E-V🌐LUNTEERING
Key to be active

EUROPE-WIDE NGO PANDEMIC IMPACT SURVEY REPORT

2021

PREPARED BY

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LEVEL UP

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The purpose of the Europe-Wide Pandemic Impact Survey is to learn about the different challenges and best practices that Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Societies experienced across Europe during the Covid19 Pandemic during 2020- 2021. Identifying the needs of organizations from all over Europe will allow us to look at the various needs of social organizations, as well as to look at what support other institutions could count on to survive this crisis. Part of the report will also be devoted to solutions that have helped organizations continue to operate socially and keep volunteers engaged.

This research is co-financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ KA227 called "E-Volunteering- Key to be Active" (Reference number:2020-1-PL01-KA227-YOU096282). Participation in this research project was voluntary. The procedure involved filling in a survey. For statistical accuracy purposes, the information provided during this survey was used internally for the sole purpose of research and will remain private and are presented in the report anonymously. "E-Volunteering- Key to be Active" project will not publish or disclose provided by respondents.

The study was conducted using a research questionnaire containing multiple and single-choice closed questions, as well as open-ended questions where the respondents had to formulate an answer to the question on their own.

The study was disseminated in electronic form, by e-mail, to over 5,000 non-governmental organizations from all over Europe. The questionnaire was also published on the social media of the organizations preparing this survey, as well as on public groups associating with social organizations from all over Europe.

PUBLISHERS

This survey has been developed by a transnational project consortium within the frame of Erasmus+. Four European organizations have been involved, specifically: Stowarzyszenie LEVEL UP (Poland), VAEV (Austria), iED (Greece), and Proutist Universal Malta (Malta).

https://pumalta.org/   https://ied.eu/   https://vaev.at/   levelupngo.com

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on a plethora of sectors, primarily affecting the youth. Research was conducted among NGOs across Europe to reveal how different organisations have maintained young people's professional and social activity during the pandemic. Inquiries were conducted with the scope of showing what endeavours were taken to keep the youth engaged -e.g., what forms of activities, the existence or the lack of thereof volunteering / e-volunteering, an overview of the existent initiatives, and specific needs for youth and organisations. The pandemic separated the youth from the opportunities and social activities they were involved in. Searching for solutions in the context of young people, especially those at risk of exclusion, is crucial in relation with the ongoing pandemic.

Methodology

The consortium prepared a survey with the scope of understanding how the pandemic affected different NGOs across Europe and what good practices could be derived from it. After collecting, aggregating, and analysing the responses, a guide of solutions and good practices was prepared. The survey consisted of 18 implicit and explicit questions that measure the degree to which each organisation and, subsequently, the volunteering work was affected by the pandemic. Each partner disseminated the survey among different European organisations and collected the qualitative and quantitive results. Qualitative and quantitative results from organisations from all countries in Europe mapped out the good practices in youth engagement during a pandemic.
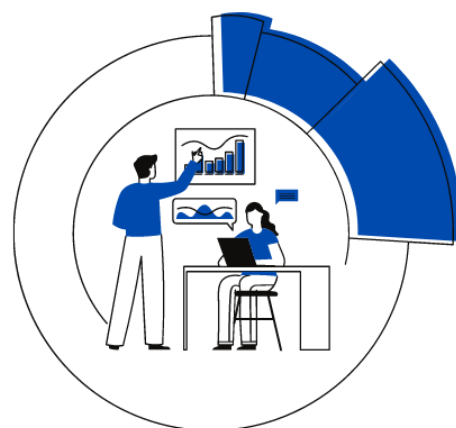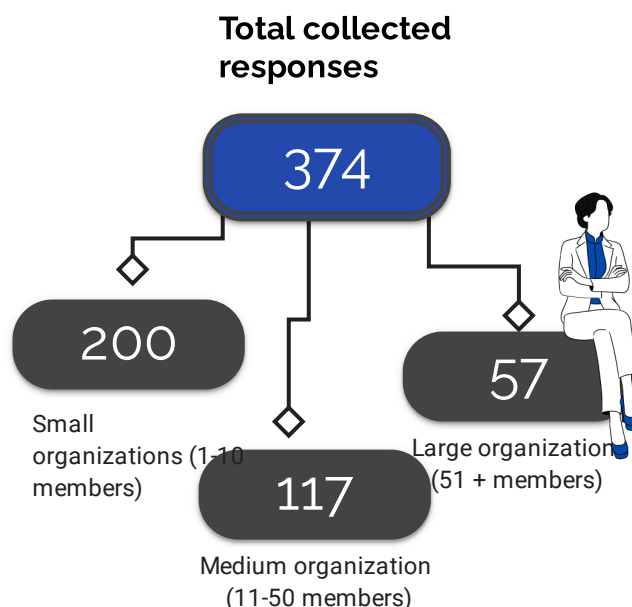
Importance of the research

The survey can facilitate extensive cooperation between European organisations that seek to include young people through unconventional methods, sensitive to the unique challenges in times of crisis. For example, much attention has been focused on training education and teacher skills shortages during the pandemic. Our goal is to focus on non-formal education, which was heavily affected due to the crisis. In virtue of innovative solutions, many organisations proactively provide young people with opportunities to adjust and adapt to the new reality.
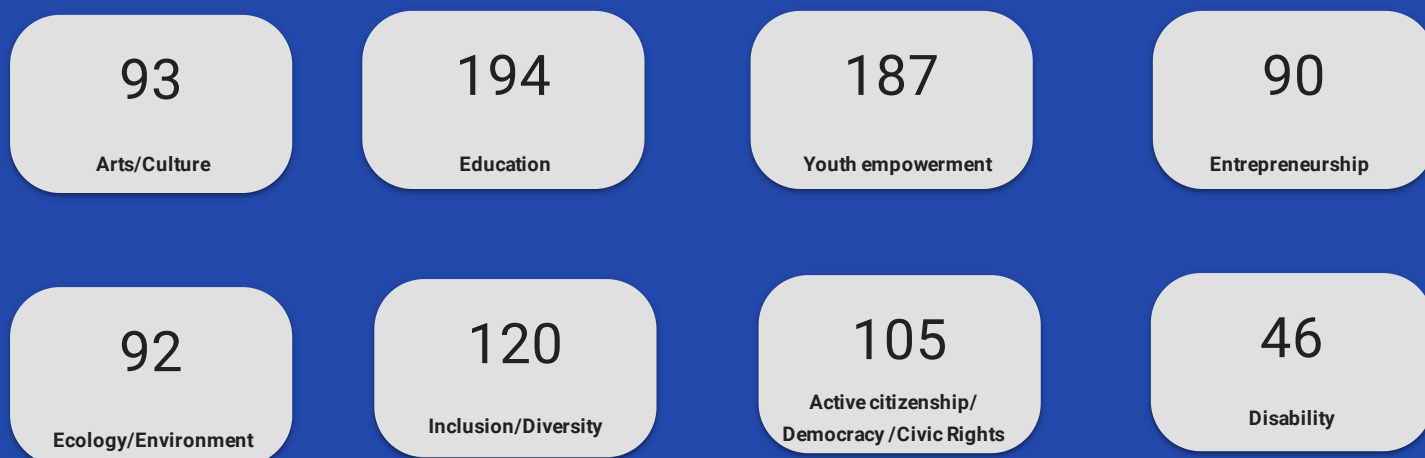
ABOUT OUR RESPONDENTS

Highlights:

• **53.3%** of the respondents' organizational size has been identified as small (having between 1-10 members).

