



## D2.2 REPORT

### #REACT - “Rights & Equality - Active Citizens Together” - Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 Seminars

#### “The Future of Volunteer Centres and their role in Unlocking the Potential of Volunteers in Europe” Seminar

19-20 November 2024: MundoMadou Brussels/Atelier 29  
Brussels, Belgium

On 19-20 November, in Brussels, CEV hosted the seminar “The Future of Volunteer Centres and their role in Unlocking the Potential of Volunteers in Europe” as part of the REACT/BEV2030 seminars that form part of the VERA 2024 actions co-funded by the CERV programme. The event saw the participation of **120 citizens** from **20 countries** across Europe, of which there were 43 males and 77 females. CEV, as part of the CEV Spring Volunteering Congress in May 2024, had already co-hosted the first #REACT campaign & BEV2030 event ([Vote Volunteer Vision-VVV Seminar](#)) with 108 participants. These events are co-funded by our EU operating grant from [CERV, Volunteering Equality Rights Action \(VERA 2024\)](#).

The indirect target group of CEV work is the over 100 million volunteers in Europe, countless potential others, and the beneficiaries of their solidarity actions. CEV aims at creating a more enabling environment for volunteering, at removing barriers for people to be active citizens and expressing solidarity through volunteering and increasing overall recognition of, and appreciation for their contribution. The focus on citizen engagement in Europe and promoting solidarity provides the opportunity to connect these developments with the role of volunteering and the way in which it unites citizens in their local communities and across the EU through shared interest and selfless, solidarity actions with those in need and for the promotion of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Volunteering is an effective vehicle for citizen engagement and democratic dialogue. It is a main agent of a true social transformation that supports social inclusion, equality, and solidarity. It underpins active citizenship, community resilience and citizen engagement; and it promotes shared responsibilities, European values, good governance and transparency. Volunteer centres play a central role in local communities where citizens are active and engaged in the decision-making process. In CEV’s policy publication the [Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 \(BEV2030\)](#) (serves as the main and most up to date guidance tool for all stakeholders wishing to see the full potential of volunteering in Europe realised) is highlighted that good cross-sector collaboration at the local level

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between the public and private sectors (profit and not for profit), for communities of all sizes and situations, has high potential as a driver of value creation that is crucial for sustainable development, as well as for disaster preparedness and risk reduction. This collaboration enables different stakeholders to face threats together and contribute to common, sustainable solutions to existing and future challenges.

Discussions in the 2022 CEV Autumn Volunteering Congress in Gdansk had already highlighted the importance of Volunteer centres in playing a crucial role in communities by acting as hubs that connect people who want to volunteer with opportunities to make a meaningful impact. How they support local organisations by helping them find and manage volunteers, offer training to ensure effective service, and work to promote a culture of volunteerism in the community was also underlined. Additionally, the fact that they foster social cohesion, helping people from various backgrounds work together toward shared goals, which strengthens community ties and inclusivity was stressed. Beyond these immediate impacts, volunteer centres also support individuals' personal and professional growth. Volunteers gain skills, build networks, and find purpose through their involvement, which benefits both the community and the volunteers themselves.

Volunteer centres play a vital role in building stronger, more connected communities. Here are some key functions<sup>1</sup>:

1. **Connecting Volunteers and Opportunities:** Volunteer centres act as a bridge between people who want to volunteer and organisations or causes that need help. They often have a database of opportunities, matching skills and interests to roles in the community.
2. **Supporting Organisations:** Many community organisations, especially smaller ones, rely on volunteer centres for resources, guidance, and recruitment support. Volunteer centres often provide training on best practices in volunteer management, making these organisations more effective.
3. **Building Skills and Capacity:** Volunteer centres provide training and workshops, equipping volunteers with valuable skills that benefit both the community and the volunteers' personal or professional development.
4. **Encouraging Civic Engagement:** By promoting the value of volunteerism, volunteer centres inspire community members to engage in civic life, building a culture of participation, responsibility, and mutual support.

