

IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS

A Manual for International Voluntary Service
Organizations

2025

MANUAL

This manual is conducted in the framework of the project "ICON - Capacity building for the IVS movement in impact assessment, communication, and community building" implemented by INEX, PVN, CCIVS and GAIA Kosovo, with the financial support of the European Union.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

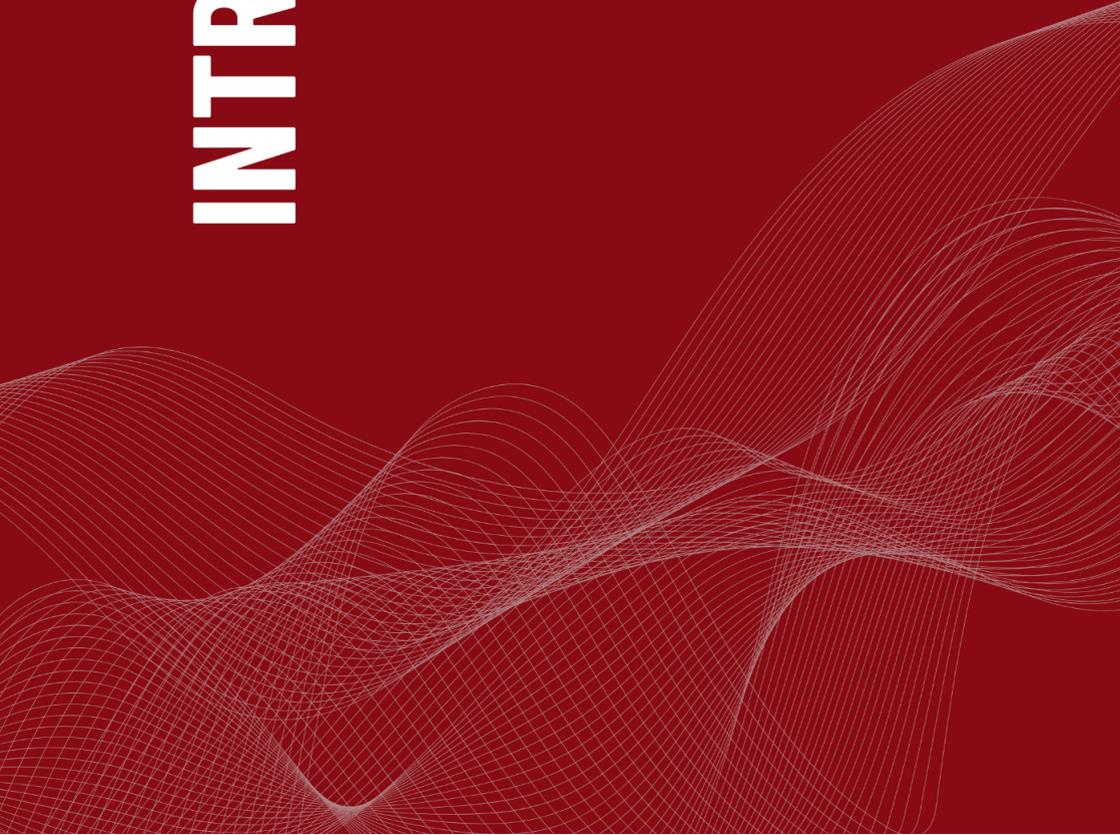
Disclaimer

The content of this manual reflects the views of the authors only and does not necessarily represent the official position of the European Union. The European Union is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herei.

Table of Contents

.....	3
Introduction: Why This Manual?.....	5
Understanding Impact: What It Is and Why It Matters.....	9
Getting Started with Impact Assessment.....	12
Tools & Methods.....	24
Tips & Insights from the Field.....	31
Making It Sustainable.....	36
Results of the Impact Survey 2025.....	41

INTRODUCTION



Introduction: Why This Manual?

Short note from the team

This manual was created by project coordinators representing four organizations, from Czechia, Albania, France and Kosovo. The organizations have considerable experience when it comes to project management, working directly with local communities in their countries and creating impact locally and internationally. Thus, this manual was developed to share experiences and good practices when it comes to understanding and measuring our impact.

We hope this manual will be a supportive tool for organizations and initiatives that want to reflect on their position in their own societies and what they can achieve to create a bigger change.

What inspired the creation of this manual

The "**Impact Assessment Guide for IVS Organizations**" was developed as part of the ICON project, coordinated by INEX-SDA. "**ICON - Capacity building for the IVS movement in impact assessment, communication, and community building**" is a project under the Erasmus+ programme's Capacity Building in the field of Youth initiative, involving four partner organizations across Europe.

Each partner organization brings unique expertise and perspective:

INEX-SDA (Czech Republic) has fostered international voluntary work and intercultural education since 1991. Their mission centers on creating opportunities for active participation in society and gaining valuable knowledge through volunteering experiences supporting people in their personal, civic, and professional development.

The Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) (France) is an international NGO dedicated to developing and coordinating voluntary service worldwide. It connects volunteers with grassroots communities within a global framework to build a more solidary, equitable, and regenerative world. CCIVS promotes global citizenship, where we collectively take responsibility for everyone's well-being.

PVN Albania has worked since 2004 to promote peace culture and foster social justice, democracy, and human rights through advocacy and lobbying. Their work

spans both international and local levels, creating meaningful volunteer opportunities.

GAIA Kosovo creates spaces where people from diverse backgrounds can meet, talk, listen, and develop mutual understanding. Through educational and volunteering activities focused on the environment, sustainability, permaculture, environmental education, and natural building, they aim to restore relationships between people and with nature, working at grassroots levels to build communities based on Earth care, people care, and fair share.

