

STUDY OF APPROACHES TO VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND COOPERATION IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

Analysis of the Current Situation, Assessment of Stakeholder
Cooperation, and Recommendations for the Development of
Volunteering in the Kurzeme Planning Region

2026

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Introduction

The study “Study of Approaches to Volunteer Recruitment and Cooperation in the Social Services Sector in the Kurzeme Planning Region” has been developed within the framework of the Kurzeme Planning Region project “Connecting Generations in Diversity” (*ConnectingGen*). The aim of the study is to identify and analyse current volunteering practices in the social services sector in the Kurzeme Planning Region, identify the key challenges related to volunteer recruitment, engagement and cooperation, and develop recommendations for the further development of volunteering.

The study is based on survey data collected from social service providers in the Kurzeme Planning Region and the results of interviews, thereby providing an insight into the experience, views and practical needs of sector representatives with regard to volunteer recruitment and cooperation. The information obtained has been used to identify effective approaches, existing barriers and opportunities for the development of volunteering in the social services sector.

The purpose of the study is not only to provide an overview of the current situation, but also to offer practical recommendations for social service providers and organisations seeking to improve their volunteer recruitment, engagement and cooperation processes. The recommendations developed may serve as a basis for further improving organisational approaches and promoting more targeted volunteer engagement in the delivery of social services. The legal framework for the organisation of voluntary work in Latvia is established by the Voluntary Work Law ¹, which regulates the organisation of voluntary work, the rights and obligations of volunteers and organisers of voluntary work, as well as other matters related to the implementation of voluntary work. Accordingly, the involvement of volunteers in the field of social services must also be organised in compliance with the provisions of this Law.

¹ The current version of the Law is available on the official website of the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, Likumi.lv: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/275067-brivpratiga-darba-likums>

The study is intended for social sector professionals, social service providers and organisations, representatives of local governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as other stakeholders interested in the development of volunteering and the promotion of civic participation in the social services sector.

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The study material "Study of Approaches to Volunteer Recruitment and Cooperation in the Social Services Sector in the Kurzeme Planning Region" has been developed within the framework of the Kurzeme Planning Region project "Connecting Generations in Diversity" (ConnectingGen), under the Interreg VI-A Latvia-Lithuania Programme 2021-2027, Project No. LL-00241 "Connecting Generations in Diversity".²

² This material has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the Kurzeme Planning Region and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the official position of the European Union.

Situation Analysis and Development Opportunities Report

Study objective: to identify the current situation by determining the underlying causes, organisational needs, functioning solutions, and proposals for developing a system for volunteer recruitment and cooperation.

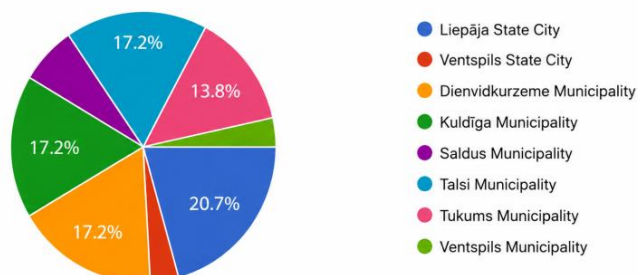
The study was prepared based on an analysis of two surveys covering 29 organisations registered in the Register of Social Service Providers (hereinafter – the RSSP) in the Kurzeme Planning Region and 10 NGOs with practical experience in volunteer recruitment, as well as three in-depth interviews with representatives of the association *Ziemupīte*, the Saldus Municipality Agency *Social Service*, and the public benefit organisation *Hospiss LV*, which are able to share examples of good practice.

Analysis of the Current Situation Regarding Volunteer Recruitment Among RSSP

The survey provides an overview of current volunteering practices among social service providers in the Kurzeme Planning Region and makes it possible to identify the key challenges and development potential in this area. The survey was conducted from June to August 2026. The questionnaire was distributed to all social service providers registered in the RSSP operating within the geographical area defined for the study.

2. In which municipality is your organisation located?

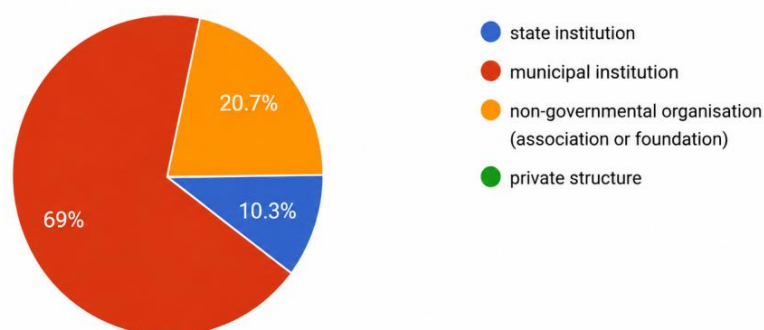
29 responses



The questionnaire was completed by 29 organisations, the majority of which are municipal institutions, alongside NGOs and state institutions.

Information about the organisation 1. Legal status of the organisation

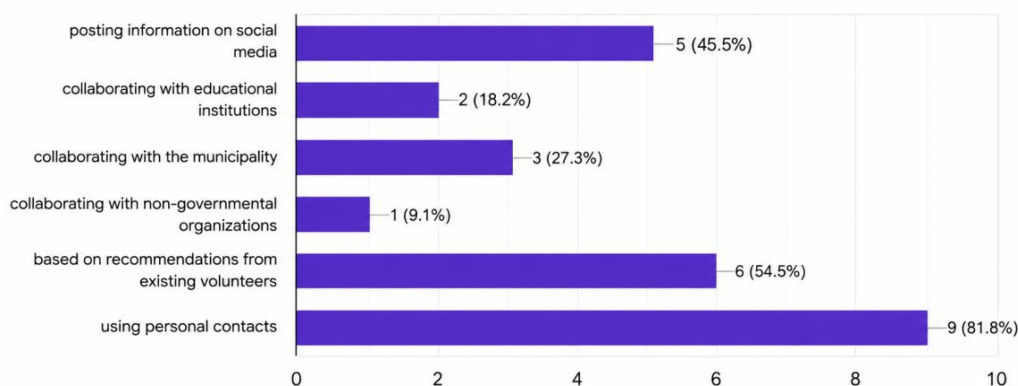
29 responses



Respondents represent a broad range of social services, including long-term social care and social rehabilitation services (52%), day care centres (28%), group homes (21%), social rehabilitation services (28%), and other types of services.

3. What are the most common ways to recruit volunteers? (multiple answers possible)

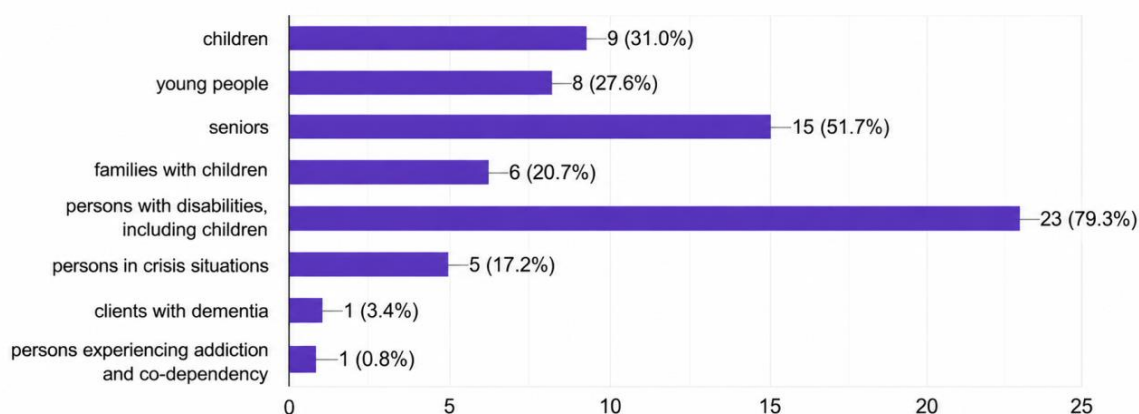
11 responses



The majority of respondents work with persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual disabilities (79%). Slightly more than half of the respondents (51.7%) provide services to older persons. A further 17% of respondents work with persons experiencing crisis situations, while approximately one-third provide services to children (31%), and a similar proportion work with young people (27.6%). 3% of respondents work with persons experiencing addiction and co-dependency, while 3.4% provide services to persons with dementia.