• **31.7%** of respondent organisations were medium-sized (11-50 members)

• **15%** were large organisations (with 51+ members).

Total collected responses

374

200
Small organizations (1-10 members)

117
Medium organization (11-50 members)

57
Large organization (51 + members)

The main social areas declared by the respondents in which they conduct social activities

93	194	187	90
Arts/Culture	Education	Youth empowerment	Entrepreneurship

| 92	120	105	46
Ecology/Environment	Inclusion/Diversity	Active citizenship/ Democracy /Civic Rights	Disability

The distribution of the social areas in which the respondents conduct social activities vary. Among the respondent organisations, **50.8%** are active in the field of Youth Empowerment; **32.8%** operate in the area of Inclusion/Diversity; **28.7%** in the field of Democracy/Active Citizenship/Civic Rights; **24.3%** are activating in the field of Arts/ Culture and **24.3%** in the field of Ecology/Environment and **23.8%** in Entrepreneurship.

Additionally, **17.5%** are active in the field of Human Rights, **15.6%** are involved in the field of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment; **13.4%** activate in ICT/Digitalization, 13.4% work in the field of Migration/Refugees/Displacement, **12.8%** in Employment, **12.3%** in the Disability sector; **11.5%** in Sport and Wellness; **10.7%** are in the Agricultural/Rural Development sector.

Moverover, **9.6%** operate in the field of Sustainability/Green Energy; **9.6%** in Health; **6%** in Charity; **3.3%** in LGBTQIA+; **1.9%** Animal protection. The rest **0.3%** are in the fields of European Integration of the Western Balkans, Youth mobility, European Politics, Natural Sciences, Research, Social, Physical and Intellectual Development of Elderly People, Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue, Tourism, Development Cooperation, Volunteering, Community Development, Positive Social Change-making, Public Advocacy, Marine Conservation, Property Management.
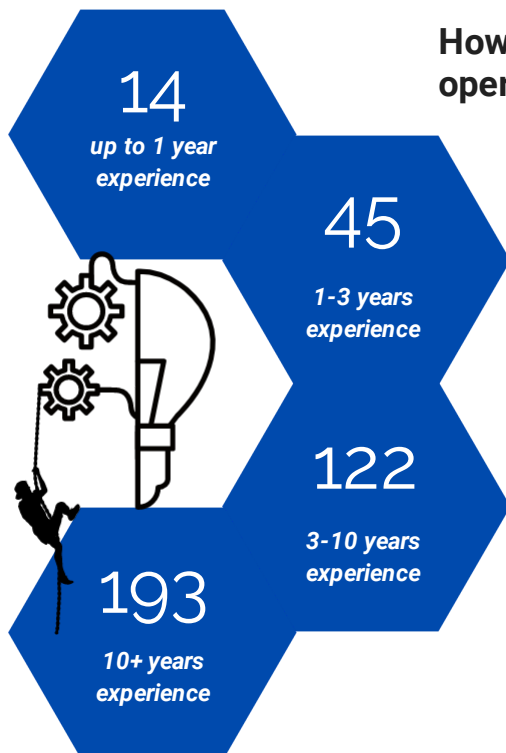
Map of countries participating in the research project
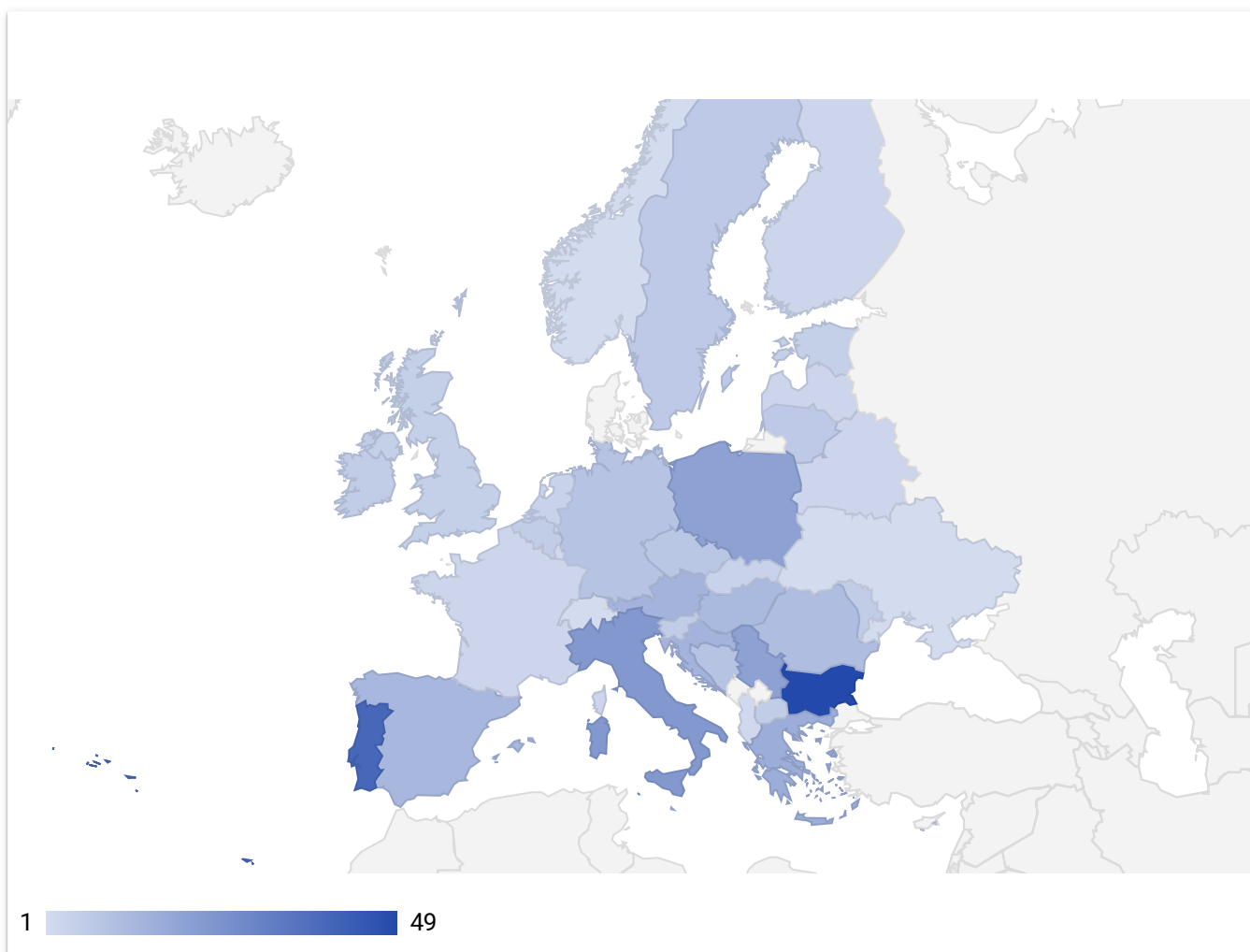
The research encompasses a total of 46 countries (Albania, Andorra, Austria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.)