While our organizations differ in specific focus areas, **volunteering is our work's core**. The ICON project brought us together to enhance our capacities and improve the impact of what we do, as well as our ability to measure it and build upon it.

Project Focus and Objectives

The ICON project aims to **increase the quality, impact, and reach of volunteering activities (including their inclusivity and environmental sustainability) by building organizational capacity in three key areas: impact assessment, external communication, and community building.**

The main objectives of the project are to:

- Strengthen **staff competencies** in impact monitoring, external communication, and community building;
- Increase the **quality and impact** of our activities, especially in active citizenship, competence development, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability;
- Improve **promotional effectiveness** toward new young volunteers (especially those with fewer opportunities);
- Establish **sustainable funding strategies** for volunteering activities;
- **Inspire other IVS organizations** to enhance their practices in these areas.

Who the manual is for and how to use it

This manual is designed primarily for staff and volunteers in organizations working with volunteers who want to assess their impact at any level. However, we welcome anyone who finds value in these tools and methods to apply them to their work. With the manual, we wish to share theoretical input and tools, as well as our insights coming from direct experience, on the following:

The manual provides a comprehensive overview of impact assessment, including:

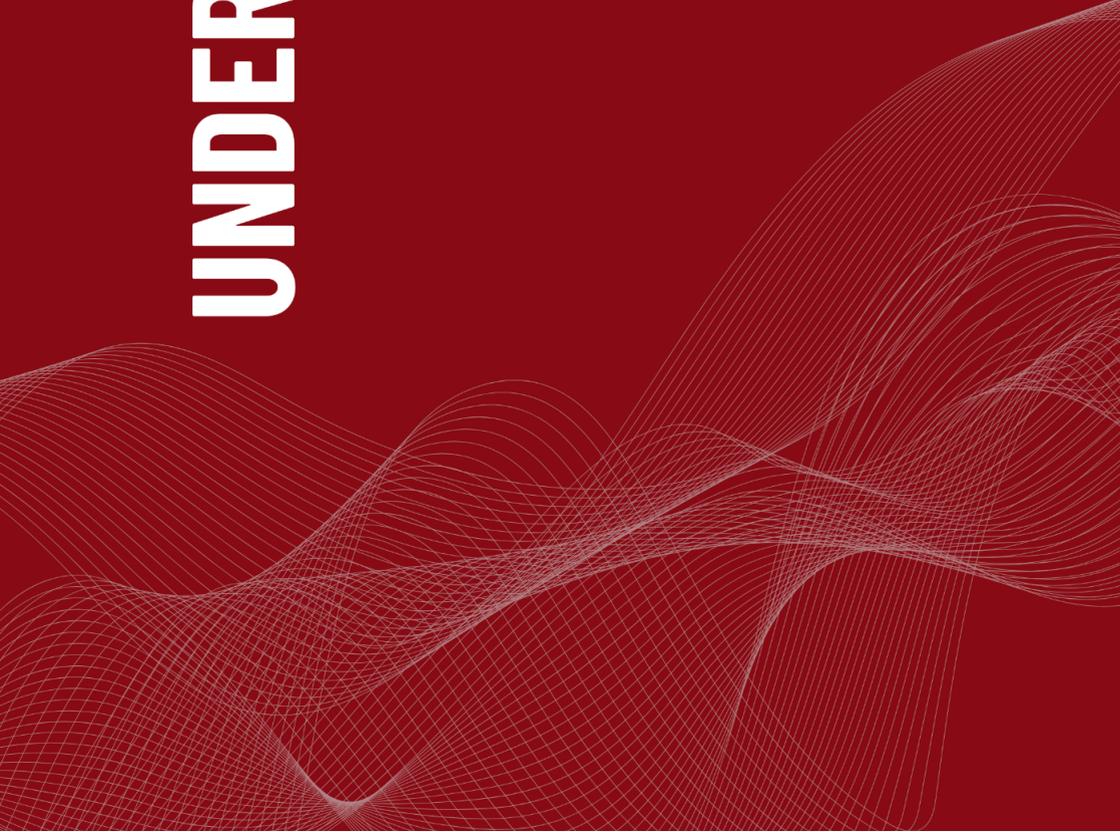
- The concept of impact and its significance;
- Step-by-step implementation guidance;
- Practical tools and methods;
- Tips, best practices, and common mistakes to avoid.

You can use this manual in several ways:

- Read it cover-to-cover for a comprehensive understanding of impact assessment.
- Jump to specific sections that address your current needs.
- Use the templates and tools included in the Examples in practice chapter.
- Learn from the examples to see how these methods were applied and how they benefited our organizations.

Above all, we encourage you to adapt these approaches to your unique context: impact assessment should never be a one-size-fits-all process but rather a flexible framework that serves your organization's specific mission and goals.

UNDERSTANDING IMPACT



Understanding Impact: What It Is and Why It Matters

What is the impact?

"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." - Jane Goodall

Impact is the powerful influence or effect that actions have on people, communities, systems, or environments. It represents the meaningful changes that occur as a result of your organization's work—changes that extend beyond immediate activities and outputs.