4. Which client groups does your organisation mainly work with? (multiple answers possible)

29 responses

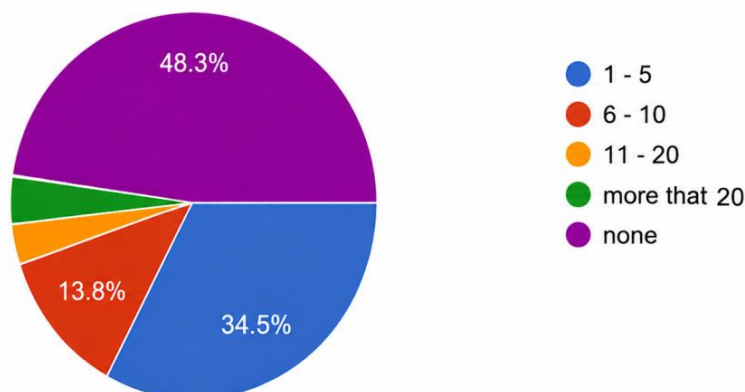


The survey results indicate that the potential of volunteering in the region is currently not being fully utilised. Nearly half of the organisations surveyed reported that they had not engaged any volunteers over the past three years. Only a small proportion (17%) of organisations reported an increase in volunteer engagement, while for 38% of organisations, volunteer engagement had either decreased or remained unchanged. These findings point to an uneven development of volunteering and highlight the need for targeted measures to strengthen volunteer recruitment and engagement in the social services sector.

The number of volunteers engaged by most organisations is relatively low. In most cases, between one and five volunteers are engaged over the course of a year, while nearly half of the organisations have not engaged any volunteers during the year.

8. Approximately how many volunteers get involved in the organization's work over the course of a year?

29 responses



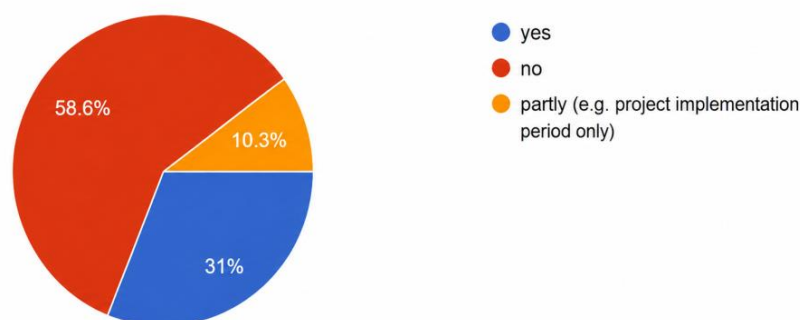
In organisations that engage volunteers, their roles are primarily focused on promoting clients' social engagement and providing emotional support. Most commonly, volunteers assist with organising leisure activities (55%), accompany clients on walks and help organise celebrations (28%), support charitable initiatives (21%), and assist with day-to-day practical tasks (10%). In no cases were volunteers engaged in administrative tasks, such as data entry, while 3% of volunteers provided assistance with digital tasks and client transportation. This demonstrates that volunteers are primarily engaged to diversify and enhance the quality of social

services rather than to replace professional staff. Consequently, volunteers can represent a valuable resource in the day-to-day delivery of social services.

Organisations report that people from different generations participate in volunteering, although adults predominate, while the level of youth engagement is somewhat lower. At the same time, the relatively high proportion of volunteers representing different generations indicates that intergenerational cooperation is already taking place in practice and could be further developed as a potential area of focus, thereby contributing to social inclusion and stronger local communities.

13. Does the organisation have a person who coordinates work with volunteers?

29 responses



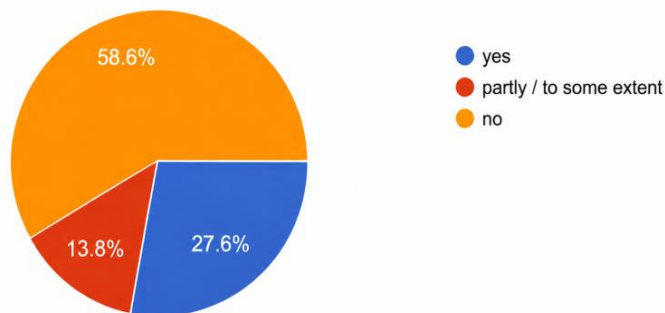
When analysing volunteer recruitment practices, it becomes evident that organisations primarily rely on personal contacts (31%), information posted on their own social media channels (21%), and cooperation with educational institutions (14%). In 10% of cases, volunteers are recruited through project-based activities. However, in most cases, organisations do not have structured and targeted volunteer recruitment systems in place. As many as 37% of organisations do not actively recruit volunteers at all. Furthermore, more than half of the organisations do not have a designated person responsible for coordinating volunteer activities.

Organisational preparedness for working with volunteers varies considerably. Only some organisations conduct candidate screening (28%) and provide induction training (24%). However, in many organisations, such practices are either not in place (28%) or are implemented only in individual cases (34%).

A similar situation can be observed with regard to internal procedures and the ongoing development of volunteers. In a significant proportion of organisations, such mechanisms are either not in place (59%) or are only partially developed (14%).

18. Has the organisation developed rules for working with volunteers?

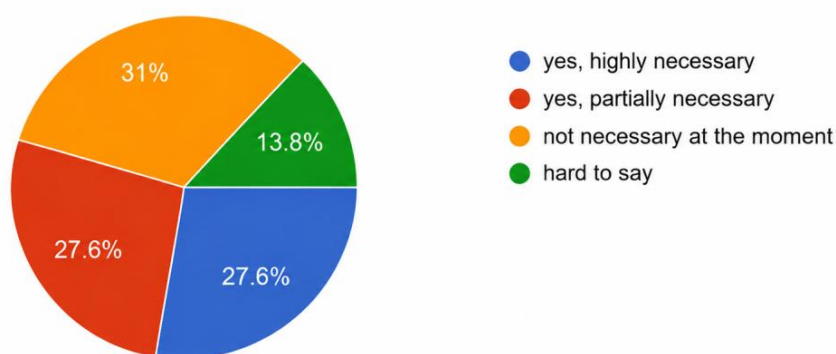
29 responses



The need to engage a broader range of volunteers varies: 31% of respondents do not currently see such a need, while 28% of organizations acknowledge that volunteer engagement is highly necessary.