ABOUT OUR RESPONDENTS

14
up to 1 year experience

45
1-3 years experience

122
3-10 years experience

193
10+ years experience

How long have our respondent organizations been operating in the social sector?
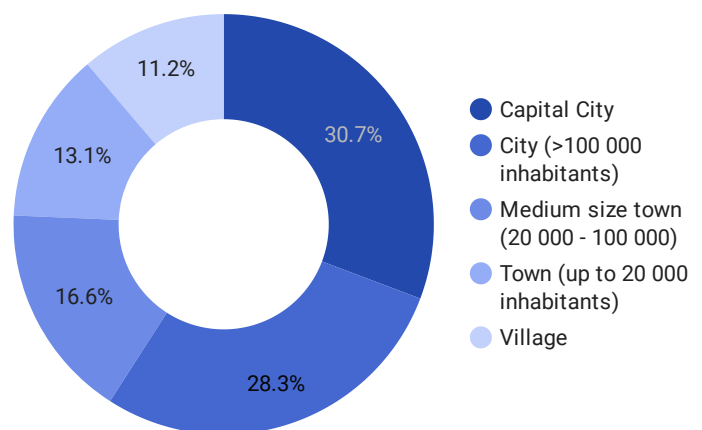
From the responding organisations:

• **51.1%** of the organisations are well-established, activating for more than ten years.

• **32.8%** are experienced organisations operating between 3-10 years.

• **12.3%** are new organisations, with 1-3 years of activity.

• **3.8%** are start-ups with less than one year of activity.

How would you describe the location of your organization?

From the responding organisations:

• **112** organisations are based in a Capital City.

• **105** are located in cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants.

• **62** operate in medium-sized towns (20 000 - 100 000 inhabitants).

• **49** are located in a town (up to 20 000 inhabitants).

• **40** are based in a village.

11.2%
13.1%
16.6%
30.7%
28.3%

● Capital City
● City (>100 000 inhabitants)
● Medium size town (20 000 - 100 000)
● Town (up to 20 000 inhabitants)
● Village

PREPARING FOR CHANGES

The impact of COVID - 19 Pandemic on your respondents' organization

- ● Negative (reduced operations, mild downsizing)
- ● No significant impact (operations and number of members remained more…
- ● Very negative (heavily reduced operations and downsizing)
- ● Positive (slightly increased number of projects, operations and members)
- ● Very positive (highly increased number of projects, operations and…
- ● I don't know
- ● others

44.7%

26.2%

14.7%

7.2%
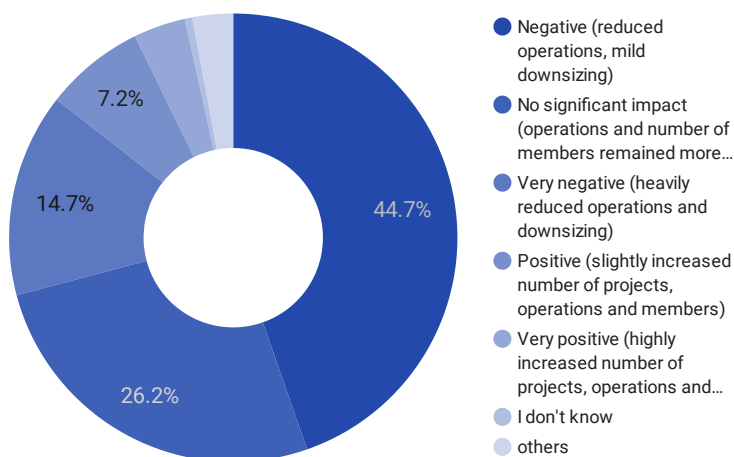
Positive Effects

On a high note, **6.8%** of the respondents remarked a *positive impact* during the pandemic, with *an increased number of projects, operations, and members.*

Similarly, **3.6%** observed an **extremely positive effect**, characterised by *an extensive number of new projects, processes, and members.*

Negative/No Impact

Almost the majority of the respondents- **45.1%**, attest to being **negatively impacted** by the pandemic, suffering *reduced operations and mild downsizing*.

The second predominant category among the responders - **26.2%**, reports that the COVID-19 pandemic had **no significant impact** on their activities, with the *operations and number of members remaining relatively the same*.

In addition, **14.8%** of the respondents note that the pandemic **heavily negatively** impacted them, *tremendously reducing their operations and downsizing*.
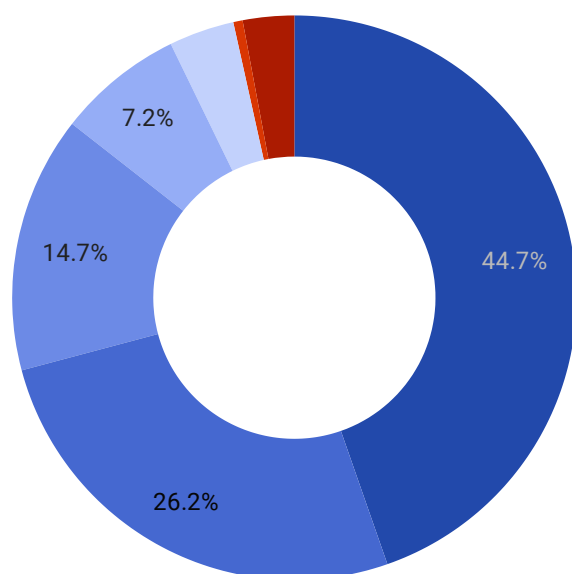
Other

Lastly, **3%** reported *other effects*, and **0.5%** did not know/ *could not answer*.

PREPARING FOR CHANGES

The impact of COVID - 19 Pandemic on your respondents' organization

- ● Negative (reduced operations, mild downsizing)
- ● No significant impact (operations and number of members remained more or less the same)
- ● Very negative (heavily reduced operations and downsizing)
- ● Positive (slightly increased number of projects, operations and members)
- ● Very positive (highly increased number of projects, operations and members)
- ● I don't know
- ● others

Pie chart values: 44.7%, 26.2%, 14.7%, 7.2%
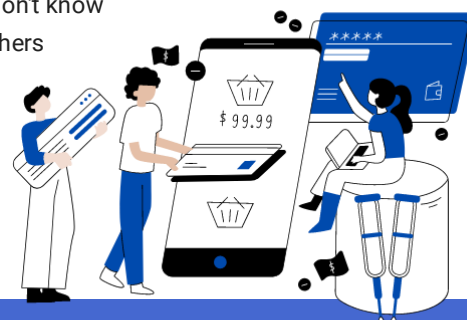
Data indicates that small organisations were the majority to report and experience adverse impacts of the pandemic, with effects observed on the (heavily) reduced number of operations and mild downsizing. On the other hand, medium and large organisations were comparatively less affected than the small ones. The same ranking stands available for organisations reporting the lack of a substantive change in the number of operations and members: most organisations experiencing no change were small, followed by medium and large-sized.