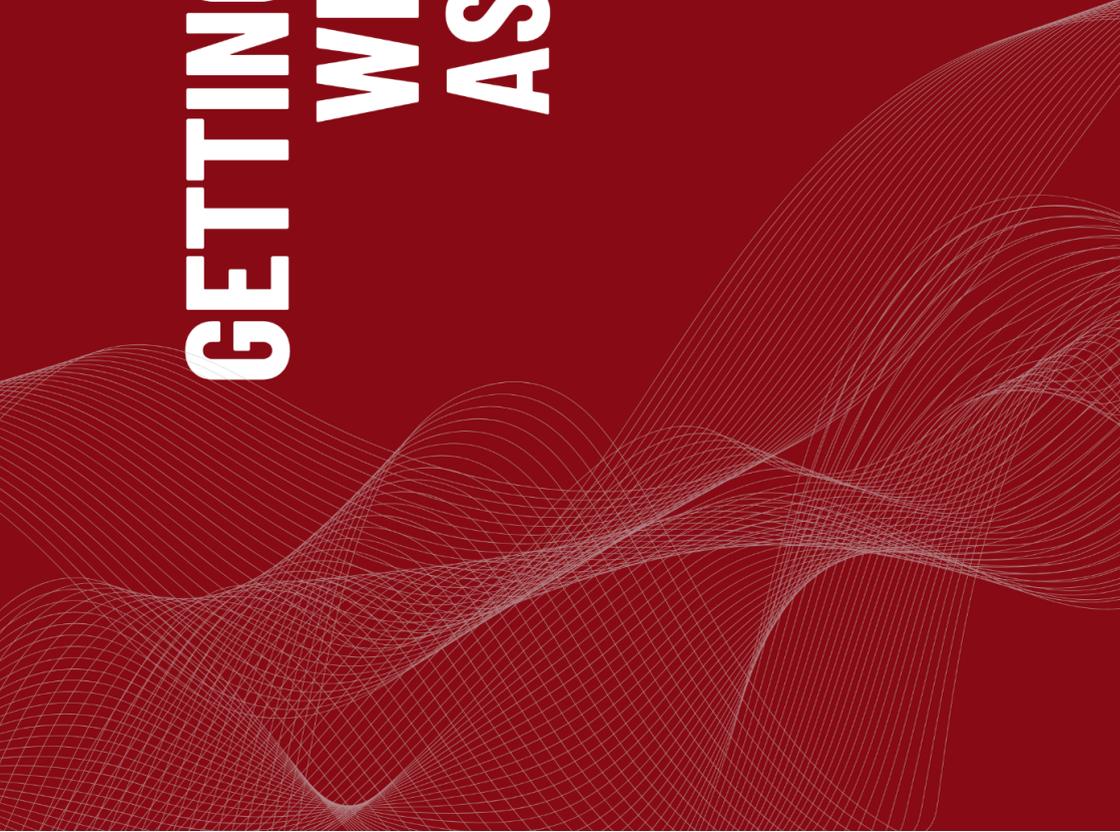
For those of us in the non-governmental sector—whether as volunteers, members, or staff—we're driven by a desire to create positive change in the world. We want our impact to extend beyond our personal lives and contribute to the broader causes we care about.

Every organization has a vision and mission, which translate into objectives achieved through specific activities. Creating a meaningful impact means consistently moving closer to that vision by generating positive change in society. This is why monitoring and understanding our impact is essential—it tells us whether we're truly making the difference we set out to make.

Depending on your organization's mission, you might be creating impact on:

- Individuals (e.g., personal growth of members, volunteers, and/or beneficiaries, development of competencies, as well as of a sense of agency);
- Communities (e.g., social cohesion, improvement of the relationships between different groups, increased support and acceptance towards diversity, etc.);
- Environment (e.g., conservation, disaster risk reduction, prevention of further degradation, environmental education);
- Education (e.g., experiential learning, value-based learning, informal and non-formal learning, and education);
- Human rights (e.g., awareness and advocacy, or the direct improvement of the position of a certain group)
- Culture (e.g., heritage preservation, the improvement of the cultural offer in a certain area or community).

GETTING STARTED WITH IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Getting Started with Impact Assessment

1. Define your purpose

Before diving into impact assessment, clarify why you're doing it. Are you looking to improve programs, demonstrate value to funders, motivate volunteers, or all of the above? Your purpose will shape every subsequent decision in the process.

Ask yourself:

- What specific questions do we want to answer?
- How will we use the information we gather?
- Who will be the primary audience for our findings?
- What resources can we commit to this process?

Consider these questions:

- Why do you want to implement impact measurement? What specific benefits do you anticipate?
- How will the results improve your work and decision-making?
- Who will benefit from this process, both internally and externally?
- To whom will you present the results, and with what purpose?
- What resources (time, expertise, funding) can you dedicate to impact measurement?
- How do you currently use data, and how will the data on impact fit into existing systems?

Example: INEX-SDA wanted to understand how their international workcamps affected volunteers' intercultural awareness and attitudes over time. This clear purpose helped them design targeted assessment tools that measured these specific dimensions of impact.

Impact measurement is the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information about the effects of your work. It involves both qualitative and quantitative assessments based on measured observations, providing evidence that can inform multiple aspects of your organization.

When our organizations implement activities or develop strategies, we envision specific goals. Every action produces effects—some intended (planned and projected) and others unintended (spontaneous and additional). Impact

measurement helps us understand these effects by identifying, quantifying, and assessing them at various levels.

There are several compelling reasons to invest in impact measurement:

Mission Alignment: Impact measurement helps us understand if our activities are genuinely contributing to our organization's mission and vision, bridging gaps between daily operations and long-term goals.

Learning and Improvement: By systematically evaluating our work, we gain insights into what's working well and what needs adjustment. This continuous learning cycle leads to more effective programs and activities over time.

Credibility and Trust: When we can demonstrate our impact with evidence, stakeholders, including volunteers, partners, communities, and funders, develop greater trust in our organizations.

Resource Allocation: Understanding which activities create the most significant positive change helps us allocate limited resources more effectively.

Staff and Volunteer Motivation: When team members see concrete evidence of how their work contributes to positive change, it boosts morale and deepens commitment to our mission.

Storytelling and Communication: Impact data provides compelling stories and evidence for our communications, helping us advocate for our cause more effectively.

