement of older people in community life, it is necessary to strengthen national policies that promote active aging and volunteering as a means of reducing social exclusion. This requires not only public campaigns to change attitudes towards the potential of older people, but also a clear legal and financial framework to ensure support for organisations involving older volunteers.

At present, Lithuania still lacks a coherent policy that would systematically promote and support the participation of older people in public life, both through volunteering platforms and inter-agency cooperation. Volunteering policy often remains on the margins of the broader context of social services, even though it has the potential to act as a preventive measure, contributing to the preservation of health, psychological well-being, and long-term independence.

Therefore, projects such as EMPOWER65 become measures of strategic importance, not only promoting the participation of seniors, but also shaping practices that could be integrated into a long-term national strategy in the context of an aging society.

This direction is supported by the current legal framework. The Law on Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania (2011, No. XI-1500) sets out clear conditions for voluntary activities, including the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and the requirement to conclude written agreements with host organizations. The new version of this law, which will come into force in July 2024 (No. XIV-2301), will further strengthen the accessibility of voluntary activities by providing the possibility of advance compensation for activity-related expenses and distinguishing between short-term and long-term volunteering, which is particularly relevant for older volunteers.

In addition, the 2021-2030 Social Cohesion Development Program, approved by Government Resolution No. 931, identifies the strengthening of volunteering as one of the priority measures for increasing social inclusion. These documents not only provide a legal basis, but also show that the state recognizes the importance of volunteering as a tool for active aging.

THE CONTEXT OF OLDER ADULT VOLUNTEERING IN LATVIA



The demographic profile of Latvian society is changing, with the proportion of seniors (aged 65 and over) in the total population increasing. It is therefore important to analyze how this age group can participate in public life, including volunteer work.

At the beginning of 2025, there were approximately 406,800 residents aged 65 and over living in Latvia, accounting for approximately 21.9% of the total population (available at: stat.gov.lv+1). The proportion of women in this age group is significantly higher – approximately 65.7%, while the proportion of men is 34.3% (available at: stat.gov.lv+1). Studies indicate that the proportion of the population above working age (i.e., over 65) will continue to grow, raising issues of demographic burden and social participation (available at: IR.LV+1). These data show that the senior group is a significant part of society, with a potentially important role in the field of volunteering.

Specifically, in the senior age group: for example, a survey in Riga – in the study "Seniors and Volunteer Activities" – revealed that only 4.4% of seniors in this city do volunteer work, but another 7.5% of those surveyed expressed a willingness to get involved (available at: LA.LV).

The project *New Opportunities for Seniors in Volunteer Work* points out that the involvement of seniors in volunteer work not only helps society, but also promotes the active participation and social involvement of seniors themselves. (available at: Vidusdaugavas NVO).



These facts show that, although opportunities exist, the involvement of seniors in volunteer work is relatively low.

In Latvia, the legal framework for volunteer work is set out in the Volunteer Work Act, which came into force in 2016. The Act defines volunteer work, the principles for its organization, the rights and obligations of the parties involved, and the procedures for organizing and recording volunteer work. According to the law, volunteer work is defined as work that benefits society, performed voluntarily and without remuneration, in cooperation with a legal entity (organization).

In recent years, volunteer work in Latvia has undergone significant development, becoming a socially important movement that promotes civic participation, social solidarity and community cohesion. Volunteers are involved in various activities, providing support to non-governmental organizations, local governments, as well as cultural and social projects. According to the Latvian Volunteer Work Association, approximately 15,000 volunteers were actively involved in various initiatives across the country in 2023.

The volunteer movement in Latvia is actively promoted by non-governmental organizations such as *the Latvian Youth Council*, *Brīvprātīgie.lv*, and other initiatives that ensure the exchange of information, coordination of volunteer recruitment, and promotion of public awareness about the importance of volunteer work. More and more state and local government institutions are recognizing the importance of volunteering and are actively involved in promoting it. Data shows that approximately 4,000 volunteers are registered with *the Latvian State Employment Agency*, as well as more than 300 non-governmental organizations and local governments that offer volunteer programs.

According to data from the Jelgava City Council, there are 1,200 active volunteers in the city, but there are no separate statistics on residents over the age of 65 who are involved in voluntary activities. The Jelgava Association of Elderly People, whose members are actively involved in the Jelgava volunteer movement, also does not have accurate statistics on how many older people volunteer. According to their data, the most popular volunteer activities are helping to organize city events, such as the traditional Ice Sculpture Festival, cleaning up the environment, helping schools and kindergartens, and providing social assistance to elderly and disadvantaged people.

According to data available to the Jelgava Organization of Elderly People, it should be noted that when evaluating their volunteering experiences, seniors do not always mention only positive experiences; there is a lack of opportunities for self-realization through volunteering and a lack of community spirit. Therefore, it is important to provide ongoing consultation and methodological support to organizations implementing volunteer programs

In summary, both Latvia and Lithuania face similar challenges in strengthening volunteering among people aged 65 and older:

- A lack of statistics about 65 and older volunteers.
- Low involvement of seniors,
- Health status, physical ability, and time resources – seniors indicate that their health status or energy sometimes prevents them from getting involved (available at: [LA.LV](#)),
- Lack of information and motivation – many seniors indicate that they have not received any offers or do not know how to get involved (available at: [LA.LV](#)),
- Organizational problems – guidelines and tailored programs are needed in the field of senior volunteering.



The Volunteer Work Guidelines developed as part of the project are intended as a volunteer work support tool and methodological aid for organizations coordinating volunteer work, to improve the quality of volunteer work and increase the satisfaction of seniors with their participation in volunteer work.