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<sup>1</sup> Revealed value of volunteering: A volunteer centre network (2020), Jakub Dostál

5. Responding to Community Needs - Community Resilience: Volunteer centres often have a pulse on what's happening in the community, making them responsive to immediate needs—whether organising disaster relief efforts, addressing social issues, or offering support for new community projects. Volunteering is an important part of community resilience. It is crucial therefore for volunteering to be an integral part of the community planning for crisis prevention and response. Volunteering in crisis situations needs special attention, planning and organisation. This should be proportional to the potential risks and take into account all the knowledge, experiences and potential of civic activism and volunteers and staff of organised civil society.

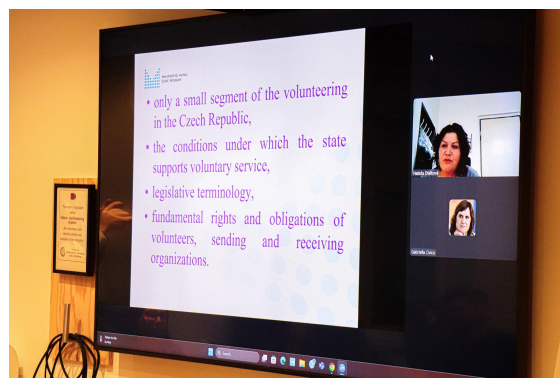
6. Creating Social Networks: These centres bring together diverse groups of people, fostering friendships and connections that enhance community cohesion, reduce social isolation and tackle loneliness. Volunteer centres empower individuals to contribute meaningfully, help organisations thrive, and create resilient communities where people feel connected and supported.

The seminar was moderated by **Amy Woods, CEV Board member and included interventions from** four experts in the field.



**Lucas Meijs, Professor at the [RSM, Erasmus University Rotterdam](https://www.rsm.nl/)** gave an intervention via a recorded video. He referenced the research paper "*The role of volunteer centres: Creating a healthy volunteer resources ecosystem*". He emphasized that volunteering materializes from volunteer energy, a resource inherent in society and that volunteer-involving organizations translate this energy into action. The fact that someone must safeguard the future of this resource base was highlighted and that volunteer centres play a vital role in this respect, fostering a healthy ecosystem for volunteering. They harness volunteer energy, transforming it into action through organizations. According to Professor Meijs, the volunteer ecosystem comprises four main areas: individual volunteers, volunteer-involving organizations, supporting entities like volunteer centres, and the

broader social and historical context. His presentation attested that volunteer centres are uniquely positioned within this ecosystem to connect stakeholders across these layers. They engage with individuals, organizations, and policymakers, advocating for policies that create a favourable environment for volunteering. Their unique position ensures a sustainable future for volunteer engagement and energy. Find his video [here](#).



**Nataša Diatková**, an **Expert for Volunteering**, at the **Ministry of Interior, Government of the Czech Republic** joined online to share the practice from the Czech Republic concerning volunteer centres. She presented the upcoming national volunteering strategy, emphasizing the central role of regional Volunteer Centres in its design and delivery. She explained why the Government believes volunteers have this central role and what it involves in practice. In contrast to trends in other countries, which lean towards less funding for actual centres and more support for online apps, in the Czech Republic they have chosen to invest in supporting volunteering centres. Still under development and open to consultation CSOs can submit their proposals to the draft national volunteering strategy until the end of 2024. The strategy aims to be the first systematic document for the development of volunteering in the Czech Republic. It sets general objectives to support the development of volunteering, creates a new body, the Council for Volunteering (at the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic) – an advisory body, and sets the infrastructure of volunteering in Czechia: regional volunteer centres, to which 300,000 Euros per year will be devoted. She underlined that the strategy will be implemented through action plans with specific measures and deadlines for 2025-2027 and 2028-2030. Find her presentation [here](#).

**Marjo Salmela** from **Kansalaisareena Finland** presented their new **Guide to Sustainable and Responsible Volunteering**. This guide offers an in-depth overview of the starting points of responsible and sustainable volunteering as well as concrete tools for the responsibility work of organisations and volunteering communities. With the guide,

participants can find out what kind of operating methods that are already widely used support responsible and sustainable volunteering. They can also get to challenge their current thinking patterns and awaken a new way of thinking about the future. In addition, volunteer-involving organisations & volunteering organisations can find comprehensive instructions on how they can prepare a responsibility program for their organisations or communities, accompanied by various exercises. Although volunteering is taking responsibility at its best, mere activity is not automatically sustainable or responsible. She emphasized the importance of looking beyond the 2030 agenda to envision the future, stating that new goals must include the voices of people, volunteers, and civil society. According to her, governments and profit-driven businesses alone cannot define these future goals. *“That is why it is important for many communities that when organising voluntary activities to think about how the activity is implemented so that it produces long-term good - both within the community for volunteers and employees and outside the community”*, she concluded.