Strategic Decision-Making: Regular impact assessment informs strategic planning, helping our organizations adapt to changing circumstances while staying focused on our mission.

Beyond these organizational benefits, impact measurement strengthens our teams' capacities: the process requires dedicated staff to assess needs, develop frameworks, communicate with stakeholders, and process data—all valuable skills that enhance organizations' overall effectiveness. Moreover, when we analyze impact data, we can develop a deeper appreciation for our work and its significance, fostering greater motivation and commitment.

Finally, clear impact data can attract support from donors who want to invest in organizations that demonstrate meaningful change.

2. Identify stakeholders and beneficiaries

Impact doesn't occur in isolation—it affects and involves various groups. Identifying who experiences change from your activities is crucial for a comprehensive assessment.

In volunteering projects, these groups usually include:

- Volunteers (local, regional, international)
- Regular staff members
- Volunteers' coordinator and other involved staff
- Host communities as the final beneficiaries of the projects' activities or outputs, and local participants
- Partner organizations (sending organizations, or local partners)
- Networks of volunteering organizations
- Funders and supporters
- Local government or authorities
- The broader society

For each stakeholder group, consider:

- What changes might they experience from your activities?
- What indicators would show that these changes are occurring?
- How can you meaningfully engage them in the assessment process?

Remember that stakeholders aren't just sources of data—they're partners in the impact assessment process. Involving them from the beginning leads to more relevant, useful, and ethical evaluation.

3. Map your Theory of Change

The term Theory of Change (ToC) emerged in the 1990s as a new way to articulate the underlying strategic assumptions behind social and political change projects. Nowadays, the Theory of Change is widely used as a core campaign strategy and planning tool by activists, organizers, NGOs, charities, and even business and professional bodies.

By mapping the logical connections between our actions and the changes we aim to create, the Theory of Change provides a powerful framework for understanding how our activities lead to impact. It is focused in particular on mapping out the “missing

middle” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to the achievement of desired goals.

At its core, the Theory of Change answers the question: "How and why do we think our activities will lead to our desired outcomes?"

It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then working back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these relate to one another causally) for the goals to occur. These are all mapped out in an **Outcomes Framework**.

With your purpose defined and stakeholders identified, develop a Theory of Change that explains how your activities lead to desired outcomes. This step transforms abstract goals into a logical pathway for creating change.

To create your Theory of Change:

- Start with your long-term impact goals
- Work backward to identify necessary preconditions
- Connect these to your organization's activities
- Identify assumptions underlying these connections
- Determine indicators that will show progress

This mapping process often reveals gaps in logic or new insights about how change occurs through your work. Don't rush this step—a well-thought-out Theory of Change provides the foundation for meaningful impact assessment.

The Outcomes Framework establishes a foundation for determining which specific activities or interventions will generate the outcomes that serve as prerequisites for reaching your ultimate objective. This contributes to a clearer understanding of the direct connections between daily actions and long-term goal achievement.

This clearer understanding helps you plan better because your activities are based on really knowing how change happens. It also helps you measure your progress more effectively by letting you track how you're moving toward your bigger, long-term goals, not just counting how many programs or services you delivered.

Once these conditions are mapped, you can determine specific actions to establish each one.

The Theory of Change uses "if/then" statements to show how one thing leads to another. For example, if you want to **make short-term international volunteering more popular with teenagers**, your theories might include:

- If we create catchy social media campaigns promoting the positive experiences of young volunteers, then more teenagers will learn about these and want to participate.
- If we provide financial support, then the cost won't be a barrier for teenagers who want to volunteer abroad.
- If we connect past teenage volunteers with current students to share their stories, then potential volunteers will better understand the benefits and feel more confident about participating.

Each "if/then" statement explains your belief about what action will lead to your desired result.

Even though all these approaches have the potential to succeed, you should take into account any existing constraints on funding and organizational capacity, and the unique circumstances within your specific context, because of these, you'll typically need to prioritize the theory or combination of theories with the highest probability of success.

For the Theory of Change Canvas, [see the dedicated chapter](#).

4. Choose what to measure (outputs, outcomes, impact)

Once you map your Theory of Change, you should decide which elements you'll measure. Understanding the difference between outputs, outcomes, and impact is crucial:

Inputs are the resources invested in your activities. In the case of organizations that work with volunteers, some of the outputs will most likely be:

- Volunteer time and skills;
- Staff coordination;

- Training materials;
- Funding;
- Physical space.

Activities are the actions taken using these inputs. In your case, some of the outputs will most likely be (depending on the specific content and purpose of each volunteering activity):

- Educational workshops;
- Environmental conservation work;
- Reconstruction work;
- Cleaning and maintenance work;
- Community animation activities.

Outputs are the direct, tangible results of activities. In such cases, this most likely translates to these or similar (depending on the specific content and purpose of each volunteering activity):

- Number of volunteers trained;
- Trees planted;
- Meals cooked;
- Educational workshops delivered;
- Participants reached.

Outcomes are the medium-term changes produced by outputs:

- Increased knowledge or skills;
- Changed attitudes or behaviors;
- New friendships and friendly relationships formed;
- Improved conditions for the involved communities;
- Improved climate towards volunteering in the involved communities.

Impact represents the long-term, sustainable changes your work contributes to:

- Transformed communities;
- Lasting improvements (whether when it comes to education, culture, environment, or other, depending on the field or fields of activity);
- Systemic or cultural positive shifts towards volunteering;
- Changed life trajectories in volunteers, members, and staff.

While outputs are relatively easy to measure, outcomes and impacts offer deeper insights into your organization's effectiveness. A balanced approach typically measures elements at multiple levels.