GOOD VOLUNTEERING PRACTICES IN EUROPE

There are many successful projects in Europe that involve older volunteers and aim to promote active participation in society, strengthen cultural, social, and digital literacy and reduce exclusion. One of the most notable examples is the Museo Reina Sofía cultural volunteer program in Spain, where since 1993 the organization CEATE has been training older people to lead interactive tours for visitors and organize educational activities, discussions, musical events and radio programs. Every year, around 15,000 visitors are involved in this program, and seniors constantly update their knowledge, develop their digital literacy and build interpersonal relationships.



A similar experience prevails at the British Museum in the United Kingdom, where more than 500 volunteers contribute to improving the visitor experience, from presenting exhibits to leading educational programs. Volunteers participate in special training, gain access to cultural events, and feel involved in the life of the museum. A volunteer from the British Museum notes: "The greatest joy is communicating with visitors; by telling others about the museum's exhibits, I get to know them even better myself. When I repeat constantly, I don't forget what I know".

In Poland, *POLIN* – Museum of the History of Polish Jews also offers various volunteer activities for seniors, ranging from event organization to visitor services and educational activities for families. Such activities not only strengthen the cultural activity of seniors, but also improve the accessibility of the museum and encourage community involvement. Another good practice initiative is the *GrandMentors programme* run by *Volunteering Matters* in the United Kingdom. Here, older volunteers become mentors to children, teenagers, or young adults from care institutions, providing them with emotional support, practical advice, and helping to strengthen their independence. The programme involves around 20,000 volunteers each year and has an impact on better social integration, intergenerational connections and a long-term culture of volunteering.

SUMMARY

These examples show that seniors can be active in the fields of culture, education, and social support - not only as recipients of support, but also as valuable members of society. The most important thing is to create meaningful, empowering activities that meet their needs and capabilities.

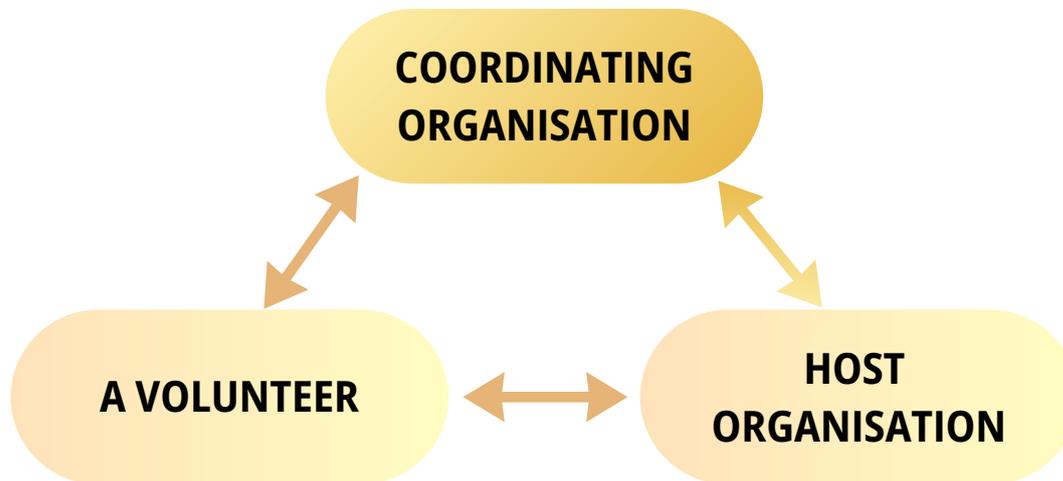
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BALTIC COUNTRIES

- 
- Develop volunteering opportunities in museums, theaters, and cultural centers, where seniors could act as guides, educators or event organizers.
 - Implement mentoring programmes for vulnerable youth, where seniors can share their life experience and help foster independence and values.
 - Provide training and support, particularly in digital literacy, to help seniors feel confident in engaging with new activities.
 - Encourage cooperation between institutions, including museums, municipalities, social service agencies and NGOs, so that senior volunteering becomes an integrated part of the community.

By properly implementing these practices, the Baltic countries can achieve greater inclusion of older people, strengthen communities, and foster intergenerational cooperation.

STAGES OF ORGANIZING AND CONDUCTING VOLUNTEER WORK

Three parties are involved in the implementation of the volunteer work process, working in close cooperation.



COOPERATION BETWEEN THE VOLUNTEER AND THE COORDINATING ORGANIZATION

Volunteering is a consistent process in which the expectations of the volunteer are aligned with the goals of the coordinating organization. Although each country may have different priorities, they are united by a common desire to create value for the community. Cooperation between volunteers and coordinating organizations has a clear structure: from information, selection, training, and support to feedback, ensuring long-term cooperation.

Differences arise from the varying priorities of volunteers and coordinating organizations

- **for the volunteer** the main thing is personal experience, meaning and belonging to the community
- **for the organization** it is the quality of activities, the process, and the achievement of goals.

Common perspectives, what connects both sides

- **Common goal.** Both the volunteer and the organization seek to create value for the community and contribute to change.
- **Clear process.** It is important for both sides that the path is structured: selection → integration → activity → evaluation.
- **Training and support.** Volunteers want to feel prepared, and organizations want to ensure quality work.



- **Feedback.** Reflection and satisfaction measurement are valuable for both the volunteer and the organization.
- **Long-term cooperation.** It is important for both sides that volunteering is not a one-time event, but creates connections for the future.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

For the volunteer

- personal experience is most important: meaningfulness, emotional benefits, a sense of belonging to a community.
- motivation can vary from altruism to developing personal skills or building social connections.
- volunteers want flexibility, recognition, and inclusion.

For the coordinating organization

- greater attention to process and quality: proper selection, distribution of responsibilities, smooth operation.
- the organization ensures that volunteers complement its operational capabilities, meet its goals, and help achieve results.
- it views volunteers not only as individuals, but also as a resource that needs to be supported, motivated, and managed.