14. Would the organisation need greater volunteer involvement?

29 responses



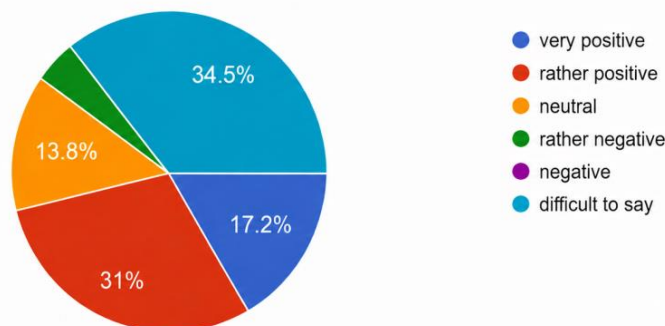
Despite the challenges mentioned above, organizations with experience in working with volunteers generally evaluate this experience positively (48%). Only 3.5% of organizations reported negative experiences. The main benefits identified include the opportunity to provide clients with more individualized attention, improve their emotional well-being, foster the development of social connections, reduce staff

workload, strengthen cooperation with the local community, and increase public awareness of social work. This demonstrates that volunteering creates added value for both service recipients and organizations.

Experience and challenges

15. How do you rate the organization's overall experience working with volunteers?

29 responses



Difficulties and Challenges in Recruiting and Coordinating Volunteers

The respondents' answers indicate that the most significant challenge in recruiting volunteers is **low public interest in volunteering**. This issue was mentioned most frequently (52%), indicating that organizations have difficulties finding people who are willing to participate in the provision of social services on a long-term and regular basis.

The second most significant challenge is **a lack of volunteer motivation and high turnover (25%)**. Respondents note that even when volunteers can be recruited, it is often difficult to maintain their long-term engagement. This creates a need to regularly seek new volunteers and repeatedly invest resources in their training and induction. One-fifth of respondent's experience difficulties finding volunteers with the specific skills required for particular tasks.

Some organizations acknowledge that they **lack knowledge of effective volunteer recruitment and coordination methods**, highlighting the need to

strengthen the professional competencies of relevant specialists. At the same time, **a lack of time and staff resources** is also emphasized, as volunteer coordination requires additional administrative work that cannot always be accommodated within the existing staff capacity.

Some respondents also point to **a lack of financial resources**, which limits opportunities to organize volunteer training, motivational activities, and coordination processes. Additional barriers include **legal and administrative issues**, which complicate the organization of volunteer involvement, as well as **staff members' cautious attitudes towards engaging volunteers**, which may hinder the development of successful cooperation within organizations.

Several organizations indicated that they **have no practical experience** of working with volunteers or do not engage volunteers at all; consequently, they are unable to fully assess the potential challenges or benefits.

Overall, the responses demonstrate that volunteer recruitment and coordination are influenced by a combination of factors, and that **the main challenges are not related to legislation, but rather to human resource and motivation issues**. This points to the need for a coordinated support system, enhanced professional knowledge of working with volunteers, the development of common guidelines, and stronger cooperation among social service providers, educational institutions, municipalities, and local commun

Organizations' Needs for the Development of Volunteering

Organizations consider the most important prerequisites for the development of volunteering to be **the exchange of experience with organizations that have examples of good practice (59%)** and **public awareness-raising activities (52%)**. These factors were mentioned most frequently, indicating that social service providers recognize the need to increase public understanding of the importance and benefits of volunteering. Respondents believe that greater public awareness could reduce public passivity and increase the number of potential volunteers. They also note that learning

from examples of good practice and fostering cooperation among organizations would help them develop more effective methods for recruiting, motivating, and coordinating volunteers, while strengthening regional cooperation networks.

Another form of support identified is **funding for volunteer coordination (45%)**. Organizations indicate that effective volunteer recruitment and management require additional human resources and administrative capacity. Therefore, funding to support the coordination function is considered one of the key prerequisites for the sustainable development of volunteering.

One-third of respondents also emphasize the need to establish **a unified volunteer database or platform** that would facilitate cooperation between potential volunteers and organizations. Such a platform would enable more effective identification of interested individuals, coordination of their involvement, and information exchange among social service providers.

Some organizations highlight the need for **staff training (24%)** and **clear guidelines for working with volunteers (38%)**. This demonstrates that social service providers wish to strengthen their competencies and gain access to practical methodological materials that would help them organize volunteer work in accordance with common principles and regulatory requirements.

At the same time, one organization indicated that engaging volunteers is not currently relevant to its work. Although this represents an isolated response in the survey, it suggests that volunteering is not considered necessary or appropriate across all types of social services.

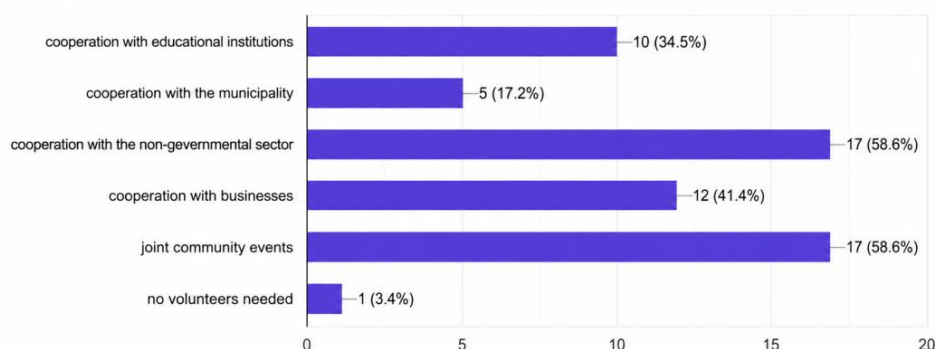
Overall, the responses clearly demonstrate that organizations expect not only additional financial resources but also systematic methodological and organizational support. Key priorities include promoting the exchange of experience, raising public awareness, strengthening coordination capacity, establishing a unified volunteer platform, and supporting the professional development of staff. These measures would create the conditions for more sustainable and coordinated development of volunteering within social services in the Kurzeme Planning Region.

Forms of Cooperation for the Development of Volunteering in Social Services

Respondents answers indicate that the development of volunteering in the social services sector requires closer cooperation among various institutions and greater involvement of local communities.

22. Which forms of cooperation would best help develop volunteering in the social services sector? (multiple answers possible)

29 responses



The most frequently mentioned effective form of cooperation is **joint community events (59%)**. This demonstrates that organizations view community activities as an important opportunity not only to promote volunteering but also to build mutual trust among residents, foster social cohesion, and attract new volunteers.

Equally important is **cooperation with the NGOs sector (59%)**, which respondents identified as one of the key areas for collaboration. NGOs have accumulated experience in organizing volunteer activities, and cooperation with them can facilitate the exchange of experience and the implementation of joint initiatives.

Several respondents also emphasize the importance of **cooperation with educational institutions (35%)**. Schools, vocational education institutions, and universities are considered important partners in engaging young people in

volunteering. Such cooperation would promote young people's civic participation, social responsibility, and intergenerational cooperation, while also providing social service providers with opportunities to attract new volunteers.

Respondents also highlight the need to strengthen **cooperation with municipalities (17%)**, which play an important role in local community development and in coordinating cooperation among different institutions. Municipal involvement could facilitate information exchange, the organization of support activities, and the development of long-term cooperation mechanisms between social service providers and other stakeholders.

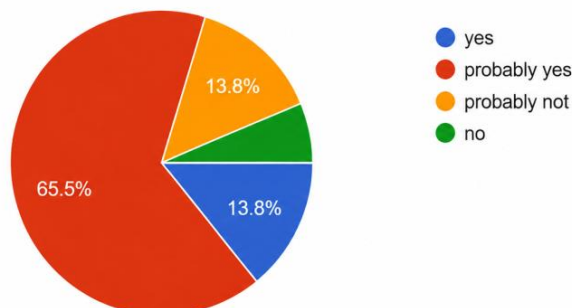
Some respondents emphasize **cooperation with businesses (41%)**, particularly through the development of corporate volunteering initiatives. Such cooperation could expand the pool of potential volunteers while also promoting corporate social responsibility and businesses' involvement in local community development.