Example from practice: During an international environmental workcamp, the inputs included funding, volunteer time, and educational materials. The activity was the workcamp itself, and the outputs included dozens of planted trees and environmental education sessions. Outcomes included volunteers' increased environmental awareness and cross-cultural understanding. The long-term impact might include continued environmental activism by participants and stronger international connections.

5. Select methods and tools

Quantitative vs qualitative approaches

Impact measurement typically involves two complementary approaches: quantitative and qualitative methods. With clear goals and metrics established, choose appropriate methods for collecting data. Your choices depend on what you're measuring, available resources, and the depth of information needed.

Quantitative methods provide numerical data that can be statistically analyzed. They answer questions like "how many," "how much," and "how often." Benefits include:

- Reaching larger numbers of participants efficiently;
- Generating comparable data across periods and programs;
- Providing clear metrics for reporting to stakeholders;
- Enabling statistical analysis to identify trends and patterns.

Common quantitative tools include:

- Surveys with closed-ended questions
- Rating scales (e.g., Likert scales from 1-5)
- Pre/post knowledge assessments
- Behavioral tracking (e.g., volunteer retention rates)

Qualitative methods capture rich, descriptive information about experiences, perceptions, and meaning. They answer questions like "how," "why," and "in what ways." Benefits include:

- Revealing unexpected outcomes and impacts;
- Capturing the nuance and complexity of change;
- Providing compelling stories for communication;
- Deepening understanding of how change occurs.

Common qualitative tools include:

- Open-ended survey questions
- Individual interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Participant journals and reflections
- Photo and video documentation
- Most Significant Change technique

Each method has strengths and limitations. Surveys can collect information from lots of people quickly, but they might not capture all the details or deeper meanings.

Interviews provide depth but require more time and resources. Often, combining methods (mixed-methods approach) provides the most comprehensive picture.

When selecting tools, consider:

- Cultural and age appropriateness;
- Language accessibility;
- Resource requirements;
- Participant burden in terms of time, energy, availability, and motivation;
- Data quality and reliability;
- Analysis capabilities.

Example in practice: GAIA Kosovo uses a mixed-method approach for their permaculture education programs. Quantitative surveys measure participants' knowledge gain and behavior changes, while qualitative interviews explore how the experience transformed their relationship with the environment and community.

6. Design your process

With methods selected, design a practical implementation process that fits your organization's context and capacity:

Timeline planning:

- When will you collect starting information (if applicable)?
- At what points during or after activities will you gather information?
- How will you follow up for a longer-term impact assessment?

Sampling strategy:

- Will you include all participants or a representative sample?
- How will you ensure diverse perspectives are captured?
- What sample size is needed for meaningful results?

Ethical considerations:

- How will you obtain informed consent?
- How will data be stored securely?
- How will you ensure confidentiality when appropriate?
- How will findings be shared with participants?

Resource allocation:

- Who will be responsible for data collection?
- What training do they need?
- What technology or materials are required?
- How much time should be budgeted for analysis?

A good process finds the right balance between being thorough and being realistic, so you can collect useful information without putting too much strain on what your organization can handle.

7. Collect, analyze, reflect, and act

The final step involves implementing your plan, making sense of the data, and using insights to improve your work:

Data collection:

- Follow your established timeline and methods
- Maintain consistency in how data is gathered
- Be prepared to adapt if challenges arise
- Document the process for future reference

Analysis:

- Organize data systematically
- Look for patterns, trends, and unexpected findings
- Compare results to your Theory of Change
- Consider alternative explanations
- Involve multiple perspectives in interpretation

Reflection:

- What do the findings tell you about your work?
- How do they compare to previous assessments?
- What surprised you, and why?
- What questions remain unanswered?

Action:

- Identify specific improvements based on findings
- Develop an action plan with the responsible parties
- Communicate results to relevant stakeholders, such as partners, networks, and funders
- Schedule a follow-up to track implementation

The point isn't just to gather information, but to create an ongoing process where you keep learning and using what you learn to make your organization work better and have a bigger impact.

Impact as change

CCIVS created Impact Measurement frameworks for its volunteer programs that build a path toward recognizing volunteering through three progressive objectives:

1. **Understanding:** Examining how practices and participant experiences influence each other, creating new knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward themselves, their communities, and the interconnected global society.
2. **Improving:** Enhancing the capacity of organizations, communities, and individual volunteers to positively leverage these accrued competencies and become conscious change agents.
3. **Valorizing:** Highlighting the unique processes and results that stakeholders create through International Voluntary Service interactions, giving them wider visibility across institutional and public spheres.

This approach utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods and centers on the concept of change as developed during the "Changing Perspectives" project coordinated by Solidarités Jeunesses France.

Change is defined as:

- An effect on individuals, collectives, or environments in the short, medium, and long term;
- Produced through interaction between individuals, communities, and environments in International Voluntary Service actions;
- Perceivable and capable of leading to social recognition or personal acknowledgment.

Finding what is important for your organization

Understanding what work can be evaluated and measured

As impact measurement gains importance across the nonprofit sector, organizations increasingly need to demonstrate their value to society. Volunteering inherently creates impact in communities, but capturing this impact requires clarity about what can be meaningfully measured.

Start with your organization's vision, mission, and objectives, as these provide the foundation for identifying relevant results. Consider:

- Who are your primary beneficiaries?
- What benefits does your organization provide?
- What is the quality of your activities?
- How do your activities support beneficiaries?
- What impacts occur in your communities?