Both perspectives are equally important, as only their combination can create a sustainable and mutually beneficial volunteering experience.



VOLUNTEERING PATHWAY

A person's experience with volunteering begins the moment they submit an application and enter the selection process. Those who are selected are welcomed into the organization's community and introduced to its values, culture, and ways of working. They then take part in introductory training, where they gain the essential knowledge and skills needed for safe and meaningful involvement. After training comes the core volunteering experience.

At the end of the process, volunteers participate in reflection and evaluation, where they receive feedback that supports their personal growth and helps the organization improve its practices. This journey can be presented as a simple visual pathway that helps volunteers understand what to expect and supports their decision to join the organization.

The volunteer journey not only helps individuals navigate a new environment — it also creates a sense of security and clarity. For organizations, it serves as a practical roadmap that ensures volunteering is professional, meaningful, and supportive for everyone involved.

Stages of the Volunteer Journey

1. Application and First Contact

The journey begins when a volunteer submits an application and expresses the desire to contribute. This is the first step in establishing a connection and understanding the volunteer's motivation.

2. Selection Process

Applications are reviewed individually. Volunteers may be invited to a conversation where they can talk about their experience, strengths, interests, and boundaries. The aim of this step is to align the volunteer's expectations with the organization's needs and available roles.

3. Joining the Community

Once selected, volunteers become part of the organization's community. They receive key information, gain access to communication channels, and are introduced to mentors, "buddy" partners, and fellow volunteers.

4. Introductory Training

Before starting any activities, volunteers attend induction training. They learn about the organization's values, guidelines, ethical and behavioral expectations, practical advice, and safety requirements.

5. Volunteering and Ongoing Support

Volunteers begin their assigned activities and receive continuous support from mentors and the organizational team. Open communication is encouraged — volunteers can reach out at any time, while the organization ensures that the experience remains safe, smooth, and positive.

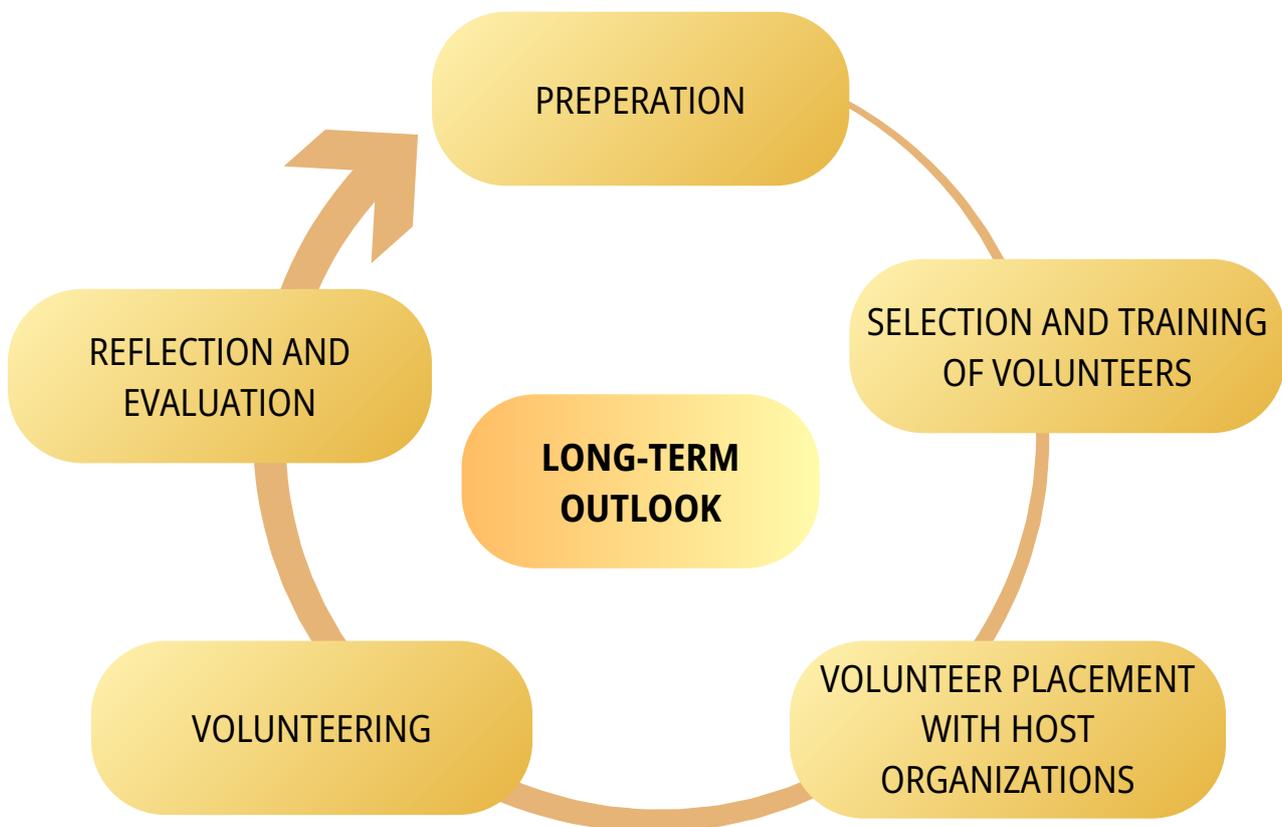
6. Review, Feedback, and Next Steps

At the end of the volunteering phase, volunteers receive constructive feedback and discuss their experiences and challenges. This stage helps recognize achievements, strengthen confidence, and consider future growth opportunities. Together with the volunteer, the organization identifies possible next steps and may encourage them to take on a new or expanded role.



ROLE AND TASKS OF THE COORDINATING ORGANIZATION

The role of the coordinating organization becomes particularly clear when the stages of the process are visually represented in a diagram.