Overall, the respondents' answers demonstrate that the successful development of volunteering **requires multifaceted cooperation** among social service providers, educational institutions, municipalities, NGOs, businesses, and local communities. It is particularly important to develop joint initiatives and establish a regular cooperation network that would support volunteer recruitment and the exchange of experience.

The majority of respondents expressed their willingness to participate in a **joint volunteer cooperation network in the Kurzeme region**, demonstrating a strong interest in a coordinated regional cooperation model.

23. Would your organisation be interested in joining a volunteer cooperation network in the Kurzeme region?

29 responses



Factors That Would Encourage Volunteer Engagement

In respondents' answers, **recognition and appreciation activities** were identified as the most important factor in encouraging volunteer engagement. This response was mentioned by 62% of respondents, demonstrating that people value receiving recognition for their contribution. Recognition is perceived as an important motivational tool that strengthens a sense of belonging to the organization and encourages continued involvement in volunteering.

An equally important motivating factor is **a system of benefits and discounts (62%)**. Various practical benefits, such as discounts on cultural, sports, or other services, could provide an additional incentive to engage in volunteering and help sustain motivation in the long term.

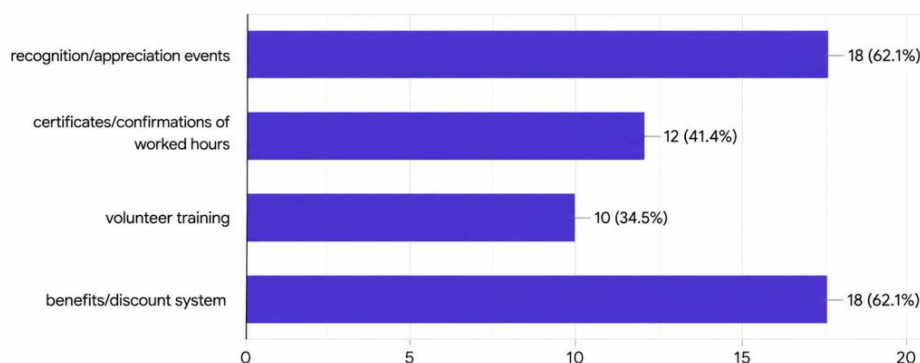
Several organizations (41%) highlight the importance of **certificates or official recognition of completed volunteer hours**. Such documents can serve as formal evidence of the experience and competencies gained, which is particularly important for young people, who may use certificates as additional points or supporting evidence when preparing for further studies or entering the workforce. At the same time, such recognition is also meaningful for volunteers from other age groups as an acknowledgement of their contribution.

Respondents also emphasize the importance of **volunteer training**. Although this factor was mentioned less frequently (34%) than those above, it highlights the

need to provide volunteers with the knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively in the social services sector. High-quality training can increase volunteers' confidence in their abilities and improve the quality of their work.

24. What, in your opinion, would most encourage people to get involved in volunteering?
(multiple answers possible)

29 responses



Overall, respondents' answers indicate that the most effective approach to volunteer motivation is a **combination of different forms of support**. Alongside symbolic recognition, organizations see a need to provide practical benefits, opportunities for professional development, and formal recognition in the form of a certificate or other means of acknowledgement.

The findings demonstrate that volunteer motivation is not solely associated with material benefits. **Social recognition, opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, and formal acknowledgement of contributions are equally important.** This indicates that both organizations' internal motivation policies and society's overall attitude towards volunteering play an important role in establishing a sustainable volunteer engagement system.

Summary of the Current Situation

The survey provides an overview of volunteer management practices among social service providers in the Kurzeme Planning Region. A total of 29 organizations participated in the survey, and their responses demonstrate that volunteering is viewed as an important complement to the quality of social services; however, its potential in the region is currently not being fully utilized. Almost half of the organizations indicated that they had no practical experience of working with volunteers over the past three years, pointing to uneven development of volunteering across the region.

The findings show that the main barriers to volunteer recruitment are **low public interest in volunteering, insufficient volunteer motivation and high turnover, as well as limited organizational capacity to coordinate volunteers**. At the same time, organizations identify broader public awareness activities, funding for volunteer coordination, the establishment of a unified volunteer database, and regular exchange of experience among organizations as the most effective solutions.

Taken as a whole, the findings reveal a clear link between the problems identified and the solutions proposed by organizations. Organizations recognize that volunteer recruitment cannot be addressed through isolated measures alone. A coordinated approach is needed that simultaneously strengthens public awareness, enhances the competencies of professionals, develops inter-institutional cooperation, and establishes sustainable mechanisms for volunteer coordination.

The study also demonstrates **significant potential for developing intergenerational cooperation**. Organizations view the involvement of volunteers from different generations positively and see opportunities to expand cooperation with educational institutions, municipalities, NGOs and businesses. At the same time, respondents emphasize that long-term volunteer engagement could be encouraged through recognition activities, certificates acknowledging contributions, professional development opportunities, and various motivation systems.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Kurzeme Planning Region has a solid foundation for the further development of volunteering, but **targeted methodological, organizational, and financial support is needed**. A region-wide cooperation

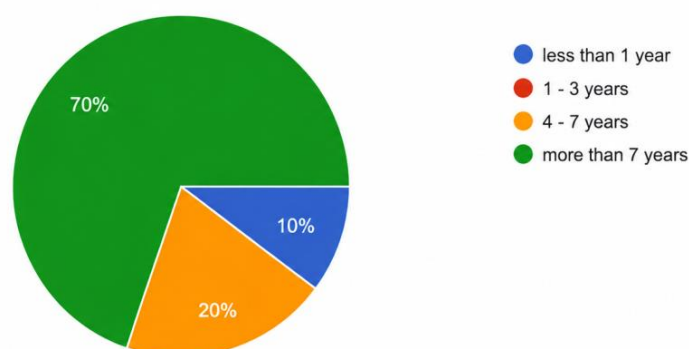
network, common guidelines, a coordinated volunteer management system, and regular public awareness activities would create the conditions for sustainable volunteer engagement in social services, while also promoting social inclusion, intergenerational cooperation, and stronger local communities.

Analysis of the Current Situation Regarding Volunteer Recruitment in Organizations Outside the Social Services Sector

In this target group, **10 organizations with regular experience in volunteer recruitment** were surveyed. For 90% of respondents, this experience spans at least four years, while 70% have more than seven years of experience. This group can be considered well suited for identifying **good practices and systemic solutions**, as it covers the entire territory of the Kurzeme Planning Region, and the social services they provide address a range of target groups and their respective need.

1. How many years of experience does your organization have in recruiting volunteers?

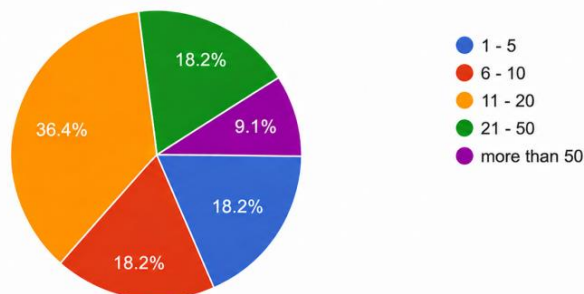
10 responses



The number of volunteers engaged by organizations varies, reflecting differences in their areas of activity, the geographical scale of the areas they serve, and the frequency of service provision.