On the positive side, small organisations were also the ones to report positive and very positive changes reflected in the number of operations and members. On the other hand, medium and large organisations were ranked second, respectively, third.

Conclusively, small organisations appear to be more change-sensitive, with **89 small organisations** reporting negative impact, **48 claiming no significant change, 34 having experienced very negative consequences, 15 observing positive results, and 5 undergoing very positive changes.** While a small number enjoyed an increased number of operations and members despite the pandemic, the vast majority was heavily hit by the crisis. It is likely that the bigger the institution, the higher chances of adapting to the new context, leaving smaller organisations especially vulnerable.

PREPARING FOR CHANGES

Respondents' assessment on their preparation for the challenges that arose during the pandemic
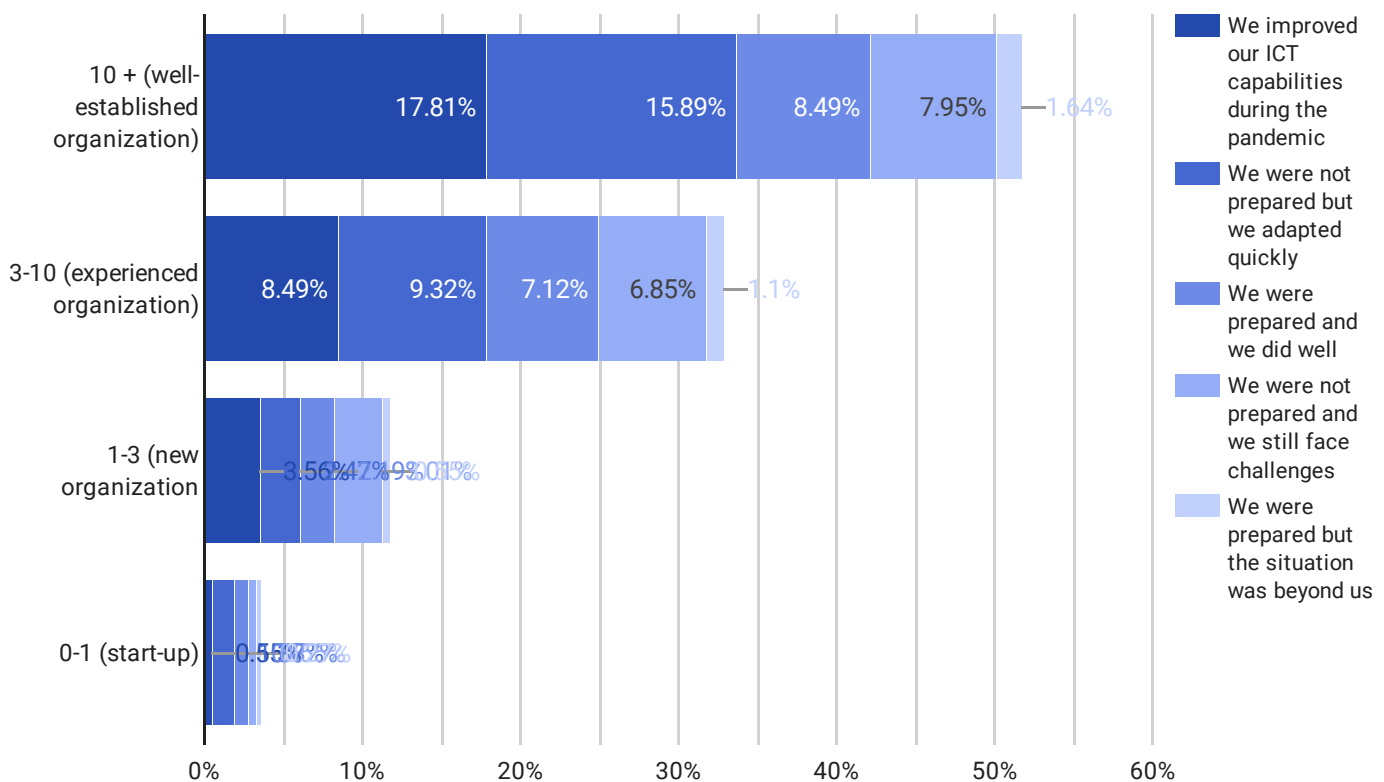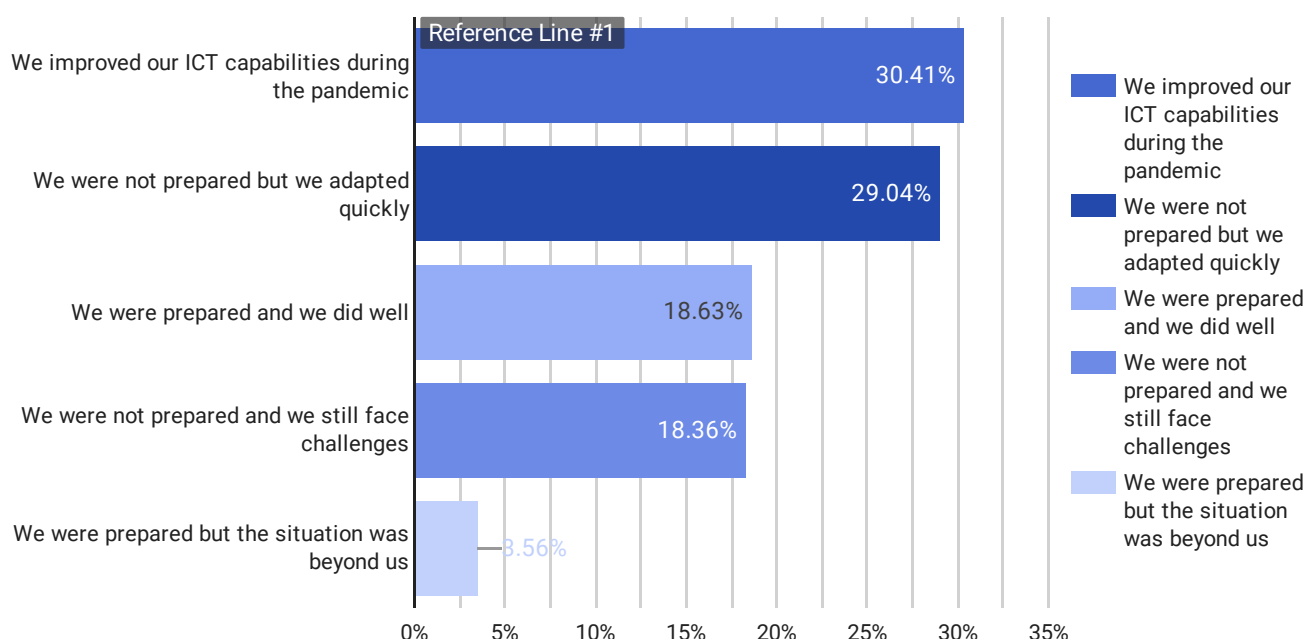

During the COVID - 19 pandemic, the respondents shed light on the ICT skills and online tools to implement online activities and communication. There is an evident variation in the answers derived from the years of activity of each organisation. However, there seems to be a strong correlation between the years of activity and the improvement or versatility of the ICT skills and online tools. Results reveal that the older the organisation, the more significant improvement the ICT has undergone during the pandemic. Similarly, younger organisations reported being unprepared but rapidly adapting to the new activity climate.