STAGE 1. PREPARATORY STAGE

The preparatory stage is an essential part of the entire volunteering system, as it is at this stage that the coordinating organization sets the direction, quality, and continuity for the entire Volunteer Path. The aim of this stage is to create a solid organisational, content and human resources foundation that allows volunteers to be involved in activities in an effective and responsible manner.

The coordinating organization acts as a bridge between the volunteer's motivation and the needs of the host organization, so its functions are not only administrative but also strategic and educational. It develops the logic of operation and value principles, ensures preparation and communication, helps to manage challenges, and coordinates all involved actors.

Without the targeted implementation of this stage, there is a risk that volunteers will face uncertainty, insecurity, or unmet expectations, and that host organizations will not receive the necessary assistance or cooperation. Therefore, the preparatory stage is an integral part of a high-quality, meaningful, and mutually beneficial volunteering process.

Main tasks of the organization coordinating voluntary activities

- formulate the objectives, strategy, and values of the volunteering programme
- assess the needs of the target group (e.g., the motivation and expectations of older people)
- establish partnerships with host organizations
- set up a training, mentoring, and communication system
- ensure readiness for quality monitoring.

Main activities of the organization coordinating volunteering

- to develop an action plan for volunteer work programmes
- to prepare document templates
 - the organization's internal volunteer work policy
 - code of ethics or rules of conduct
 - documentation templates: partnership agreement, voluntary registration form, etc.
 - volunteer database template
 - etc.
- to disseminate information – presentation of the programme to communities and organizations
- to train mentors or volunteer coordinators
- to develop and implement a quality monitoring and impact assessment system.

Quality assurance aspects

A quality volunteering experience cannot be left to chance – it must be carefully planned and consistently monitored. It is therefore important to have clear guidelines that help both the organization and the volunteer feel safe and secure.

Firstly

Clear selection and integration criteria are necessary to help assess the volunteer's motivation, abilities, and suitability for specific activities. This ensures from the outset that the volunteer is in the right place to use their strengths and experience meaningfully.

Secondly

It is important to have assessment and monitoring indicators in place to measure both the scope and impact of activities. This helps to objectively assess the contribution of volunteers, identify strengths, and identify areas for improvement in a timely manner.

Thirdly

A feedback system is essential for quality assurance. It can take various forms, from periodic surveys and individual interviews to informal reflection meetings. Such ongoing dialogue allows volunteers to feel heard and enables organizations to respond quickly to their needs and suggestions.



STAGE 2. VOLUNTEER SELECTION AND PREPARATION

The selection and preparation of volunteers is essential for high-quality volunteer work. At this stage, it is most important to listen to the volunteer—their wishes, expectations, motivation—and understand how much time they can realistically devote to the activity. During the interview, it is also important to discuss the "strictly no" zone – areas or activities in which the person would not want to volunteer, in order to avoid unpleasant situations and disappointment.

The selection process may include a questionnaire, an interview, or a letter of motivation. This helps the organization get to know the person and assess whether the proposed activity would suit them. It is also important to discuss possible challenges: mobility options, language barriers, behavioral characteristics, necessary knowledge, or learning needs.

Before starting to volunteer, introductory training is provided to present the organization's values, volunteering principles, ethical rules, and basic guidelines. This helps the person to start their activities safely and confidently. The stage ends with the signing of a volunteer agreement, which clearly defines the agreements and responsibilities of both parties.

STAGE 3. REFERRAL OF VOLUNTEERS TO HOST ORGANIZATIONS

This stage is like a bridge between the volunteer's preparation and the actual start of activities. Its essence is to ensure that the volunteer's expectations and needs match the host organization's capabilities and areas of activity. Matching the volunteer's needs with the host organization's capabilities leads to mutual satisfaction: the volunteer feels empowered and needed, while the organization receives motivated help where it is most needed.

Bilateral agreements play an important role. The coordinating organization enters into an agreement with both the volunteer and the host organization. This helps to ensure transparency and clearly define responsibilities and communication channels. Such agreements become a solid foundation for cooperation and trust.

Finally, it is very important to introduce the volunteer to the team and familiarize them with the activities. This is the first step into the community, which determines how quickly the volunteer will feel accepted and included. A warm welcome, a clear explanation of activities, and communication with the team create motivation and a sense of belonging.

STAGE 4. VOLUNTEERING

Once volunteering has begun, the most important thing is to ensure that everything runs smoothly and that the volunteer has a good experience. This is the stage when theoretical preparation turns into real work, so constant communication and support are particularly important here.

 **It is necessary to ensure constant communication between the three parties – the volunteer, the host organization, and the coordinating organization.**

Open and clear communication helps quickly resolve any issues that arise and ensures that all parties feel heard and supported.

 **Interim reflection, mentoring, or supervision sessions.**

These allow the volunteer to share their experiences, identify difficulties, and celebrate achievements. Mentoring provides personal support, while supervision helps to address deeper emotional or organizational challenges.

 **An activity log.**

By recording their activities, volunteers and organizations can more clearly see the results achieved, the time invested, and the growth experienced. This is not only an accounting tool, but also a way of self-reflection that helps to give meaning to the volunteering experience.

This stage is at the heart of volunteering – it is here that the volunteer's work becomes real help, and at the same time their personal skills, connections, and sense of satisfaction are formed.

STAGE 5. REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

The essence of this stage is feedback. It must be mutual: the volunteer shares their experiences and suggestions, and the organization provides constructive feedback, recognizing their efforts and achievements. This strengthens the volunteer's motivation and self-confidence.