**Sharon Meaney from the [Clare Volunteer Centre, Ireland](#)** discussed how volunteer centres strengthen communities by driving resilience and response. She shared that Ireland is one of the few European countries with a government-funded, but not government-led, volunteer centre in every locality. Sharon highlighted that there are 29 volunteer centres across the country, and the National Volunteering Strategy (NVS), launched in 2020, was developed collaboratively with the volunteer centres and Volunteer Ireland playing a central role. The volunteer centres served as intermediaries and facilitators, bridging the local concerns with the national government during the creation of the NVS. Volunteer centres are directly responsible for implementing around 20 of the 56 actions outlined in the strategy. The (NVS) launch coincided with the pandemic, which presented unexpected challenges. A swift shift was required to provide an immediate and direct response to local communities, with the national network playing a crucial role in enabling local volunteer centres to effectively disseminate information and guidance to communities.

Another compelling example of the empathy, engagement, and resilience demonstrated by volunteer centres and volunteers was their response to the arrival of displaced people due to the war in Ukraine. Recognizing the opportunity to support incoming refugees, the Government of Ireland worked with volunteer centres to mobilize efforts and provide critical assistance to those arriving in the country. In reflecting on the learning from supporting communities in responding to both the Covid-19 pandemic and the arrival of displaced people, Sharon detailed the learnings of a social impact analysis carried out in 2022/2023 which explored how a rural community in North Clare responded, mapping the processes of community support and capacity building, especially in volunteer engagement and management. Expanding on the future of volunteer centres, Sharon explained how the role of the volunteer centre has expanded from a volunteer brokerage service to being part of a framework that builds sustainable communities where effective community engagement and collective capacity is supported and encouraged, she finished by identifying some of the key impacts, resilience, quick response, robust service delivery, resourcefulness and a rising rate of repeat volunteers. Find her presentation [here](#).



The discussion emphasized the importance of revitalizing the rural way of life as a sustainable practice, with Finland identified as a potential example supported by EU funding and subsidies. Volunteering was recognized for its significant impact, bringing meaning and fostering community engagement without requiring extensive resources. Encouraging sustainable volunteering is also seen as a way to address climate anxiety by creating spaces for dialogue and collective action. Young people in the Czech Republic were highlighted as one of the largest contributors to volunteering, driven by motivations such as having fun, feeling recognized, and understanding the impact of their efforts. However, integrating volunteering into schools remains a key challenge, as it is currently done on an ad hoc basis, often relying on individual teachers or partnerships with NGOs. Despite these hurdles, funding is available to raise awareness and encourage young

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people to engage in volunteering, helping them develop valuable skills and competences while contributing to their communities in the Czech Republic.

Some of the participants underlined that regional cooperation among volunteer centres was another critical focus to prevent isolation and enhance effectiveness. This can be achieved through networking initiatives, the sharing of best practices, and collaborative events, such as an annual mobility week in April in Czechia dedicated to volunteering. These efforts aim to foster a sense of unity and learning between volunteer centres. However, the sustainability of funding remains a concern. While volunteer centre funding is embedded within the autonomous budget of the Czech Ministry of Interior, offering some protection, it is still at risk of cuts by incoming governments. Maintaining stable and secure funding is essential to ensure the continued operation and impact of these centres. This financial uncertainty, coupled with challenges in scaling and integrating volunteering into broader societal structures, underscores the need for strategic planning and advocacy at both national and regional levels.