2. On average, how many volunteers get involved in the organisation's work over the course of a year?

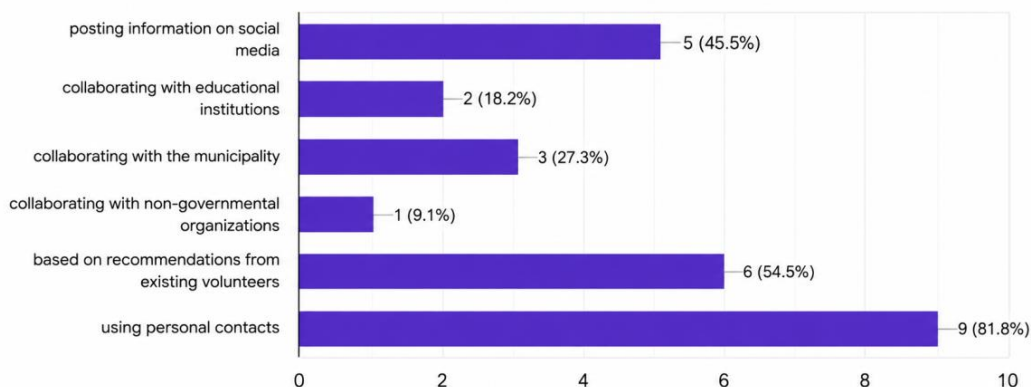
11 responses



In this case as well, organizations most commonly recruit volunteers through personal contacts (82%), relying on recommendations from existing volunteers (55%) or posting information on social media (46%). Various forms of cooperation are used much less frequently, including cooperation with municipalities (27%), the NGO sector (18%), and educational institutions (9 %).

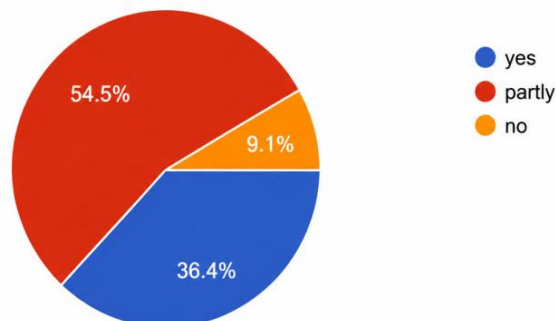
3. What are the most common ways to recruit volunteers? (multiple answers possible)

11 responses



4. Is there a person in the organization who coordinates work with volunteers?

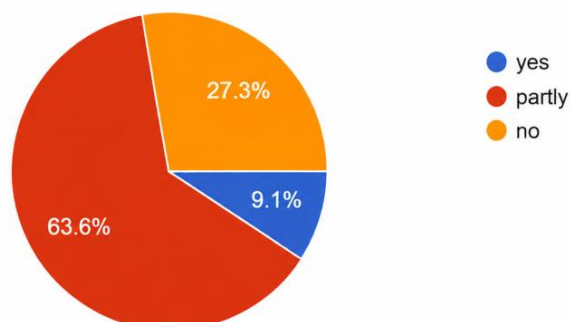
11 responses



Even among experienced organizations, a fully formalized volunteer management system is uncommon. In most cases (64%), organizations operate under a partially regulated framework for working with volunteers.

5. Has the organization developed procedures for working with volunteers?

11 responses



Nearly half of the organizations (45%) **provide volunteers with induction training**, while 36% offer ongoing mentor support. Only one organization provides each volunteer with training based on a specially developed course. Almost one-third of respondents (27%) do not provide any form of training. The responses reveal a range of practices: in some cases, training is provided only when it is included in a specific project; in others, organizations choose to cooperate only with people who already have knowledge relevant to the particular service being provided. One organization, meanwhile, provides not only training but also regular supervision sessions, in which participation is not mandatory but encouraged.

Unlike social service providers registered in the SPSR, volunteers in these organizations are primarily involved in **supporting day-to-day activities (91%)**. Volunteers also frequently lead activities (73%) and organize events (64%). Unlike organizations included in the SPSR, where volunteers are not involved in administrative work, in this target group volunteers perform administrative tasks in 27% of cases.

Two benefits of volunteer involvement are considered equally important (73%): **strengthening connections between clients and the local community and increasing the organization's visibility and recognition**. Improving clients' quality of life was identified by 64% of respondents. A further 46% of respondents highlighted volunteers as a source of new ideas. For almost one-third of organizations (27%), volunteer involvement reduces staff workload, while one organization reported that such cooperation increases its overall capacity.

Volunteer Motivation

Organizations identify a range of personal motivations and needs that encourage people to engage in unpaid work:

- the desire to be useful and needed by society;
- the opportunity to see the results and impact of their work;
- a sense of meaningful purpose;
- the opportunity to remain active and play a meaningful role in community life (particularly for seniors);
- the opportunity to contribute to a supportive and inclusive environment;
- meeting new friends and like-minded people;
- the opportunity to share their life experience;
- developing new knowledge and skills and broadening their horizons;
- gaining experience for future needs (particularly for young people);
- public recognition and appreciation for their contribution.

When describing the **mistakes and challenges** encountered in their experience, organizations distinguish between systemic barriers and human factors. Among the systemic barriers, the most significant is the availability of resources, including

funding for training and covering food or accommodation costs when these need to be provided to volunteers.

Key Challenges and Risks Identified by Organizations

- **Lack of volunteer commitment** – people may fail to fulfill their commitments, meaning that organizations must always have an alternative solution or a “Plan B” in place.
- **Insufficient attention to existing volunteers** – when organizations focus primarily on recruiting new volunteers, existing volunteers may be neglected and fail to receive the regular support, motivation, and recognition they need. As a result, volunteers may become taken for granted rather than being viewed as a valuable additional resource supporting the organization’s work.
- **Insufficient psychological preparation or practical skills** – volunteers may not be adequately prepared psychologically or may lack the practical skills required to perform their assigned tasks.

Overall, the **key drivers of volunteer engagement are a sense of purpose, belonging to the community, and recognition for one’s contribution.** From the organizations’ perspective, the main risks are insufficient support (mentoring and training) and volunteer instability. Respondents identify the provision of basic resources and the establishment of a regular system of emotional and practical support for volunteers as key solutions for ensuring sustainable cooperation between volunteers and organizations.

Examples of Good Practice

The qualitative part of the study includes three interviews with organizations that have been working with volunteers on a long-term and regular basis.

NGO “Ziemupīte” has been operating in Ziemeupe Parish and providing social support for 11 years. The organization initiated the preparation and distribution of assistance packages for various target groups, including foster families, people released from incarceration, people living alone, and seniors. The association

cooperates with social services across Kurzeme and focuses on supporting people who are making efforts to manage their own lives and improve their quality of life but may nevertheless need some additional support.

Assistance is provided for several months each year. In cooperation with businesses and other interested parties, the necessary goods are collected, sorted and packed with the help of volunteers and then delivered to people in need. Volunteers are approached personally and are often recruited from the families, friends, or acquaintances of existing volunteers. Sometimes people initially decline because they are unfamiliar with the nature of the work. However, after trying it, they realize that the sense of fulfillment makes the effort worthwhile and subsequently continue volunteering for a longer period.

The association's activists consider volunteer turnover to be a normal phenomenon, particularly given people's busy lifestyles and the fast pace of modern life. They emphasize that even two or three years of involvement in organizing and providing assistance represents a significant contribution to the association's activities.