From these considerations, develop key indicators that reflect your organization's unique impact. For volunteer organizations, indicators might include:

- Percentage of volunteers who continue volunteering after your activities;
- Rate of return for repeat volunteers;
- Skills development among volunteers;
- Attitude development among volunteers;
- Knowledge development among volunteers;
- Community perceptions of volunteer contributions;

TOOLS & METHODS

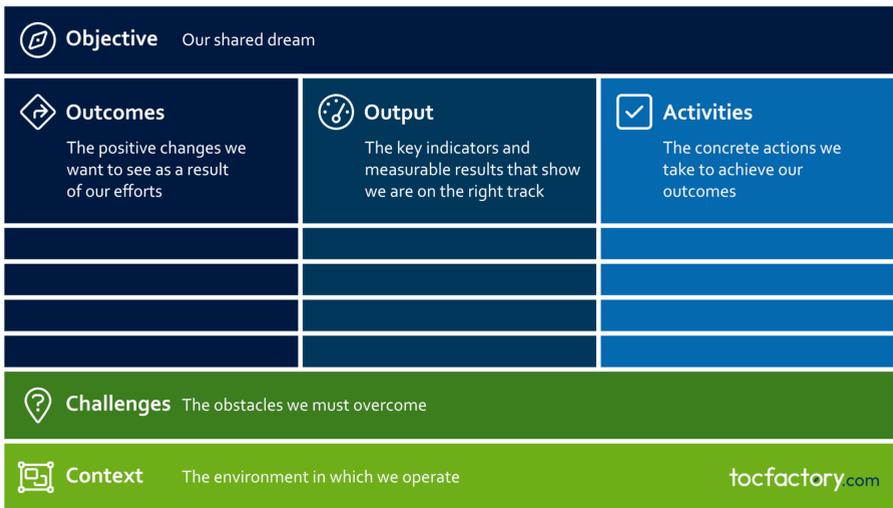


Tools & Methods

Within this manual, we have already introduced the Theory of Change. In this chapter, we will dive deeper to understand how to use the framework through **The Theory of Change Canvas**.

The Theory of Change Canvas is a practical model that helps you plan, execute, and monitor how you create impact. It consists of six core components: Objective, Outcomes, Output, Activities, Context, and Challenges.

Each component plays a role in guiding your strategy and ensuring you address the issues that matter most.



Objective:

It defines what you aim to achieve and how you intend to accomplish it. This statement should be both visionary and realistic. By clearly articulating the result you want and the method you will use, you create a strong foundation for everything that follows.

Outcomes:

Outcomes represent the positive changes you want to see as a result of your efforts. These changes should directly answer the challenges you face. By focusing on outcomes, you ensure your work goes beyond completing tasks and moves toward creating real, measurable impact.

Output:

It refers to the key indicators or measurable results that show you are on the right track. If outcomes describe the change you seek, output tells you how much progress you are making. Tracking these indicators allows you to adjust your approach when needed.

Activities:

The concrete actions you take to achieve your outcomes. This is where you detail the steps, initiatives, or projects you will implement. Defining activities helps you maintain focus and accountability.

Challenges:

Challenges are the obstacles you must overcome. They inform every step of the Theory of Change: from shaping your objective to choosing the right activities. By identifying and addressing challenges, your plan stays relevant and effective, even when faced with unexpected shifts.

Context:

It describes the environment in which you operate. It includes external factors, such as market conditions, technology trends, or social and political developments, that can influence your work. Understanding your context helps you adapt to evolving circumstances.

Examples of questions and surveys

Effective questions are the foundation of good impact measurement. Whether used in surveys, interviews, or other formats, questions should be clear, relevant, and designed to elicit useful information.

Types of quantitative questions:

Scale questions measure intensity of experience or agreement:

- "On a scale of 1-5, how much did this experience increase your understanding of environmental issues?"
- "Rate your confidence in communicating across cultures before and after the program."

Multiple choice questions offer standardized response options:

- "Which skills did you develop most during your volunteering experience? (Select up to three)"
- "How often do you now engage in the environmental practices learned during the project?"

Binary questions provide yes/no or true/false responses:

- "Have you volunteered again since participating in our program?"
- "Did you maintain contact with other international volunteers after the project?"

Types of qualitative questions:

Open-ended reflection questions invite detailed personal responses:

- "What was the most significant change you experienced as a result of volunteering?"
- "How has your perspective on community development evolved through this experience?"

Story-based questions elicit narrative responses:

- "Can you share a specific moment when you realized your work was making a difference?"

- "Describe a challenge you faced during your volunteering and how you overcame it."

Comparative questions explore before/after changes:

- "How would you describe your understanding of different cultures before and after the project?"
- "In what ways has your daily life changed since participating in this program?"

Example in practice: Partners of ICON project conducted pilot testing of their impact assessment surveys. In the following lines you can understand how these types of questions were presented.

Scale question: "How much did you learn about the topic during the activity?" With a proposed scale from 1 to 5.

Multiple choice question: "Did you notice any changes in your everyday behaviour following the activity?" With proposed choices and "Other" for the respondents to have an option to add their own perspective.

Binary question: "Did this experience help you in dealing with some of your fears, weaknesses or prejudices?" With "Yes" or "No" answers.

Open-ended question: "Please describe the social aspect of your experience in 1-2 sentences (what did you learn about yourself and the others, what do you miss, and what you don't miss, etc)."

Story based question: "What would you say is the most relevant change, skill, knowledge or connection you got from your experience?"

Comparative question: "Prior to participating in the activity, how much knowledge did you have about the activity topics?" With proposed choices and "Other" for the respondents to have an option to add their own perspective.