At the end, **Ellen Vervoort from [Mechelen Municipality \(EV Capital 2025\)](#)** presented the speech of the Alderwomen Rina Rabau Nkandu. She emphasised that Mechelen will be the first Belgian city to carry the prestigious title of European Volunteering Capital and that it is a unique honour and a powerful affirmation of what they represent: solidarity, citizenship, and an inclusive commitment. She underlined that in 2025, they will celebrate everyone who dedicates themselves to helping others, and they will continue investing in supporting their volunteers and the organizations that work with them. *“Sharing knowledge and learning from each other’s experiences is something we strongly prioritize. And together, we are building a year full of recognition for our volunteers. A year in which Mechelen, on behalf of all these volunteers and associations, and of course the CEV, will shine as European Volunteering Capital. The title of European Volunteering Capital is not only a recognition, it’s a responsibility. Volunteers are incredibly important to our city, to our world. We couldn’t do without them, and we truly value them. In 2025, we want to*

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*emphasize this even more. And we want to share that appreciation for volunteers with other cities in Belgium and Europe. Solidarity is universal, and it's something we must work on together, across the borders of our city and our country” she concluded. Read the full speech in Annex 2.*

**The second part of this Seminar was held on 20 November 2024**, and involved presenting and discussing the draft recommendations that had been drafted according to the previous session presentations and discussion. Amy Woods, CEV Board member presented the 15 draft recommendations and opened the floor for discussion and comments.



During the interaction with the audience, **several key points were raised**, particularly that efforts should be made to promote AI literacy among volunteers and organisations, providing the necessary tools and knowledge to use AI effectively while at the same time involve volunteers in the development and deployment of AI tools, ensuring their perspectives and needs are considered in the design and implementation processes.

When it comes to public institutions engaging volunteers, some examples were shared such as in Sweden, volunteers are engaged in public sectors like elderly care homes and in Ireland, municipalities involve volunteers primarily in non-profit events (e.g., local fun runs) as part of efforts to understand and engage volunteers. Across Europe, engagement varies widely due to cultural and traditional differences. For example, museums often rely on volunteers, while certain healthcare sectors also involve them. The debate over public versus private engagement in volunteering remains open.

It was also underlined that Volunteer centres play a vital role in fostering inclusion and accessibility, supporting local organisations to adapt to flexible and sporadic volunteering trends. Inclusion efforts extend beyond traditional groups (e.g., people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups) to include individuals seeking new methods of volunteering. Volunteer centres are better equipped than municipalities to respond swiftly to crises without waiting for formal requests for assistance.



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It was emphasised that collaboration among volunteer organisations strengthens resilience and enables faster, more effective actions in crises. Volunteer centres connect volunteers, municipalities, and national entities while focusing on improving the roles of volunteer managers and mentors to prevent burnout, enhance retention, and maintain well-being. Intergenerational and peer-to-peer learning, facilitated by volunteer centres, builds community ties (e.g., creating spaces for informal exchanges like coffee meet-ups). Partnerships with formal and non-formal education providers allow volunteer centres to act as connectors in fostering learning and development.

Also participants talked that there are significant disparities between municipalities regarding funding and support for volunteer centres, impacting their operations. In Portugal, volunteer centres often function as part of municipalities, which can work well but are subject to political changes that affect stability. When it comes to international cooperation and crisis response, limited local budgets often hinder international gatherings, yet the growing role of volunteers in global crises underscores the importance of international collaboration. CEV together and CEV members facilitate opportunities for international cooperation, including events like their congresses.

**The discussion and conclusions from these exchanges have been used to formulate the final recommendations below.**

**In order that Volunteer Centres and other forms of volunteer support and infrastructure entities are empowered to play their full role in unlocking the potential of volunteers in Europe they should:**

**1. Be properly resourced and funded: ROBUST**

**1.1** In order to **increase sustainability and recognition** for Volunteer Centres, public funds should be accessible to all civil society organisations that respect human rights and European values through open calls for proposals. Sustainable, long term funding for volunteering infrastructure organisations in particular should be increased and protected. Funding and resources that also enables them to develop capacities for volunteer impact measurement should also be specifically allocated.

**1.2 Capacities to support and guide new forms of volunteering** that are emerging due to changing lifestyles and social attitudes should be increased through suitable and sufficient support from public/ state sources being provided to volunteer infrastructure organisations that can in turn build capacity in grassroots organisations in this regard.

**1.3 Community Crisis management can be enhanced** when policymakers integrate Volunteer Centres in their crisis management plans from the beginning. Volunteer

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infrastructure organisations are ideally placed to designate and train volunteers and volunteer leaders for emergency response, enhancing community resilience and ensuring local resources are mobilised efficiently in times of need. Resources and political support should be available that lead to formalising the role of volunteer centres in local disaster and crisis response frameworks which is especially necessary in the current geopolitical climate where all trends indicate it is going to remain precarious for some time and volunteers will be required ever more frequently to build resilience and respond to disasters.