Feedback can take many forms, from individual conversations to group meetings. The most important thing is that they are sincere, growth-oriented, and that all parties have the opportunity to speak and be heard. There are several methods of providing feedback that can be found online and applied in practice. Here we present the SOFA feedback model we use, which is a simple and clear way to provide constructive feedback that helps maintain a respectful tone and encourage growth. The model consists of four steps:

S – Situation:

Specifically identify when and in what situation the behavior was observed.

O – Observation:

Describe clearly and factually what the person did – without interpretation or judgment.

F – Feelings/Feedback:

Explain how the behavior affected you, the team, or the situation.

A – Action/Advice:

Make a specific suggestion on how the behavior can be adjusted or reinforced in the future.

In short: **SOFA helps you speak clearly, respectfully, and focus on solutions rather than accusations.** This method is particularly effective when discussing problems, difficulties encountered, and uncompleted tasks.



This stage completes one cycle of volunteer work, but at the same time opens the door to another—reflections and feedback often become a strong incentive for volunteers to return.

STAGE 6. LONG-TERM OUTLOOK

Volunteering should not be seen as a short-term experience – it can be the beginning of long-term cooperation and sustainable relationships. The goal of this stage is to maintain the connection that has been established, give meaning to the experience, and provide the volunteer with the opportunity to continue to grow alongside the organization.

One of the most important aspects is volunteer retention. An organization that is able to recognize and appreciate the contribution of a volunteer will most often see them return. This can be done in various ways: through thank-you events, symbolic awards, personal attention, or opportunities to take on new responsibilities.

Another important step is maintaining contact. Even if a volunteer steps back from active involvement at a certain point, maintaining contact with them allows them to return in the future or become an ambassador for the organization. This can be done through newsletters, invitations to events, or involvement in advisory activities.

In the long term, volunteers can become ambassadors or mentors, passing on their experience to new volunteers. This not only strengthens the community but also creates a sustainable model for the organization's growth.

Summary

The volunteering process is a coherent system that includes preparation, selection, induction, support, feedback, and long-term cooperation. Each stage contributes to a safe, meaningful, and mutually beneficial volunteering experience. Strong structures, clear agreements, and open communication enable volunteers to grow and organizations to create sustainable community benefits.

SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT VOLUNTEERING

For volunteering to be consistent, meaningful, and high-quality, an organisation needs more than goodwill or occasional activities. It needs clear, coordinated systems that ensure every.

MENTOR NETWORK – TRAINING AND PEER SUPPORT

Every volunteer needs someone they can turn to when questions or challenges arise. That is why organisations benefit from building a mentor network where experienced volunteers or staff provide personal guidance, help newcomers settle in, and encourage their growth. Strong mentorship builds confidence, fosters a sense of belonging, and reduces dropout rates.

We also recommend that project partners use a buddy system – a peer-to-peer support model pairing two volunteers as partners. Buddies stay in regular contact, share experiences, and offer emotional support. This helps new volunteers integrate more quickly, reduces feelings of isolation, and ensures that no one is left without someone to ask for help.

Both mentor and buddy systems are especially valuable when working with vulnerable groups, where volunteers may face emotional or practical challenges. Together they create a safe, reassuring environment where volunteers feel seen, heard, and supported.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING SYSTEM

One of the main reasons people join volunteering programmes is the opportunity to grow and learn. That is why it is essential to plan how volunteers will be trained: which skills need strengthening, what expertise the organisation already has, and which external partners could offer additional training.

Learning keeps volunteers engaged – especially during quieter periods – and strengthens connections within the group. Proper training ensures volunteers feel prepared and confident.

A complete training system usually includes:

- **Introductory training:** organisational values, key volunteering principles, ethics, and safety.
- **Role-specific or thematic training:** working with target groups, first aid, communication, conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, etc.

Recommendations

- Look for trainers within the organisation — many volunteers or staff have valuable experience to share.
- Create an internal training team for larger groups of volunteers.
- Keep a list of potential trainers or partner organisations (education, social services, mental health, NGOs, academics, public figures).



A coherent training plan boosts confidence, ensures quality, and supports safe and professional volunteering.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM – CLEAR CHANNELS FOR INFORMATION AND COLLABORATION

Effective volunteering relies on timely and transparent communication. Clear channels between the coordinating organisation, host organisations, and volunteers help everyone stay informed and connected.

Examples of good practice:

- Regular volunteer newsletters
- Closed communication groups (Facebook, WhatsApp, Signal)
- Shared calendars (Google Calendar)
- Short weekly or monthly check-ins (in person or online)
- A designated contact person for questions or urgent issues
- Shared document libraries (Google Drive)

These tools help volunteers feel supported and involved, while allowing the organisation to respond quickly to needs and maintain smooth cooperation.

SUPPORT AND MOTIVATION – RECOGNITION, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY

Volunteering thrives where people feel seen and valued. When volunteers know their efforts truly matter, motivation grows naturally. A good support and motivation system is not just a set of procedures – it is a living culture of appreciation and warmth.

Recognition can take many forms: a friendly message after an event, a handwritten card, a short thank-you call, certificates, small gifts, or moments of acknowledgement during community gatherings. What matters most is the message: “You are important here.”

A positive organisational culture is built every day – through the tone we use, the way we handle mistakes, and the respect we show each other. When the atmosphere is open and friendly, volunteers feel safe, take initiative, and grow as part of the team.

Community also plays a crucial role. Volunteers stay where they feel connected not only to the work but also to the people around them. Informal get-togethers, shared outings, or simply spending time together build a sense of belonging. And when families are included – invited to events, celebrations, or open activities – volunteering becomes something shared, not something done away from family.

QUALITY ASSURANCE – SURVEYS, REVIEWS, AND REFLECTIONS

High-quality volunteering does not happen by accident. It requires continuous observation and willingness to learn. Regular volunteer surveys, activity reviews, and reflection meetings provide valuable insight into how volunteers feel and what improvements are needed.