• A total of **30,25%** of the respondent organisations reported **improved ICT capabilities during the pandemic**.

• **29,61%** of the organisations expressed **not being prepared for the challenges associated with the pandemic but being able to adapt swiftly.**

• **18,16%** of the respondents proclaimed **being prepared and performing well** during the pandemic.

• **18,15%** of the participants revealed **not being prepared for the challenges** and **still facing the consequences** to this date.

• Lastly, **3,34%** of the organisations reported that **despite being prepared, the circumstances were overwhelming.**

PREPARING FOR CHANGES

Among the **new organisations**, **3.64%** reported improving their ICT capabilities, while **3.08%** were unprepared and still face challenges. Furthermore, **2.52%** reported not being prepared but managing to adapt quickly, and **1.96%** claimed to have been ready and done well. Only **0.65%** account for not being able to handle the situation.

Most of the respondents (**1.4%**) in the last category- **the startups**, reveal not being prepared but managing to adapt to the new circumstances quickly. On the other hand, **0.84%** of the startups recount being prepared and handling the situation well. Moreover, **0.56%** report improving their ICT capabilities, and the same percentage was unready and are still suffering the repercussions. Lastly, **0.28%** reported that the situation was beyond their capabilities despite being well-prepared.
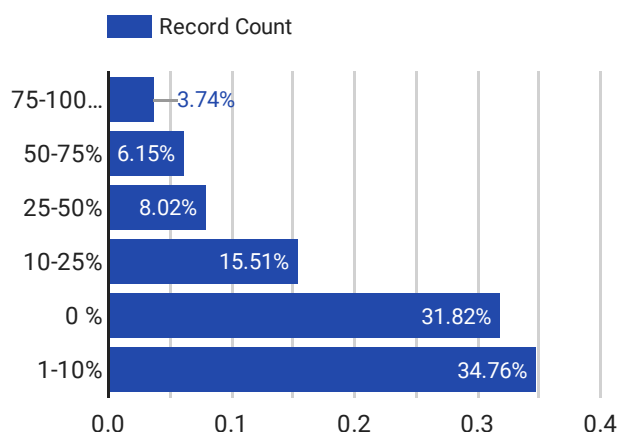
Reference Line #1

Category	Value
We improved our ICT capabilities during the pandemic	30.41%
We were not prepared but we adapted quickly	29.04%
We were prepared and we did well	18.63%
We were not prepared and we still face challenges	18.36%
We were prepared but the situation was beyond us	3.56%

Legend:
- We improved our ICT capabilities during the pandemic
- We were not prepared but we adapted quickly
- We were prepared and we did well
- We were not prepared and we still face challenges
- We were prepared but the situation was beyond us

• Holistically, the surveyed sample revealed that **30.25%** of the respondents improved their ICT capabilities during the pandemic.

• **29.69%** of the respondents declared that despite the lack of preparation for the COVID-19 pandemic, they managed to adapt fast.

• **18.21%** assessed that their preparedness and performance was appropriate.

• **18.21%** proclaimed a lack of preparedness and the continuation of challenges in the status quo.

• **3.64%** of the respondent organisations report that despite being prepared, the challenges were overwhelming.
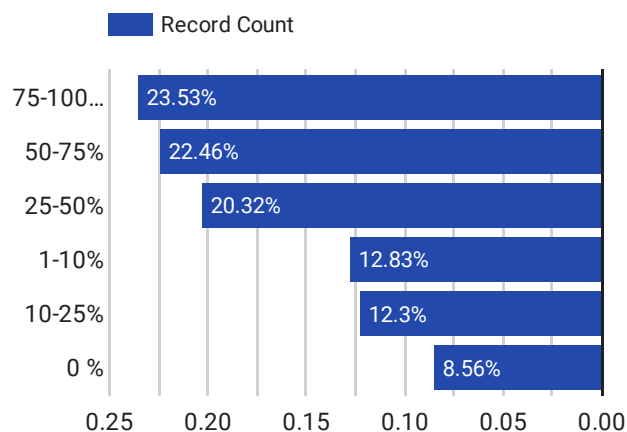
FACING NEW CHALLANGES
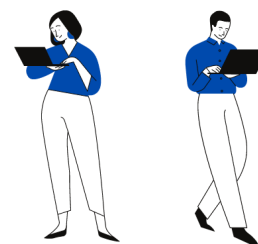
What percent of youth (15-30 y.o.) activities were conducted online before the COVID - 19 pandemic in your organization?

Record Count

Category	Percentage
75-100...	3.74%
50-75%	6.15%
25-50%	8.02%
10-25%	15.51%
0 %	31.82%
1-10%	34.76%

0.0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4

What percent of youth (15-30 y.o.) activities were conducted online during the COVID - 19 pandemic in your organization?

Record Count

Category	Percentage
75-100...	23.53%
50-75%	22.46%
25-50%	20.32%
1-10%	12.83%
10-25%	12.3%
0 %	8.56%

0.25   0.20   0.15   0.10   0.05   0.00

Respondents were asked about the percentage of activities held online before and after the pandemic, as a comparative tool of determining to which degree had the pandemic affected the onsite-online work dynamic.

Out of the respondents, **31.69%** reported that **0%** of their activities were held online *before the pandemic,* with the number dropping to **8.74% during the pandemic.** Up to **34.4%** of the respondents reported that only **1-10%** of their activities were conducted online *before the pandemic*, and comparatively, the percentage dropped to **12.57%** *during the pandemic*.
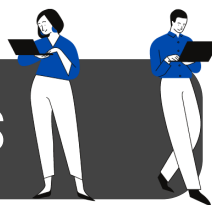
Furthermore, **15.57%** of respondents declared that **10-25%** of their activities were conducted online *before the pandemic*, but the percentage reached **12.57%** *during the pandemic*.