When and how to collect data

Timing and methods of data collection significantly impact the quality and usefulness of your impact assessment. Consider these factors when planning:

Timing considerations:

Baseline measurement (before activities):

- Establishes participants' starting point
- Allows for comparison to measure change
- Helps set realistic expectations

Immediate post-activity measurement (within days or weeks):

- Captures fresh impressions and immediate learning
- Usually yields high response rates
- May reflect temporary enthusiasm rather than lasting change

Medium-term follow-up (3-6 months later):

- Assesses which changes have been maintained
- Reveals how learning has been applied
- May show emergent outcomes not visible immediately

Long-term assessment (1+ years later):

- Evaluates sustainable impact
- Identifies lasting behavior and attitude changes
- Often more challenging to obtain responses

Data collection methods:

Digital surveys:

- Reach many participants efficiently
- Automatically compile data for analysis
- May have lower response rates
- Best designed for mobile compatibility

Paper surveys:

- Work in areas with limited connectivity
- Can be completed during in-person activities
- Require manual data entry
- May yield higher completion rates when distributed in person

Individual interviews:

- Provide rich, detailed information
- Allow for follow-up questions and clarification
- Requires significant time investment
- Works best with clear, consistent protocols

Focus groups:

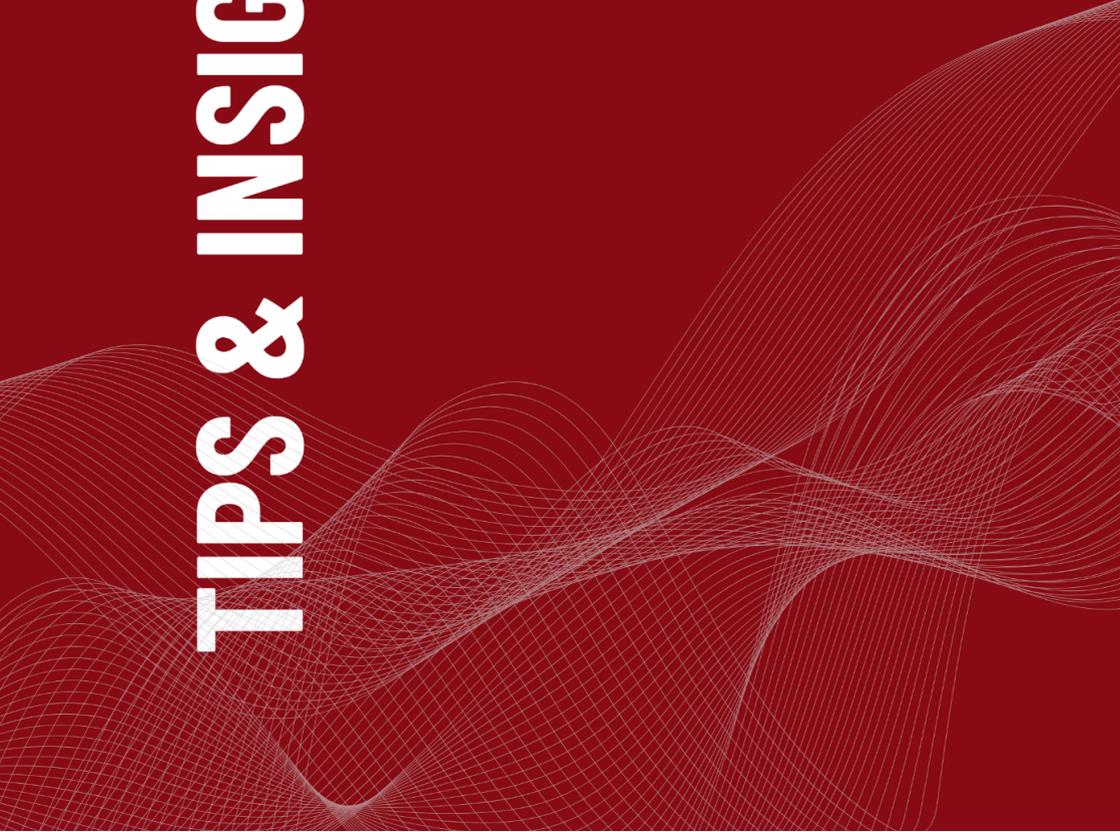
- Capture multiple perspectives efficiently
- Generate discussion and shared insights
- May be influenced by group dynamics
- Require skilled facilitation

Participatory methods:

- Involve participants in data collection and analysis
- Build capacity while gathering information
- Often yields more authentic insights
- Require training and coordination

For the best results, choose your timing and methods based on the specific questions you want to answer and what works for your organization.

TIPS & INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD



Tips & Insights from the Field

Best practices

Based on the collective experience of ICON partners, we've identified these best practices for effective impact assessment in volunteering organizations:

Start with clarity of purpose:

- Define precisely why you're measuring impact.
- Identify specific questions you want to answer.
- Link assessment directly to organizational learning and decision-making.

Keep it manageable:

- Begin with a modest, focused assessment rather than trying to measure everything.
- Choose depth over breadth—a few well-measured indicators are more valuable than many superficial ones;
- Design systems that match your organizational capacity.

Engage stakeholders meaningfully:

- Involve volunteers, communities, and staff in designing assessment approaches.
- Create opportunities for participatory analysis and interpretation.
- Share findings transparently with those who contributed data.

Create appropriate tools:

- Design assessment tools with your specific context in mind.
- Test and refine methods before full implementation.
- Balance standardization (for comparison) with customization (for relevance).

Build it into regular operations:

- Integrate impact measurement into existing processes rather than treating it as separate.
- Establish regular rhythms for data collection, analysis, and reflection.

- Dedicate specific staff time to impact assessment coordination.

Use findings actively:

- Schedule dedicated time to discuss and interpret results.
- Identify specific actions based on findings.
- Document how the assessment has influenced decisions and improvements.