The Social Service Agency of Saldus Municipality (the Agency) has engaged volunteers both through projects implemented by the agency and through cooperation with NGOs. Initially, within one of the Agency's projects, young mentors worked with young people at social risk. These young people subsequently became volunteers and participated in the next project alongside the mentors. Their integration into volunteering was gradual and purposeful. To ensure continuity of these initiatives, funding to strengthen and sustain volunteering was subsequently secured through the Agency's NGO partners.

Young people, including those at social risk, are recruited through agency staff, social media posts, and a volunteer WhatsApp group created by the Agency's project specialist. Social service staff and mentors also support recruitment by encouraging their own young people and others to participate.

In a project aimed at integrating people with mental health difficulties, young activists from the Saldus Youth House participated as volunteers. Volunteers work

with a range of target groups, including young people and seniors, for example in social care centres.

NGO Hospiss LV has been operating for almost seven years. Its aim is to raise awareness of the importance of palliative care services and to ensure that people can spend the final days of their lives in a comfortable and dignified environment. Since its establishment, volunteering has been one of the organization's priorities. In Kurzeme, volunteers participate in the Svētku galds (Festive Table) project, visiting hospitals in Liepāja, Kuldīga, and Ventspils.

Potential volunteers are recruited through social media, and the organization also makes use of media coverage whenever possible. Some volunteers have personally experienced the loss of a loved one and therefore understand the situation and recognize their ability to support others facing similar circumstances. Others are looking for a meaningful activity and find a sense of fulfillment through the volunteering opportunities offered by Hospiss LV. Most volunteers are women, generally around 40 years old, although younger people also participate.

To become a volunteer, applicants complete an application form on the organization's website and undergo training. Initially, the training was delivered in person over four full days; later, it was converted into a video-based format consisting of 15 lectures. Volunteers are required to complete a basic assessment by answering six questions, allowing the organization to confirm that they have reviewed the training materials.

Each hospital has its own coordinator who uses a WhatsApp group to communicate with potential volunteers, coordinate the team, maintain team spirit, and organize supervision sessions held once a month. These sessions take place both in person and remotely and provide an opportunity to discuss and analyze different situations arising during volunteer work.

The organization's experience demonstrates that **volunteering should be regular in order to become part of a routine**. For this reason, hospital visits take place once a week, always on the same day and at the same time.

Volunteer turnover remains a challenge, but the organization does not pressure people to continue if they no longer wish to volunteer. The nature of the work is emotionally demanding, and volunteers working with palliative care patients should not participate if they are emotionally unprepared or no longer feel able to provide support.

Conclusions

1. Volunteering in the social services sector of the Kurzeme Planning Region represents significant development potential rather than an already fully established system.
2. The main challenge is the lack of a systematic approach. There are no established procedures for working with volunteers, volunteer training is not consistently provided, and there is a shortage of dedicated volunteer coordinators or coordination is limited to short-term project-based arrangements.
3. The challenges related to volunteer engagement are closely linked to limited public awareness and a lack of interest in volunteering.
4. Long-term volunteer retention requires different solutions from those used for recruitment. Respondents highlight recognition, benefits, certificates or other forms of formal acknowledgement, and training as potential factors supporting volunteers' long-term engagement within organizations.
5. Organizations are interested in establishing a regional cooperation network or platform that would facilitate the exchange of information and experience, volunteer recruitment, and cooperation among organizations.
6. It is important to preserve flexibility in volunteering. The interviews demonstrate that shorter-term or occasional involvement can also provide significant value. Therefore, the volunteer engagement system should be capable of offering both regular and one-off volunteering opportunities.

Guidelines for Social Work Professionals on Recruiting and Coordinating Volunteers

These guidelines have been developed based on the analysis conducted by the Kurzeme Planning Region, the survey findings, and practical examples of good practice. The aim of the guidelines is to provide social work professionals with a **structured and practical tool for implementing and managing volunteer engagement**, while promoting intergenerational cooperation and addressing the challenges of volunteer turnover and insufficient motivation.

Volunteer Engagement Cycle / Four-Step Model/

To address the lack of a systematic approach, work with volunteers should be organized around four consecutive stages:

Recruitment and Selection → Induction and Training → Coordination and Support → Motivation, Recognition and Retention

1. STEP. Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

The most effective way to find interested volunteers is to approach people personally or rely on recommendations from existing volunteers. It is recommended to establish thematic *WhatsApp* or social media groups where people can be approached regarding specific needs or informed more generally about the organization's need for assistance with various activities. This approach allows potential volunteers to learn more about the organization's work and develop an understanding of whether the activities are compatible with their physical and mental capabilities.

Before engaging a volunteer, it is advisable to assess their suitability. This can be done informally, for example through a conversation, or more formally by asking the candidate to complete a questionnaire. For young people, it is important to assess their willingness to learn and their understanding of responsibility towards the tasks

they undertake, the people involved, and the organization. When working with senior volunteers, it is important to identify the skills and strengths derived from their life experience that can be applied to the role, while also assessing their physical capacity and the amount of time they are able to commit. In specialized areas, such as palliative care, the candidate's emotional resilience and suitability for working with people experiencing severe physical and psychological difficulties should also be assessed.

2. STEP. Induction and Training

To ensure that volunteers do not feel overwhelmed or uncertain, it is advisable to follow a **“step-by-step” approach**. Initially, volunteers should not be given full responsibility on their own; instead, they can be offered an observer or assistant role under the guidance of an experienced staff member or mentor. It is important to provide induction training, which can be delivered either in person or online.

If an organization considers it important to confirm that a volunteer has completed, for example, a video-based training course, a follow-up discussion or knowledge assessment test can be conducted before the volunteer begins their activities. This step not only confirms whether the volunteer has acquired the necessary knowledge but also encourages a sense of responsibility from the very beginning of their involvement.

3. STEP. Coordination and Support

Even when volunteer coordination is not a full-time position or volunteers are engaged occasionally rather than on a regular basis, the organization should designate a person responsible for **volunteer coordination and support**.

Clear cooperation arrangements and established routines help volunteers develop habits and make it easier to balance their personal lives with their commitment to serving the community. It is therefore important to define specific responsibilities and the time allocated to them. Wherever possible, volunteer involvement should take place on a regular basis.

In addition to practical support, it is essential that volunteers have a specific person - a **volunteer coordinator** - to whom they can turn whenever they need assistance. Emotional support is equally important. When working with clients, situations may arise that are particularly emotionally demanding. In such cases, supervision should be provided to support volunteers' well-being, strengthen their willingness to continue volunteering, and prevent burnout. In other situations, simply having an opportunity to discuss a particular experience or the volunteer's feelings more generally can be crucial in determining whether they wish to remain involved with the organization.

4. STEP. Motivation, Recognition and Retention

Organizing **public appreciation events and community activities** is an effective way of recognizing volunteers and expressing gratitude for their contribution. Recognition can be an important motivating factor for continued involvement.

It is also important to provide practical benefits, such as **local discounts or preferential access to cultural and sporting events**. Reimbursement of transportation costs and the provision of meals can also serve as additional incentives for volunteers.

Formal recognition - such as certificates confirming volunteer hours completed and skills acquire - can be particularly valuable for young people, although such recognition is also meaningful for volunteers of any age.

When working with volunteers, it is important to take into account their **age, experience, and skills**. Recognizing and making use of their individual strengths can ensure higher-quality support while also strengthening volunteers' self-confidence and, consequently, their motivation to remain involved in the organization's activities.