From the responding organisations, **8.2%** reported that **25-50%** of their endeavours were conducted online *before the pandemic*, but the percentage shifted to **20.49%** of respondents identifying **25%-50%** of their activities as moving online *during the pandemic.*
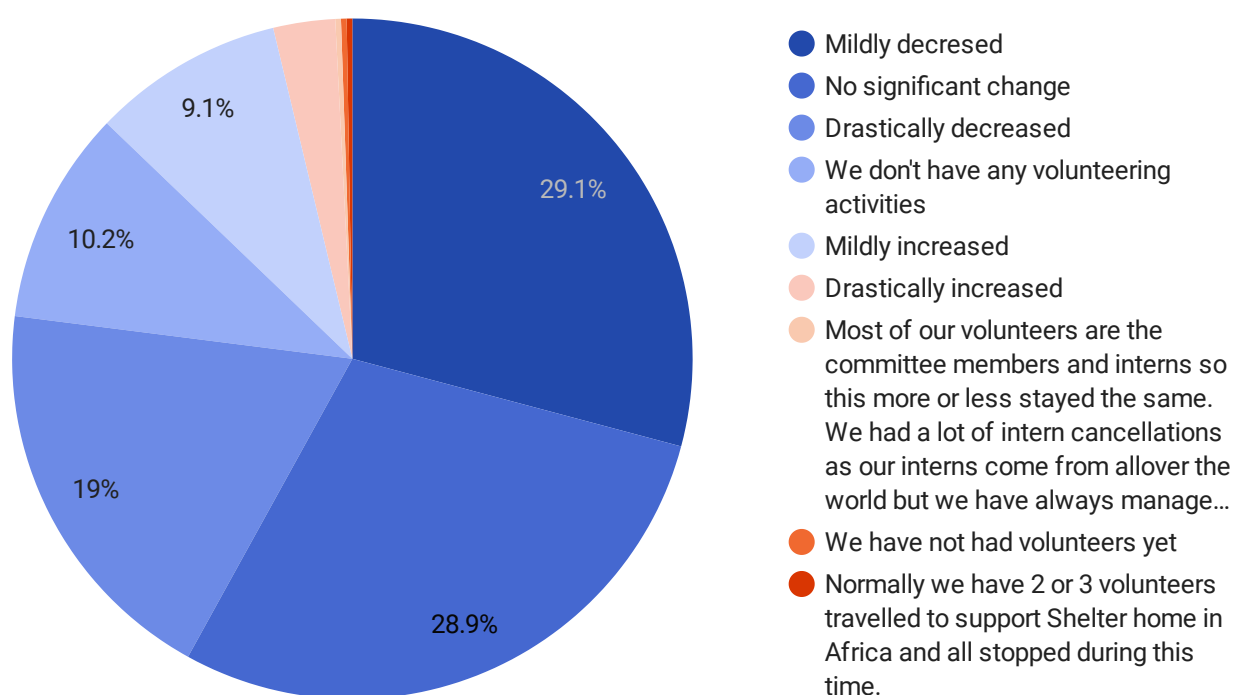
Only **6.28%** of the respondents claimed to have **50%-75%** activities online *before the pandemic*, yet the percentage of organisation shifting **50-75%** of their endeavours online *during the pandemic* increased to **22.4%.**

The most visible change is in the category of **75-100%** activities conducted online. **Before the pandemic**, only **3.83%** of the respondents admitted to the practice, yet the percentage skyrocketed to **23.22%** *during the pandemic.*

How did the number of volunteers change during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- 🔵 Mildly decresed
- 🔵 No significant change
- 🔵 Drastically decreased
- 🔵 We don't have any volunteering activities
- 🔵 Mildly increased
- 🔵 Drastically increased
- 🟠 Most of our volunteers are the committee members and interns so this more or less stayed the same. We had a lot of intern cancellations as our interns come from allover the world but we have always manage...
- 🟠 We have not had volunteers yet
- 🔴 Normally we have 2 or 3 volunteers travelled to support Shelter home in Africa and all stopped during this time.
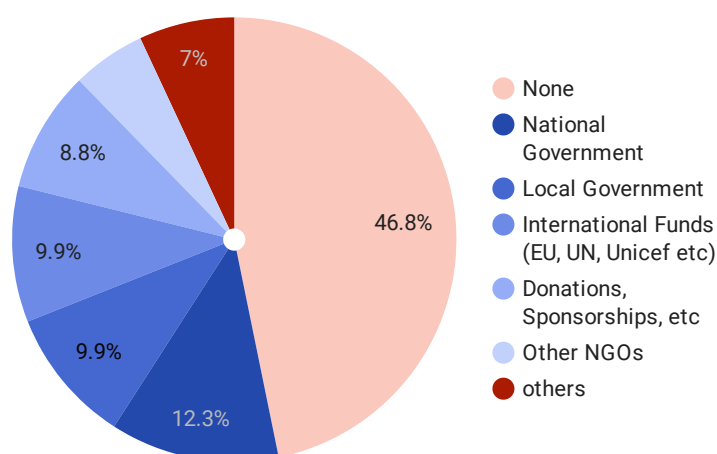
The crux of the research is to determine how different NGOs across Europe coped with maintaining the professional and social activities dedicated to the youth during the pandemic. A determinant variable in understanding how the pandemic moulded the NGOs' activities was the change in the number of volunteers.

The predominant answer selected by **29.8%** of the respondents was that the number of volunteers *mildly decreased* during the pandemic. However, **29%** of the participants could not identify a *notable change* in the number of volunteers. The pandemic heavily hit some organisations; hence **18.6%** of the respondents reported that the number of volunteers *drastically decreased*. Antithetically, **8.7%** of the organisations declared a *mild increase* in the number of volunteers, and **2.7%** reported a drastic increase.

On a different note, **10.4%** of the respondents *did not have any volunteering work* carried out in their organisation. The rest identified *specific barriers* that did not account necessarily for a change in the number of volunteers, but rather acted as barriers in the practice of mundane activities (e.g., volunteering work abroad which had to be canceled due to the travel bans).

EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Did you receive any support during the pandemic from the following entities?

- None
- National Government
- Local Government
- International Funds (EU, UN, Unicef etc)
- Donations, Sponsorships, etc
- Other NGOs
- others

When asked whether they received any support from diverse entities, **47%** of the respondents claimed **none**. Conversely, **12.6%** of the participants were aided by their **National Governments**, **10.1%** received support from the **Local Government**, **10.1%** benefited from the support of **International Funds** (e.g., EU, UN, UNICEF), **8.7%** were supported by **Donations and Sponsorships**, **5.5%** were assisted by **other NGOs**, and **6%** had benefited from **other types** of support.

What kind of support you would expect during a pandemic to keep the operational functionalities of your organization's volunteering activities?

The answers can be divided into different support areas: **economic and financial, information and communication, infrastructure and assistance, cooperation.**

Economic and financial support

Financial support was the most commonly encountered answer to what type of support would've been needed to upkeep the operational functionality of their organisations' volunteering activities. Responses varied from **direct financial support through grants, stipends, subsidies for different expenses, unemployment benefits, fixed costs aid, more EU-funded or national-funded projects, or the postponing of tax payments.**

Information and Communication

Many organisations demanded more **explicit guidelines** than rather lengthy legislative statements that would not be entirely evident at all times. Furthermore, the respondents identified a **lack of cohesiveness between national agencies that would frequently communicate conflicting information** regarding the **regulations in place**. Therefore, to avoid misinformation, disinformation, and other barriers in hosting regular activities, the local authorities should have put in place a better communication strategy.

EXTERNAL SUPPORT

What kind of support you would expect during a pandemic to keep the operational functionalities of your organization's volunteering activities?