## 2. **Be Values Based: RELEVANT**

**2.1 Democracy can be strengthened and polarisation reduced** by investing in Volunteer Infrastructure organisations that have unique leadership roles ideal for promoting and supporting values based volunteering. By setting standards for values-based volunteering, centres can ensure alignment with ethical principles, safeguard volunteers from unintended associations, and maintain and advocate for the integrity of volunteering as a values-driven action on the basis of solidarity that contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals.

**2.2 European Values can become a reality** by ensuring that volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and volunteer infrastructure organisations are implicated as key stakeholders in improving society and reaching equal opportunities for all, not just as deliverers of tasks and services but also having a meaningful role in: social cohesion; interpersonal relationships; bringing people together and keeping the communication and dialogue open between ourselves and each other.

### **2.3 Exploitation of volunteers, particularly in for-profit settings should be avoided.**

Volunteer centres and other infrastructure organisations are ideally qualified to establish clear guidelines to assess and manage volunteering opportunities, including controversial ones. This includes evaluating roles for: potential job substitution and/or exploitation of volunteers in for-profit settings; affiliations with organisations not aligned with human rights and EU Values; and assessing the suitability for intended volunteer roles as regards the private or public nature of the setting.

## 3. **Support the matching of supply and demand to quality volunteering initiatives: RECEPTIVE & RESOURCEFUL**

**3.1 Volunteering that is inclusive and sensitive to the new employment situations** in which many citizens find themselves (gig economy, WFH, zero hour contracts etc) as well as AI developments, can be enabled and supported for potential and existing volunteers by

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volunteering infrastructure organisations that should lead by example. They can foster an inclusive approach to volunteer engagement that emphasises the importance of people from different situations and backgrounds volunteering together for a common cause and shared vision. The use of digital tools for matching supply and demand should be used in an ethical and appropriate way (See BEV2030 5.5) and the environmental impact related to digital carbon footprints of such systems should be evaluated.

**3.2 Initiatives that bring together volunteers from diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities and emphasise the added value of an approach that is inclusive for people of all ages** should be invested in. Volunteer centres should respond and adapt to shifting volunteering and societal trends and facilitate and support the supply and demand for inclusive volunteering projects that build social networks, reduce isolation & tackle loneliness, and strengthen the social fabric of communities, ensuring connectedness and supportiveness.

**3.3 Through fostering inclusive volunteering opportunities, in projects and initiatives that meet quality standards** and are appropriate for the societal context, Volunteer Centres are ideally placed to enhance social inclusion, improve community cohesion, develop intergenerational solidarity and empower people with disabilities to more actively contribute to society, going beyond a role that is limited to placement brokerage.

#### **4. Play a key role in Capacity Building for Community Resilience: RESPONSIVE & RESILIENT**

**4.1 Strong cross-sector collaboration is essential** for a well functioning volunteering infrastructure from the local (municipality) level to European levels. Volunteer centres, agencies, platforms or networks specialised in supporting and promoting volunteering contribute hugely to societal capacity to identify and respond to common challenges particularly in crisis situations and should not be subject to uncertainty related to political election cycles.

**4.2 Community initiatives and pop-up voluntary initiatives are increasingly relevant** for the development of civic engagement, inclusion and community responsibility to make a change in line with EU values. Volunteer infrastructure organisations at all levels can play a crucial role in fostering and promoting quality developments in these directions including playing a role as “Community hubs” to contribute to ensuring that volunteers “feel part of something” and can have suitable recognition for their roles.

**4.3 Investing in the development of the quality of the role and practice of volunteer managers and mentors** that will help cultivate thriving and relevant volunteer

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programmes leading to high impact, is essential for Volunteer infrastructure Organisations as part of their core activities. This should have a particular focus on ensuring the physical and mental health and well being of volunteers.