Working with Specific Target Groups: Youth and Seniors

Volunteer Age Group	Young People <i>(school students, university/college students, young people at risk)</i>	Seniors
Main Motivation	Experience for CV and future career, bonus points for further studies, making new friends, and a sense of belonging.	A desire to be useful and needed by society, active participation in community life, and sharing life experience.
Suitable Tasks	Event organisation, leading activities, digital support, and peer mentoring.	Accompanying clients on walks, conversations/emotional support, and practical workshops.
Recruitment Method	Cooperation with educational institutions and Youth Centres, as well as communication via social media and <i>WhatsApp</i> .	Collaboration with educational institutions and Youth Centres, as well as communication via social media and <i>WhatsApp</i> .
Risk Factors	Turnover due to lack of time and studies; lack of responsibility in fulfilling commitments.	Physical limitations and unpredictable health conditions.

Risks and Mitigation Measures

When planning volunteer involvement, organizations should take into account several risks arising from human factors.

- **If a volunteer does not show up or fails to fulfil their commitment**, the organization should always have a contingency arrangement or a “Plan B” in place. The provision of a core service should never depend solely on a volunteer. A volunteer is an *added value* and a means of *enhancing service quality*, not a replacement for a core staff member.
- **If volunteer turnover is high**, this should not necessarily be viewed as a risk. A burned-out or genuinely disengaged volunteer may become a burden rather than a source of support. Turnover should be accepted as a normal part of volunteering, as any contribution can be valuable. Organizations should therefore create opportunities for both long-term engagement and one-off volunteering, for example in projects or at specific events.
- **If a volunteer experiences emotional overload**, their involvement should be paused or their tasks adjusted. In social services, it is not advisable to involve volunteers who are emotionally distressed, unprepared, or unable to cope with the demands of the role.

Developing a Cooperation Network

Effective development of volunteering in the social services sector is not the responsibility of an individual organization alone. To ensure a stable supply of volunteers, coordinated cooperation should be established among social service providers, municipalities, educational institutions, NGOs, youth centers, businesses, and local communities. The purpose of the cooperation network is not only to facilitate the exchange of information about volunteering opportunities, but also to develop a shared understanding of volunteer management, recruit new volunteers, organize training and preparation, coordinate engagement, and evaluate outcomes.

The establishment of a **regional voluntary work cooperation network** requires a clear division of responsibilities and roles among the parties involved.

At the initial stage of establishing the cooperation network, the **Kurzeme Planning Region**, in cooperation with municipalities, could take the leading role. Representatives of municipalities, social service providers and NGOs should be involved in **developing the cooperation model, common principles and division of responsibilities**.

During the stage of **volunteer recruitment, training and practical involvement**, the main responsibility would lie with social service providers and NGOs, working in cooperation with educational institutions, municipalities and businesses. At the regional level, the **coordination of the network's activities, regular exchange of experience and evaluation of results** could be ensured by the Kurzeme Planning Region in cooperation with municipalities and other network participants.

This division of responsibilities should not be regarded as a strictly defined institutional model, but rather as a recommended approach that can be further refined during the development of the cooperation network by agreeing on the competences of each party involved, the resources available and the specific tasks to be carried out.

Practical Steps for Establishing and Operating the Cooperation Network

The needs identified through the study indicate that **clear cooperation mechanisms, exchange of experience, access to information, staff training, and volunteer coordination capacity** are particularly important. Therefore, the cooperation network should be developed as a practical mechanism rather than merely as a formal association of organizations.

1. Identify Partners and Create a Cooperation Map

The first step is to systematically identify potential cooperation partners in each municipality and across the Kurzeme Planning Region as a whole. This process should identify not only organizations that already engage volunteers, but also institutions and organizations that have access to potential volunteer groups.

Particular attention should be paid to:

- general and vocational education institutions;
- higher education institutions and student organizations;
- municipal youth centers;
- NGOs and associations;
- senior organizations and community centers;
- social service providers;
- businesses implementing corporate social responsibility initiatives;
- municipal institutions;
- local community organizations and initiative groups.

In practical terms, it is recommended to create a **Kurzeme Volunteer Cooperation Map** containing the organization's name, geographical area, contact person, field of activity, potential contribution to volunteer recruitment, and possible forms of cooperation.

Such a map would enable organizations to move from occasional contact-building towards systematic cooperation. For example, a social service provider could cooperate with a nearby school, municipal youth center, and local NGO to recruit volunteers or obtain material support for a specific event.

As a result, the main potential partners would be identified and clear areas of cooperation and contact persons established.

2. Develop Common Internal Procedures for Working with Volunteers

To ensure that volunteer engagement is safe, transparent, and consistently organized, each social service provider should develop a short and practical **internal procedure for working with volunteers**. This procedure should not be unnecessarily complex. Its purpose is to clearly define how the organization manages:

1. volunteer recruitment and selection (see the annex *Volunteer Application Form*);
2. communication of safety and confidentiality requirements;
3. volunteer induction;
4. definition of tasks and limits of responsibility;
5. regular communication and support;
6. completion of volunteer engagement and collection of feedback.

It is particularly important to distinguish volunteer tasks from the duties and professional competencies of social service staff. **A volunteer is not a substitute for a professional social work specialist.** Volunteer involvement should be organized in a way that complements professional services while ensuring the safety of both clients and volunteers.

The internal procedure should also include requirements relating to sensitive information, client privacy, confidentiality, safety, and appropriate action in unexpected situations. The organization should ultimately have a simple and clearly defined process that reduces uncertainty and facilitates cooperation for both staff and volunteers.

3. Appoint a Volunteer Coordinator

One of the most important prerequisites for high-quality volunteer engagement is **clearly assigned responsibility**. Each organization should therefore appoint a volunteer coordinator or designate a specific staff member whose duties include volunteer coordination.

The coordinator's responsibilities should cover the entire volunteer engagement cycle:

- maintaining contact with potential and current volunteers;
- coordinating recruitment and engagement;
- providing initial information and induction;
- organizing necessary training;
- maintaining volunteer records;

- providing feedback;
- addressing problems and challenging situations;
- organizing volunteer recognition activities;
- cooperating with external partners.

For smaller organizations, the coordinator does not necessarily need to be a separate full-time position. However, it is essential to clearly define who is responsible for this function and how much working time is allocated to these duties.

At the regional level, it would also be worth considering the establishment of a **professional community of volunteer coordinators**, enabling coordinators from different organizations to regularly exchange experience, address practical challenges, and jointly develop recommendations and other tools to support volunteering. This would help transform volunteering into an organized process with clear responsibility rather than an occasional additional task.

4. Establish a Volunteer Motivation and Recognition System

Volunteer recruitment alone does not guarantee long-term engagement or motivation. To reduce volunteer turnover and strengthen volunteers' sense of belonging, organizations need a **systematic approach to motivation and recognition**.

The findings particularly highlight:

- recognition and appreciation activities;
- certificates or other forms of acknowledgement;
- benefits or discount schemes;
- opportunities to participate in training.

Organizations are therefore encouraged to develop a **volunteer motivation package**, which could include:

- a standardized certificate or acknowledgement template;
- letters of appreciation;
- public annual or seasonal volunteer recognition events;

- opportunities to participate in free training;
- experience-sharing activities;
- recommendations or formal confirmation of volunteer experience;
- symbolic benefits or discounts offered by partner organizations.

It is important that the motivation system is not designed solely around material benefits. In the social services sector, important sources of motivation can also include **gaining new experiences, developing skills, meeting new people, and developing a sense of belonging to the community.**

For young people in particular, volunteering can be linked to skills development, career exploration, teamwork experience, and demonstrable work experience. For seniors, social engagement, sharing life experience, and maintaining an active role in the community may be particularly important. As a result, volunteers receive clear feedback about the value of their contribution, feel recognized, and are encouraged to remain involved.