Infrastructure and Assistance

Participants felt that the **transition to online activities lacked the necessary support and assistance** and was troubling. Respondents suggested a **need for hardware-** laptops, computers, webcams, and other electronic devices, **and software-** tools and licenses **procurements for a swifter transition** to the online environment. Additionally, it would've been beneficial to have **technical assistance** and support for different **online platforms** used to hold meetings. Participants in the survey also identified a need to **develop a methodology to implement online activities successfully.**

To facilitate volunteering activities, respondents argued that they would expect **support for the modernisation of the work equipment and advanced training to help NGOs survive, develop and evolve during this crisis.** In addition, complementary support should cover IT equipment and the associated costs for volunteers from a disenfranchised background.

Lastly, since core activities migrated in the online sphere, one would expect **extensive funding for better equipment suited for virtual activities.**

Cooperation

In times of need, **extensive cooperation between NGOs and other organisations, institutions, or agencies was deemed crucial, especially among fellow colleagues working for European projects (Erasmus+) in the field of education and the youth.**

Likewise, augmented cooperative efforts with other civil society organisations and public bodies to collaborate and reach target groups are crucial.

Lastly, there is an expectancy for more extensive cooperation for identifying immediate needs and acting in a partnership manner, as most organisations face the same challenge, and by joining forces, they could achieve more.

SOLUTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

As part of the survey, specialists from the responding organisations were asked for their expertise on improving online youth volunteering (e-volunteering). Their responses were grouped on 6 areas where solutions and good practices could be deployed and could make a difference: the **Framework of online youth volunteering; Motivation, Participation and Engagement; Digital Support and Literacy; Training and Learning Priorities; Innovation, and Cooperation.**

1 THE FRAMEWORK OF ONLINE VOLUNTEERING

In order to provide the youth with the best experiences adapted to the new realities brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the participating experts in the survey suggested that a **robust framework** for online volunteering should be the starting point. In this sense, establishing a **Code of Conduct** that would encompass **unambiguous instructions** for recurring activities could ease the **onboarding process** and help volunteers navigate their work autonomously. Furthermore, on the matter of achieving a sturdy onboarding process, it is vital to put in place clear guidelines regarding the organisation's main activities and core mission.

Experts argued that for online youth volunteering to maximise its outreach, it should resort to utilising **high-quality online portals**. For example, some suggested that online youth volunteering opportunities should be featured in the **European Youth portal.** The portal could be used for **recruitment,** but it could also **disseminate additional informative packages** such as a guide for best practices for organisations and volunteers on virtual volunteering opportunities, planning, mentoring of volunteers online, follow-up on activities, and more so. As flexibility is at the core of youth volunteering, it has to be also ensured through the platforms or apps used- through a **user-friendly interface** that would appeal to the younger generations.

Lastly, experts argue that in light of the **transition to the digital era,** constructing a **framework** should involve **local, national, and European institutions** to facilitate the recruitment and implementation processes of online volunteering actions.

SOLUTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

2 MOTIVATION, PARTICIPATON AND ENGAGEMENT

A feature unique to the act of volunteering is managing to keep the **motivation and participation** of the youth at high levels. The responding experts argue that good practice is **creating a volunteering experience that is not passive, empowering volunteers** through **proactiveness**. Particularly because young volunteers need to be given a voice within the organization they are affiliated with, the practice of delegating tasks should be replaced by **encouraging initiatives** from their side. These strategies would shift the paradigm from **passive participation** to **co-building**, most likely keeping the volunteers motivated.

Online activities and digital volunteering should be **engaging and exciting for volunteers** of all ages. Acquiring socio-professional competencies is crucial in the current hyper-competitive market, and young people will always be willing to acquire them. But to keep a **high engagement,** organisations should **design new programs and activities**, even in collaboration with the volunteers, **to spark ideas and enthusiasm for action,** tailor-made for the specifics of digital volunteering.

Moreover, to attract the youth to e-volunteering, organisations should **promote their work to younger audiences.** If youngsters are exposed and familiarised with volunteering from a young age, they are **more likely to feel motivated to participate in such activities.**

On top of that, experts argued that the **stability of digital volunteering networks** is critical for retaining volunteers. In addition, because virtual mediums often feel alienating, it is essential to **reach out to all participants frequently by communicating regularly.**

Lastly, some respondents suggested that to keep the volunteers engaged, motivated, and eager to participate in different activities, **various forms of funding** could be made available by **national or international institutions to finance online activities.**

SOLUTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

3 DIGITAL SUPPORT AND LITERACY

An invaluable aspect to the successful implementation of e-volunteering is ensuring that the participants have access to the proper **infrastructure, achieve digital competencies, and access to information**. NGOs should be proactive in seeking out the digital tools necessary for successful online implementation, also by finding and participating in the online learning modules of others.

Infrastructure

Firstly, digital volunteers must have **access to the proper infrastructure**. During the pandemic, an observable predicament was the **lack of technological equipment**, most evident among the disenfranchised and vulnerable groups. However, even for non-vulnerable groups, partaking in digital volunteering required a **stable internet connection** and **functional hardware(s)-** a laptop, webcam, microphone, and more. These conditions were hard to meet, so any organisation should consider the best course to support the volunteers, at least partly, with the **proper equipment and assistance.** This solution could avoid instances where volunteers are willing and motivated to play a role in different communities but do not have the means.

Another aspect that should be examined is the **inequality of accessibility** to digital volunteering dependent on whether the participants come from the urban versus rural environment. In certain countries, the latter have considerably **less access to the necessary infrastructure and equipment,** which may impede them from partaking in digital activities. Therefore, specific measures targeting volunteers from rural areas with unstable or unexisting internet and a lack of the **necessary equipment** should be designed to offer assistance. It is of utmost importance to try and offer equal access to digital volunteering because the main advantage of such practices lies in the ideal availability- digital volunteering capitalizes on the fact that **participation is no longer bounded by distance** or **physical presence.** So to maximise the benefits of such activities, one must be **sensitive to whether the targeted group has or does not have the means to access such opportunities.**

Digital competencies

Secondly, volunteers should be **provided with the means of achieving or improving their competencies** in the field of **digital literacy.** There is a lack of uniformity in the digital competencies among the youth, so there must be a cumulated effort to **bridge the digital knowledge gap**. Experts argue that digital natives do not necessarily have digital wisdom. A solution is implementing a learning course that could help volunteers understand the challenges and risks associated with the digital realm and manage to **use the digital transformation to benefit their work.**

Access to information

Lastly, a good practice for online volunteering is to provide the participants with reliable information. Because online volunteering will grow in importance, teaching volunteers about **trustworthy sources, fact-checking and digital perils is imperative.**

As a final note, educating volunteers in **digital literacy is a service for the communities they support** because once versed in the digital environment, they can further teach the community members. Moreover, digital knowledge transfer is significant since the latter might not be digitally aware of the risks, benefits, and responsibilities of going digital.

SOLUTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

4   TRAINING AND LEARNING PRIORITIES

Online volunteering can be improved by organising training and conformal educations for volunteers to help people develop their skills and connect with others. The volunteers must be correctly trained and prepared to face any kind of situation like the one occurring with the pandemic, and the volunteering organisations must be the ones providing that support, so they can continue working to help the civil society.