**4.4 Intergenerational, as well as peer to peer Learning and innovation,** are central aspects to which volunteer infrastructure organisations can contribute. This can be particularly impactful in the areas of Critical Thinking and Media Literacy. Volunteer centres should support and empower volunteer-involving initiatives that encourage critical thinking and media literacy as a route to more democratic and less polarised societies. Volunteer-led workshops where citizens can learn how to critically analyse information, identify misinformation, and engage in constructive dialogue can be especially powerful. By equipping volunteers and volunteer leaders with these skills, volunteer centres can help reduce stereotypes & prejudices and polarisation and promote informed, balanced discussions.

**4.5 Volunteer centres can also collaborate with formal and non-formal education providers** to develop media literacy campaigns especially in the framework of Service Learning programmes. Promoting media literacy helps create an informed citizenry that can engage meaningfully in democratic processes and resist divisive narratives.

Presentations from the Seminar are available [here](#), while more pictures are accessible [here](#).

## ANNEX 1

### AGENDA

<b>Part I - 19/11/2024 (MundoMadou Brussels)</b>	
<b>10:30 - 12:00</b>	Welcome & Opening Moderator: Amy Woods, CEV Board member
	The role of volunteer centres in creating a healthy ecosystem for volunteering - Video by Lucas Meijs, RSM, Erasmus University Rotterdam
	Case Study from Czech Republic - Nataša Diatková, Ministry of Interior, Government of the Czech Republic (online)
	A Guide to Sustainable and Responsible Volunteering - Marjo Salmela, Kansalaisareena Finland
	Strengthening Communities: How Volunteer Centres Drive Resilience and Response - Sharon Meaney, Clare Volunteer Centre, Ireland
	Discussion and first ideas/ drafting for the recommendations
	Ellen Vervoort from Mechelen Municipality (EV Capital 2025)
<b>Part II - 20/11/2024 (Atelier 29)</b>	
<b>09:00 - 10:30</b>	Presentation, discussion, amendments and approval of the final recommendations



## ANNEX 2

### Full speech of Alderwomen Rina Rabau Nkandu

And a very warm welcome on my behalf and, by extension, from the city council of Mechelen.

In 2025, after hosting the Special Olympics and Construct Europe, Mechelen will once again be in the European spotlight. This time as the first Belgian city to carry the prestigious title of European Volunteering Capital. It is a unique honor and a powerful affirmation of what our city represents: solidarity, citizenship, and an inclusive commitment.

With the support of the Centre for European Volunteering, Mechelen will continue to elevate volunteering on the European stage. In 2025, we will celebrate everyone who dedicates themselves to helping others, and we will continue investing in supporting our volunteers and the organizations that work with them. Because our volunteers contribute so much: they support people in need, offer homework assistance, combat loneliness, and back a wide array of activities across our cultural, sports, and community sectors. They help keep our streets clean, green our neighbourhoods, and care for the well-being of animals. This dedication strengthens our city and creates opportunities both for others and for themselves. And they are many: 1 in 5 residents of Mechelen participates in volunteer work!

Guided by this spirit, we are committed to promoting volunteering throughout Europe, in collaboration with the Centre for European Volunteering. Through the European Solidarity Corps, we connect our youth to volunteering experiences across Europe and reinforce the recommendations outlined in the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030. The title of European Volunteering Capital is not only a recognition, it's a responsibility. This is why, at the beginning of 2025, we will be welcoming distinguished guests, from European delegations to the royal family, to a festive opening event here in Mechelen. During the Week of the Volunteer in March, we will officially endorse our commitment by signing the memorandum that describes our role as Volunteering Capital. And just as today, the city of Mechelen, together with all participating organizations, is dedicated to creating a memorable program for the spring congress with activities, knowledge-sharing, and inspirational moments. Looking even further ahead, we promise a grand closing event in December 2025 that will be unforgettable. But let's not get ahead of ourselves just yet.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's clear by now: volunteers are incredibly important to our city, to our world. We couldn't do without them, and we truly value them. In 2025, we want to emphasize this even more. And we want to share that appreciation for



Volunteering Equality  
Rights Action  
VERA 2024



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volunteers with other cities in Belgium and Europe. Solidarity is universal, and it's something we must work on together, across the borders of our city and our country. Sharing knowledge and learning from each other's experiences is something we strongly prioritize. And together, we are building a year full of recognition for our volunteers. A year in which Mechelen, on behalf of all these volunteers and associations, and of course the CEV, will shine as European Volunteering Capital.

Then all that is left for me is to wish you an inspiring and enjoyable day.