5. Participate in the Regional Cooperation Network

The capacity of individual organizations can be significantly strengthened when they do not have to develop all volunteer recruitment tools independently. It is therefore recommended to develop a **regional volunteer cooperation network.**

The functions of such a network could include:

- facilitating joint information exchange;
- connecting volunteers with organizations;
- organizing joint training;
- collecting and sharing examples of good practice;
- organizing experience-sharing events;
- implementing joint public awareness campaigns;
- cooperating with educational institutions and youth organizations;
- involving businesses in corporate volunteering initiatives;
- developing methodological materials and guidelines.

A **shared digital platform or database** could be particularly valuable, bringing together information about organizations, volunteering opportunities, required skills, training opportunities, and contact persons.

Such a system should function not merely as a platform for publishing volunteering opportunities, but as a **practical cooperation tool**. For example, a person interested in helping seniors could find several opportunities in their municipality, while a social service provider could communicate a specific need and receive support in finding a suitable volunteer.

This would create a regional system in which **organizations, volunteers, and partners can find one another more effectively and make use of shared resources**, providing a stronger foundation for the sustainable development of volunteering in the social services sector.

Cooperation Network Operating Model

To ensure that the cooperation network functions effectively in practice, it is recommended to organize it across several levels.

Social service provider level. The social service provider identifies the need, defines the volunteer assignment, appoints a coordinator, participates in volunteer recruitment, and ensures the volunteer's induction and integration into the organization.

Municipal level. The municipality facilitates cooperation among social services, youth centers, educational institutions, NGOs, and other local partners.

Partner level. Educational institutions, NGOs, businesses, and community organizations encourage potential volunteers to participate and support their involvement in specific initiatives.

Stages in Establishing the Cooperation Network

The cooperation network should be developed **not as a separate project with a limited implementation period, but as a long-term regional mechanism** that helps social service providers systematically recruit, prepare, coordinate, and retain volunteers. Such an approach would help shift volunteering from occasional assistance towards a structured human resource and community participation resource within the social services system.

In the long term, the cooperation network would provide:

- access to a larger pool of potential volunteers;
- more effective connections between volunteers and organizations;
- reduced workload for individual social service providers;
- more effective use of volunteer resources;
- consistent application of safety and confidentiality requirements;
- greater opportunities to organize joint training;
- transfer of good practices between organizations;
- increased participation of young people and seniors in community life;
- stronger intergenerational cooperation;
- greater involvement of businesses and NGOs in supporting social services.

It is recommended that the cooperation network be established gradually.

Stage 1 – Mapping and Assessment: mapping partners and organizations, identifying contact persons, and assessing existing resources.

Stage 2 – Minimum Standards: developing internal procedures, identifying safety requirements, and introducing the volunteer coordinator function.

Stage 3 – Capacity Building: providing training for coordinators, organizing experience-sharing activities, and developing methodological materials.

Stage 4 – Recruitment and Engagement: implementing joint public awareness campaigns and strengthening cooperation with schools, youth centers, NGOs, and businesses.

Stage 5 – Regional Integration: developing a shared platform or database, organizing regular experience-sharing activities, and implementing joint regional initiatives.

Stage 6 – Evaluation: regularly collecting and analyzing data, including the number of volunteers, duration of engagement, volunteer hours completed, organizational satisfaction, and other relevant indicators.

VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM

The purpose of this form is to learn about your interests, skills, availability, and preferences in order to identify the most suitable volunteering opportunity for you. Completing this form does not prevent you from clarifying or changing your preferences at a later stage.

Volunteering is organised physical or intellectual work performed by a natural person, voluntarily and without remuneration, for the benefit of society.³ Your involvement can provide valuable support to older people, young people, and other recipients of social services, while also giving you an opportunity to gain new experience, skills, and contacts.

First name, surname:

Age group:

- ☐ Under 15
- ☐ 16–18
- ☐ 19–25
- ☐ 26–40
- ☐ 41–60
- ☐ 61–75
- ☐ 76 and over

Place of residence / Municipality:

Telephone:

E-mail:

³ Volunteer Work Law, Section 2, Paragraph 1. Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, 18 June 2015.
Likumi.lv

Your current status:

- ☐ School student
- ☐ University/college student
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Looking for work
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Other: _____

What motivates you most to engage in volunteering?

(You may select more than one answer.)

- ☐ I want to help others
- ☐ I want to contribute to my community
- ☐ I want to gain new experience/new skills
- ☐ I want to meet new people
- ☐ I want to gain experience in the social services field
- ☐ I want to use my knowledge and skills
- ☐ I want to develop my communication and cooperation skills
- ☐ I want to spend my free time meaningfully
- ☐ Other reason: _____

Which target groups would you like to work with?

(You may select more than one answer.)

- ☐ Older people
- ☐ Young people
- ☐ Families with children
- ☐ People with functional impairments
- ☐ People with special needs
- ☐ People experiencing difficult social circumstances
- ☐ People who feel lonely or socially isolated
- ☐ Other groups: _____

Would you be interested in participating in intergenerational activities?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ I am not sure
- ☐ No

What type of volunteering would you like to engage in?

(You may select more than one answer.)

- ☐ Conversations and communication with older people
- ☐ Assistance with everyday activities
- ☐ Organising events
- ☐ Organising creative activities
- ☐ Organising sports activities
- ☐ Digital support and working with technology
- ☐ Assistance during events
- ☐ Information dissemination and communication
- ☐ Administrative support
- ☐ Remote volunteering
- ☐ Other: _____

Do you have previous volunteering experience?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How often would you like to participate?

- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Several times a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Several times a week
- ☐ Regularly, by prior agreement
- ☐ Only at specific events

How much time could you devote to volunteering on average?

- ☐ Up to 2 hours per week
- ☐ 2–5 hours per week
- ☐ 5–10 hours per week
- ☐ More than 10 hours per week
- ☐ I can adjust my time to a specific activity

When would it be most convenient for you to participate?

- ☐ Weekday mornings
- ☐ Weekday afternoons
- ☐ Weekday evenings
- ☐ Weekends
- ☐ Flexible / by agreement

Where would you prefer to volunteer?

- ☐ In my municipality
- ☐ In my local area
- ☐ In another municipality in the Kurzeme region
- ☐ Remotely
- ☐ It is not important – I will consider the most suitable opportunities

Are you able to travel independently to the volunteering location?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Would you be interested in participating in joint regional volunteering events?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

What would help you maintain your motivation the most?

(You may select more than one answer.)

- ☐ Certificate/official confirmation of my contribution
- ☐ Public appreciation/recognition event
- ☐ Opportunity to gain new experience
- ☐ Opportunity to meet new people
- ☐ Opportunity to participate in community events
- ☐ Benefits/discounts offered by partners
- ☐ Regular feedback
- ☐ Sense of belonging and being part of a team
- ☐ Other: _____

Are you willing to comply with the organisation's rules, safety requirements, and confidentiality conditions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I would like to receive additional information

Do you agree to participate in the necessary induction training before starting your volunteering?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Depends on the type of training

By completing this form, I confirm that the information provided is accurate and that I would like to receive information about opportunities to engage in volunteering.

☐ I agree to be contacted to clarify my interests and to be offered suitable volunteering opportunities.

☐ I agree to receive information about volunteering opportunities, training, and events.

Date: _____

Signature: _____