Good practices include:

- Short “post-activity” surveys (3–4 questions)
- Quarterly reflection evenings
- Annual “volunteer experience” surveys
- Monthly “open office hours” with the coordinator

These practices create an ongoing dialogue rather than a monitoring mechanism, helping both volunteers and the organisation grow.

SUMMARY

Volunteer support systems form the foundation of a strong, meaningful volunteering experience. When an organisation offers a clear pathway for volunteers, provides training, ensures good communication, fosters personal support and community, and continually monitors quality, volunteering becomes more than a task — it becomes a safe, enriching, and empowering journey.

In such an environment, volunteers feel seen and valued. They engage more deeply, overcome challenges with confidence, and remain committed over time. And the organisation, learning from volunteers’ feedback, builds a vibrant and sustainable culture of volunteering.

For the volunteering journey to be consistent, meaningful, and high-quality, an organization needs more than just good intentions or isolated activities. Clear, effective, and coordinated systems are needed to ensure that every volunteer is properly welcomed, prepared, supported, and evaluated.

MENTORING NETWORK – A SYSTEM FOR PREPARING AND SUPPORTING MENTORS

It is important for every volunteer to have someone they can turn to when questions or difficulties arise. Therefore, it is necessary for the organization to create a network of mentors in which experienced volunteers or employees provide personal assistance, help with integration, and encourage improvement. Mentoring strengthens volunteers’ self-confidence, creates a sense of community, and reduces the risk of dropouts.

When coordinating volunteer teams, we recommend that project partners use the “buddy system”, which is a form of mutual support among volunteers where two volunteers are paired as partners. They communicate regularly, share experiences, and provide each other with emotional support. The buddy connection helps volunteers integrate into activities more quickly, reduces feelings of loneliness, and ensures that volunteers always have a close, easily accessible source of support.



Mentor and buddy systems are particularly important when working with vulnerable groups, where volunteers may face emotional or practical challenges. This dual support structure creates a safe environment where volunteers feel seen, heard, and not alone.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM – CLEAR CHANNELS FOR INFORMATION SHARING AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN ALL PARTICIPANTS

Effective volunteering is based on smooth communication. Clear channels are needed between the coordinating organization, the host organization, and the volunteer. This can be both regular electronic communication (newsletters, internal platforms) and face-to-face meetings, allowing issues to be resolved in a timely manner and maintaining a sense of community.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING SYSTEM – INTRODUCTORY TRAINING AND THEMATIC TRAINING

Without proper training, volunteers may feel unprepared. Introductory training helps volunteers understand the organization's values and ethics, while thematic training deepens their knowledge in specific areas, from working with target groups to first aid or communication skills. Such a consistent training plan gives volunteers confidence and ensures high-quality activities.

QUALITY ASSURANCE – SURVEYS, EVALUATIONS, REFLECTIONS

Systematic monitoring allows us to assess whether the volunteering process is working as intended. Periodic surveys, activity evaluations, and reflection meetings provide feedback that helps to continuously improve the process. This ensures that the volunteer experience is not only enjoyable, but also meaningful and valuable in the long term.

In short, these systems are the solid foundation on which the volunteering process is built. They allow the organization to operate in a consistent and strategic manner rather than chaotically, and allow volunteers to feel safe, valued, and supported in their growth.

KEY DOCUMENTS

Clear documentation is necessary for the volunteering process to run smoothly. It helps to establish common rules, ensure transparency, and define the responsibilities of each party. Documents should not only be formal, but also easy to use and understandable to all parties.

Documents of the coordinating organization

- Strategic volunteering plan – defines the goals, objectives, and directions according to which the organization develops volunteering.
- Partnership agreement template with the host organization – helps to ensure transparent and clear cooperation.
- Volunteer questionnaire – the first step in getting to know the volunteer, their experience, motivation, and interests.
- Selection criteria and guidelines – ensure a fair and consistent selection process.

Volunteer participant documents

These documents help structure the volunteer experience and promote responsible participation in the programme.

- Volunteer contract/agreement – clearly defines the obligations and responsibilities of the volunteer and the organization.
- Activity log (volunteer diary) – helps to record experience, results achieved, and reflect on the knowledge gained.
- Reflection templates – provide a structure for feedback and help to make sense of the experience.

Host organization documents

These documents ensure the integration, safety, and quality control of volunteers.

- Volunteer integration plan – defines the first steps that help volunteers smoothly integrate into the team.
- Code of ethics and conduct – presents the core values, standards of conduct, and principles of communication.
- Descriptions of volunteer activities or roles – provide a clear understanding of the tasks and responsibilities involved.
- Evaluation form or feedback template – provides an opportunity to evaluate the volunteer's contribution and share insights.
- Safety instructions – ensure that volunteers know how to behave safely while performing their activities.

This set of documents ensures that all stages of volunteering are clear, transparent, and consistent. They serve as a practical tool for both organizations and volunteers, helping to maintain high quality, trust, and a professional attitude throughout the entire process.



RECOMMENDED MONITORING AND EVALUATION INDICATORS ACCORDING TO THE STAGES OF THE VOLUNTEERING PATHWAY

Monitoring and evaluation are an essential part of the volunteering process. They help to ensure quality, respond to the needs of both volunteers and the organization, identify strengths and areas for improvement. By collecting data consistently, it is possible to make informed decisions, plan further actions, and demonstrate the impact of activities to partners and the community. Evaluation also helps to increase transparency and motivation, both for volunteers and coordinators. Monitoring and evaluation indicators according to the stages of the volunteer's journey.



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EMPOWER 65

IT Training and Volunteering Integration for Seniors

THE VOLUNTEER PATHWAY

**VOLUNTEERING GUIDELINES FOR
COORDINATING ORGANIZATIONS**



This guide is a methodological tool designed to help organizations plan and implement high-quality volunteer management. It is not a strict instruction manual but a set of adaptable guidelines based on each organization's work style.