Another important aspect is the capacity-building of various actors, from youth workers to teachers, when working online with young people. Training and support for volunteers on engaging with young people online is essential. Suppose volunteers lack the skills; this would be translated into them lacking the confidence to work with groups online. Online youth volunteering is critical, and it has to be improved by training the organisations and the volunteers on how to use their available visual means to offer their services. In particular, young people understand social media and online working far better than many NGO staff, so there is a window of opportunity to give volunteers support and training and some freedom to suggest, innovate, and initiate ideas. This course of action will engage more young people and will allow them to have a volunteering experience that is useful and enjoyable for both them and the organisation.

Specific areas that could make a difference in teaching the volunteers are copyright / personal data management and securing the organisation's data. In addition, workshops and training promoting the organisation to the outside world can also help advertise the mission and outreach of the projects.

Lastly, for the best functionality and outcome of digital volunteering, the staff must improve their ICT skills on an ongoing basis.

SOLUTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

5 INNOVATION

During the pandemic, most activities shifted online, which led to an **oversaturation of the market with online activities, projects, and initiatives.** Consequently, e-volunteering was left in the challenging position of providing engaging and exciting volunteer activities to stand out. The circumstances require an innovative approach to advertising digital volunteering as an attractive field.

In pursuing that goal, organisations hosting digital volunteers should **integrate novel online platforms and tools** in non-pandemic settings. For example, a creative way to attract and engage youth in digital activism is to use new media such as TikTok to raise awareness of a specific cause.

6 COOPERATION

Digital volunteering could benefit from close monitoring, collaboration, and partnership with **grassroots organisations**. Inter-NGO cooperation could improve the creation process of more **precise guidelines, identify shortcomings, and develop new solutions.**

Complementary, a **better marketing strategy** at a national and international level is highly desired. Creating a specific online portal to support small NGOs may lead to **better visibility and enhance cooperation between similar organisations** experiencing common low visibility issues.

Another good practice is for NGOs to host regular meetings within a Digital Volunteer Network framework, discuss current issues from their **local communities, share ideas for improvement, and plan further actions.**

Awareness

Enhanced cooperation between NGOs in the field of digital volunteering is essential. For example, **spreading more information about E-Volunteering to break down prejudices and make people aware of the benefits of becoming a virtual volunteer is a milestone worth pursuing.**

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted the nature in which organisations conduct their activities. In light of the research, the following observations and recommendations can be made:

1. Most respondents had been negatively impacted by the pandemic, suffering reduced operations and mild downsizing.

2. Smaller NGOs were more sensitive to the challenges brought by the pandemic.

3. There has been a substantive shift in the medium in which activities were hosted- from onsite and face-to-face before the pandemic to predominantly online during the pandemic.

4. The pandemic pushed a significant number of participating organisations to improve their ICT competencies during the pandemic. The second-highest percentage of respondents reported being unprepared for the pandemic but swiftly adapting.

5. Most of the responding organisations account for either a mild or a massive decrease in the number of volunteers during the pandemic. They identify challenges unique to the circumstances- barriers in traveling or hosting face-to-face activities.

6. The number of funding opportunities for NGOs and volunteering work should increase during a pandemic.

7. Communication with the public should increase in times of crisis, with more precise guidelines and cohesive instructions.

8. A robust framework for e-volunteering should be put into place.

9. Enhanced communication and a proactive approach should be deployed when working with volunteers in the digital realm to keep them motivated and engaged.

10. Support towards achieving digital literacy, the procurement of proper infrastructure, and the dissemination of trustworthy sources of information are crucial to facilitate and maximise the benefits of digital volunteering.

11. Adapting training methods to the digital sphere is crucial for successful knowledge and skill transfer.

12. Innovative tools and platforms must be deployed to attract the youth to digital volunteering.

13. Cooperation between NGOs is a must-have for information exchange on best practices, strategies, and innovations.

Annex I: Survey Questions

1. Name of the organization (the answer won't be published in the final report)
2. Country
3. The size of your organization (considering the members, trainers, trainees, volunteers and employees in your branch/office).
▫ Small organization (1-10)   ▫ Medium organization (11-50)   ▫ Large organization (51 +)
4. Field of activity of your organization (select 1-3 dominant fields)
▫ Arts/Culture
▫ Ecology/Environment
▫ Inclusion/Diversity
▫ Youth empowerment
▫ Rural development/Agriculture
▫ Active citizenship/Democracy/Civic Rights
▫ Entrepreneurship
▫ Disability
▫ ICT /Digitalisation
▫ Sport and Wellness
▫ Human rights
▫ Gender equality/Women empowerment
▫ Employment
▫ Charity
▫ Health
▫ Education
▫ Migration/Refugees/Displaced population
▫ Animal protection
▫ LGBTQIA+
▫ Sustainability/Green energy
5. Years of activity
▫ 0-1 (start-up)
▫ 1-3 (new organization)
▫ 3-10 (experienced organization)
▫ 10 + (well-established organization)
6. Location of your organization
▫ Village   ▫ Town (up to 20 000 inhabitants)   ▫ Medium size town (20 000 - 100 000)   ▫ City (>100 000 inhabitants)   ▫ Capital City
7. What is the impact of COVID - 19 Pandemic on your organization?
▫ Very negative (heavily reduced operations and downsizing)
▫ Negative (reduced operations, mild downsizing)
▫ No significant impact (operations and number of members remained more or less the same)
▫ Positive (slightly increased number of projects, operations and members)
▫ Very positive (highly increased number of projects, operations and members)
▫ I don't know
8. What percent of youth (15-30 y.o.) activities were conducted online before the COVID - 19 pandemic in your organization?
▫ 0 %
▫ 1-10%
▫ 10-25%
▫ 25-50%
▫ 50-75%
▫ 75-100%
9. What percent of youth (15-30 y.o.) activities were conducted online during the COVID - 19 pandemic in your organization?
▫ 0 %
▫ 1-10%
▫ 10-25%
▫ 25-50%
▫ 50-75%
▫ 75-100%

10. How did the number of volunteers change during the COVID - 19 pandemic?

▢ **Drastically decreased**

▢ **Mildly decreased**

▢ **No significant change**

▢ **Mildly increased**

▢ **Drastically increased**

▢ **We don't have any volunteering activities**

11.What type of activities did you implement in order to keep youth engaged during the pandemic?

12. What was your strategy to cope with the challenges and limitations of COVID-19 to continue your operations successfully?

13. Regarding the ICT skills and online tools for the implementation of online activities & communication during the COVID - 19 pandemic, how do you assess your organization?

▢ **We were not prepared but we adapted quickly**

▢ **We were not prepared and we still face challenges**

▢ **We were prepared and we did well**

▢ **We improved our ICT capabilities during the pandemic**

▢ **We were prepared but the situation was beyond us**

14. Did you receive any support during the pandemic from the following entities?

▢ **None**

▢ **Local Government**

▢ **National Government**

▢ **International Funds (EU, UN, Unicef etc)**

▢ **Other NGOs**

▢ **Donations, Sponsorships, etc**

17. What kind of support you would expect during a pandemic to keep the operational functionalities of your organisation's volunteering activities?

18. Your expert opinion on improving online youth volunteering in the future.