The steps below will help structure the volunteering process, especially when working with long-term volunteers. Some steps may be less relevant or unnecessary for episodic volunteers. However, experience shows that only consistent engagement helps volunteers stay active and become part of the community in the long run.

The "Volunteer Pathway" is divided into 11 stages. Additional recommendations are provided for organizations working with senior volunteers. Each stage outlines key actions and recommended steps, along with detailed explanations where necessary.

VOLUNTEER COORDINATION STAGES FOR ATTRACTING VOLUNTEERS

MAIN TASKS OF THE COORDINATING ORGANIZATION FOR ORGANIZING THE VOLUNTEER WORK PROCESS

- The establishment of a coordination system involves appointing a responsible person, preparing internal procedures, and developing an accounting system.
- Setting goals – clearly defining the reasons and goals for attracting volunteers, as well as specifying the specific results we want to achieve.
- Identifying the target audience – finding out which groups in society are most interested in volunteering.
- Needs analysis – assess the number of volunteers needed, their skills, resources, and time frame to successfully implement the activities.
- Preparation of role and responsibility descriptions – develop descriptions of volunteer duties, skills, and responsibilities.
- Communication and publicity strategy – selecting appropriate communication channels, developing an attractive call to action, and setting an action plan. Preparation of information materials includes the development and design of posters, publications, videos, and other communication tools.
- Creation of an application system – development of application forms, meetings with applicants both individually and in small groups, creation of a volunteer registration system.
- Development of an information circulation system – email correspondence, WhatsApp groups, etc.
- Establishment of a cooperation network - create a tripartite cooperation model: coordinating organization, volunteer, and host organization.
- Ensuring feedback - ensure regular communication and feedback between all parties involved: coordinating organization, volunteer, host organization.

STAGE 1. ENGAGEMENT

- Ensure a constant flow of information and publicity about volunteer opportunities in the mass media, digital platforms, social networks, as well as in printed materials – posters and flyers.
- Create an open and friendly environment that promotes mutual communication.
- Precisely determine the number and profile of volunteers needed.
- Prepare a convenient application form, available both online and in person.

STAGE 2. FIRST MEETING

- Invite interested parties to an initial interview and select the most suitable candidates.
- Introduce the volunteer candidate to the volunteer coordinating organization, its values, and activities.
- Discuss ethics and confidentiality rules.



- Provide accurate and understandable information about volunteer opportunities and their importance, as well as support from coordinating institutions.
- Show how volunteer work manifests itself in real life – with real people's stories and examples.
- Find out what motivates people to become volunteers and get involved in community activities.
- Find out about the person's ability to do volunteer work: professional interests, experience, health, time constraints, and mobility.
- Introduce volunteer work documentation: application/contract.
- Encourage them to fill in a volunteer application form.
- Encourage the person to engage in voluntary work.

STAGE 3. APPLICATION

- Follow a set procedure – review applications once a week and respond within 10 days so that applicants know when to expect a response.
- Select volunteers based on predefined criteria: health status, skills, interests, preferences, and opportunities.
- Identify potential risk factors, taking into account indicators such as value mismatch, time constraints, and differing personality traits.
- Inform the applicant about the outcome of the application and specific volunteer opportunities.

STAGE 4. COMMUNICATION

- Ensure that the volunteer is included in all shared communication channels, including Messenger, WhatsApp, and email lists.
- Explain the communication procedure in detail, indicate which communication channels (Messenger, WhatsApp, email) are intended for specific purposes, and explain the rules for information security and dissemination, such as the publication of photographs.
- Promote an atmosphere in which volunteers feel included in the community.

STAGE 5. TRAINING

- Organize individual or group consultations and training sessions that prepare volunteers for potential work, including topics such as cooperation and communication skills, data protection, ethical principles, and other important areas.
- Actively engage participants during training using interactive methods such as discussions, role-playing, and practical tasks to make learning exciting and easy to apply in practice.
- Involve long-term volunteers as mentors or assistants so that they can share their knowledge and experience with new participants.
- Provide feedback at the end of the training so that participants receive an assessment and recommendations for further development.

STAGE 6. STARTING WORK

- Contact the host organization and take all necessary steps to ensure that the volunteer can successfully start work.
- Inform the volunteer about job opportunities, working hours, and schedules at the specific organization, obtain their consent or refusal, and record it accordingly.
- In cooperation with the host organization, engage volunteers in the work.
- Provide the volunteer with contact information in case they have questions or concerns.
- It is recommended that volunteers perform their first task alongside an experienced volunteer in order to familiarize themselves with volunteer work and receive support.
- Receive feedback from the volunteer both during and at the end of the work.
- Maintain a positive and supportive relationship with the volunteer. If they experience difficulties or negative emotions, provide the necessary support or ensure additional supervision.

STAGE 7. LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT

- Invite volunteers to sign a long-term cooperation agreement to ensure clear and mutually beneficial cooperation.
- Organize monthly meetings to share experiences.
- Identify the volunteer's difficulties and needs and, where possible, make the necessary adjustments to support their work.
- Share news about volunteer opportunities.
- Provide feedback to volunteers on their work and discuss individual goals.
- Recognize volunteer work through appropriate means, such as awards, letters of appreciation, or recognition events.
- Support the long-term growth of volunteers by offering mentoring and ongoing learning opportunities to keep them motivated and able to contribute even more to their work.

STAGE 8. FEEDBACK

- Maintain regular communication with volunteers to learn about and discuss their work experience, providing support and encouragement.
- Ensure open and mutually respectful communication throughout the cooperation period.
- To get feedback from volunteers, it is recommended to use structured surveys, individual interviews, or focus group discussions.
- Include volunteers' suggestions in the program improvement process.
- Respond to volunteers' needs and questions in a timely manner, providing support and information when needed.

STAGE 9. BREAK

- Try to understand the reasons for discontinuing volunteer work with respect and understanding.
- In consultation with the volunteer, maintain regular communication to encourage their motivation and interest in returning to work.



- Define the steps in the voluntary return process and indicate the responsible contact person to contact in order to resume work.
- Express gratitude for the contribution made so far and confirm readiness to resume cooperation at any time convenient for the volunteer.
- Encourage volunteers to provide constructive feedback and suggestions for improving the program or organization's activities, even during breaks from work.
- If the volunteer resumes cooperation, discuss previous difficulties, provide the necessary support and outline the scope and expectations for future cooperation.
- If necessary, cooperate with the host organization to discuss possible difficulties or problems and find appropriate solutions.

STAGE 10. CLOSURE

- Organise structured discussions with volunteers to analyse their involvement, discussing achievements, challenges and lessons learned during their work.
- Express gratitude to all volunteers for their contributions and publicly recognize those who have made long-term or particularly significant contributions through official channels and events.
- If the organization is the one proposing to terminate the volunteer relationship, ensure that a neutral moderator is present during the discussions so that the negotiations are conducted objectively and professionally.

Summary – final highlights for successful implementation of the voluntary pathway

- 
Creating an inclusive and open environment.
 Conduct an assessment of senior volunteers and ensure their inclusion. Clearly present the organization's mission, core values, and strategic goals.
- 
Tailoring activities to individual needs.
 Provide a flexible volunteer schedule. Delegate tasks that match each volunteer's physical and digital skills.
- 
Defining and communicating basic principles.
 Introduce the code of ethics, internal rules, and data protection policy to ensure proper and responsible conduct. Designate a contact person or mentor for communication.
- 
Provision of introductory training and continuing education.
 Organize an introductory session to familiarize volunteers with the organization, the work, and upcoming activities. Offer structured training sessions that promote volunteer competence and confidence.
- 
Provide regular and structured feedback.
 Monitor the progress of volunteer work regularly and provide opportunities to express opinions. Show appreciation to volunteers both individually and as a group by recognizing their contribution to the work.



Maintaining motivation.

Promoting initiatives for sharing experiences.

Provision of ergonomic and socially inclusive recreation areas.



Create a recreation room for tea or coffee breaks that promotes informal communication between volunteers, ensuring that the room complies with ergonomic principles and the needs of older people.



Introduction of a mentoring system.

Organize cooperation between young senior volunteers and experienced volunteer mentors.



Respect the autonomy of residents over 65 years of age who volunteer.

Respect their ability to independently decide on the type and timing of their involvement.

Provide support and understanding if volunteer work is temporarily suspended or terminated altogether.



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APPENDICES

EXAMPLE OF VOLUNTEER ROLE TYPOLOGY

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE ROLES	COMMITMENT LEVEL
Education	Digital literacy mentor for adults or youth	Weekly (2–3 hours)
Culture	Museum or library greeter/guide	Flexible – project-based
Intergenerational	Storytelling facilitator in schools	Bi-weekly
Community Support	Local event helper / outreach volunteer	Ad hoc / seasonal
Tech Mentorship	Digital buddy to other seniors	Weekly (online or in-person)

APPENDIX 2

VOLUNTEER WORK SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE. SAMPLE

The aim of the survey: to find out about seniors' experiences and interest in getting involved in volunteer work.

Recommended questions.

1. Gender.

- Female
- Male

2. Place of residence. Please select only one option.

- Jelgava
- Riga
- Other: _____

3. Age. Please select only one option.

- 65 - 69
- 70 - 74
- 75 - 79
- 80+
- Other _____

4. Education. Select only one option.

- Higher
- Secondary vocational
- Secondary
- Basic
- Lower than basic

5. What languages can you communicate in?

- Latvian
- Lithuanian
- English
- German
- French
- Russian
- Other: _____

6. Have you ever volunteered?

- Yes
- No



7. If you answered "Yes" to question 6, how often do you volunteer?

- Regularly
- Sometimes
- Rarely

8. Please specify which organisations you have volunteered in.

- state or local government
- private sector
- non-governmental

9. Please describe the tasks you did as a volunteer (e.g. visiting the sick, humanitarian work, helping at an event, lecturing, etc.).

10. Would you like to volunteer?

- Yes
- No

11. If you answered "Yes" to question 10, please tick the job you would like to do. Check all that apply.

- Be a companion to lonely people at home or in nursing homes
- Provide individual consultations or mini-lectures using your professional knowledge
- Help war refugees settle into the local community
- Participating in environmental projects and/or improvement works
- Volunteering at various events: sporting events, city festivals, etc.
- Helping schoolchildren with their homework and learning
- Babysitting on request
- Participation in public organizations
- Handy helper - volunteering in a library, museum, theater, etc.
- Other: _____

12. What are your suggestions and preferences for volunteering activities you could/would like to do?

13. What professional experience or skills would you like to share with others (e.g. photography skills, parenting experience, guiding, massage, art therapy, etc.)?

14. Do you have a driving licence?

- Yes
- No

15. Could you use your car for volunteering if needed?

- Yes
- No

16. On average, how many hours a month could you volunteer?

- 1 - 4 hours per month
- 5 - 10 hours per month
- 1 - 4 days per month
- Other _____

17. List at least three things that motivate you to volunteer.

18. If you would like to receive information about volunteering opportunities, please leave your contact details: name, phone number or email address.

I agree that my personal data (name, surname, phone number, e-mail address) will be used, processed, and stored in accordance with data protection regulations.



Have a successful and creative journey!

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Design: Vēsma Cielava

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