What to do and what not to do in impact measurement

Even when you're trying to do the right thing, measuring impact can go wrong. Here are common mistakes and how to avoid them:

Measuring too much:

- **Do:** Focus on your most important indicators and keep assessments concise
- **Don't:** Create exhaustive surveys that overwhelm respondents and yield low response rates

Only measuring what's easy:

- **Do:** Balance easily measured metrics with deeper outcome and impact indicators
- **Don't:** Focus only on outputs (like number of volunteers) because they're simpler to count

Collecting but not using data:

- **Do:** Plan your analysis approach and decision points before collecting data
- **Don't:** Implement assessment systems without clear plans for analysis and application

Inappropriate timing:

- **Do:** Implement a thoughtful follow-up assessment to capture longer-term impacts

- **Don't:** Only measure immediately after activities when enthusiasm is highest

Ignoring negative or unexpected findings:

- **Do:** Create a learning culture that values honest assessment and continuous improvement
- **Don't:** Focus only on positive results and dismiss challenging feedback

Using language that doesn't resonate:

- **Do:** Frame questions in an accessible language relevant to participants' experience
- **Don't:** Use academic or technical evaluation terminology that confuses participants

Failing to close the feedback loop:

- **Do:** Develop transparent reporting practices that respect contributors' time and insights
- **Don't:** Avoid or forget to share findings with those who provided data.

Volunteer engagement: how to get responses

Gathering meaningful data mainly depends on volunteer participation. Because of that, you will need to put into practice effective strategies for maximizing response rates, such as these:

Communicate purpose clearly:

- Explain how the assessment will benefit volunteers, the organization, and communities
- Show examples of how previous feedback has led to improvements
- Frame assessment as an opportunity for reflection and continued engagement

Time it right:

- Send surveys when volunteers are likely to have time (avoid holiday periods)
- For post-program assessment, send within 2 weeks to 3 months after completion
- Send reminders strategically (typically 1 week after initial request)

Make it accessible and engaging:

- Keep surveys mobile-friendly and visually appealing
- Use progress indicators so respondents know how much remains
- Group questions thematically with clear section headers
- Add interactive elements when appropriate

Personalize communication:

- Address volunteers by referencing specific programs they participated in
- Include photos that evoke memories of their experience
- Have the person they worked with directly send the request

Show appreciation:

- Thank volunteers sincerely for their time
- Share how their input will make a difference
- Consider small incentives for participation when appropriate
- Follow up with key findings to show their input was valued.

MAKING IT SUSTAINABLE



Making It Sustainable

How to embed Impact measurement into your organization

For impact measurement to keep being useful to your organization over time, it needs to become a regular part of how you work, not just something you do once. Here's how to make impact assessment a lasting part of your organization:

Align with strategic priorities:

- Connect impact measurement directly to your strategic plan
- Ensure assessment addresses questions that matter for decision-making
- Review and update indicators when strategic priorities shift

Build staff capacity:

- Designate a specific responsibility for coordinating impact assessment
- Develop team skills through training and peer learning
- Create simple documentation of processes for knowledge transfer

Integrate into existing processes:

- Incorporate impact questions into regular activity evaluations
- Add impact discussions to team meetings and annual planning
- Connect impact data to budgeting and resource allocation decisions

Create supportive technology infrastructure:

- Develop simple, accessible systems for data storage and analysis
- Automate data collection when appropriate
- Ensure data security and ethical management

Establish regular rhythms:

- Create an annual impact calendar with key assessment activities
- Schedule regular data review sessions with the team
- Include impact discussions in annual reports and planning

Continuously improve your approach:

- Review and refine your assessment methods annually
- Gather feedback on the assessment process itself
- Stay open to new methods and approaches

Team roles and time management

To do good impact checking, you need to give each person clear jobs and plan your time well. In small organizations, the same people often do multiple jobs. The important thing is to clearly say who does what. Here's how to organize your team effectively:

You will need one **Impact Coordinator** to oversee the overall assessment strategy, ensure consistency in implementation, and manage data and documentation.

You will need a few **Data Collectors** (their number depends on the size of your organization, as well as the data you wish to collect): they will administer surveys or conduct interviews. These can be staff members, volunteers, or external associates. They will need clear protocols and basic training, and you should be aware that their commitment may vary.

You will also need one or more persons whose task will be to **analyze and interpret the collected data**: they will process and make sense of the collected data, identify patterns and implications, and come to written findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This or these individual(s) typically works in a concentrated period of time, which follows the data collection period.

Finally, one or more **communicators** can transform findings into accessible formats; develop reports, presentations, and stories; and connect findings to organizational narratives. Their time commitment aligns with reporting cycles.

Time Management Strategies

In order to make the Impact Assessment process smoother, especially if you are a small organization with a limited staff, volunteers, and/or resources (be it human, financial, or time-wise), it's important to organize your work so that Impact Assessment doesn't overwhelm you. For example, you could:

- Schedule specific times for Impact Assessment-related work, so that other urgent tasks don't push it aside.
- Group similar jobs together, like doing all data entry at once, to work more efficiently.

- Try to combine impact checking with meetings and work you already do.
- Train volunteers to help with some assessment tasks, if possible.
- Focus on measuring the most important things instead of trying to track everything.
- Use digital tools such as Google Forms, Google Data Studio, KoBo Toolbox, Survey Monkey, Canva, Mailchimp, and others to make routine data collection, analysis, visualization, and communication easier and more automatic.

How to use results (learning, funding, communication)

Impact data becomes valuable when actively used. Here are strategies for applying your findings in three key areas:

For organizational learning:

- **Reflection sessions:** Hold dedicated team meetings to discuss findings and implications.
- **Improvement plans:** Develop specific action items based on assessment results.
- **Benchmarking:** Compare findings across periods or program areas to identify patterns.
- **Testing innovations:** Use data to inform and evaluate new approaches.
- **Training content:** Incorporate insights into volunteer and staff training.

For funding and sustainability:

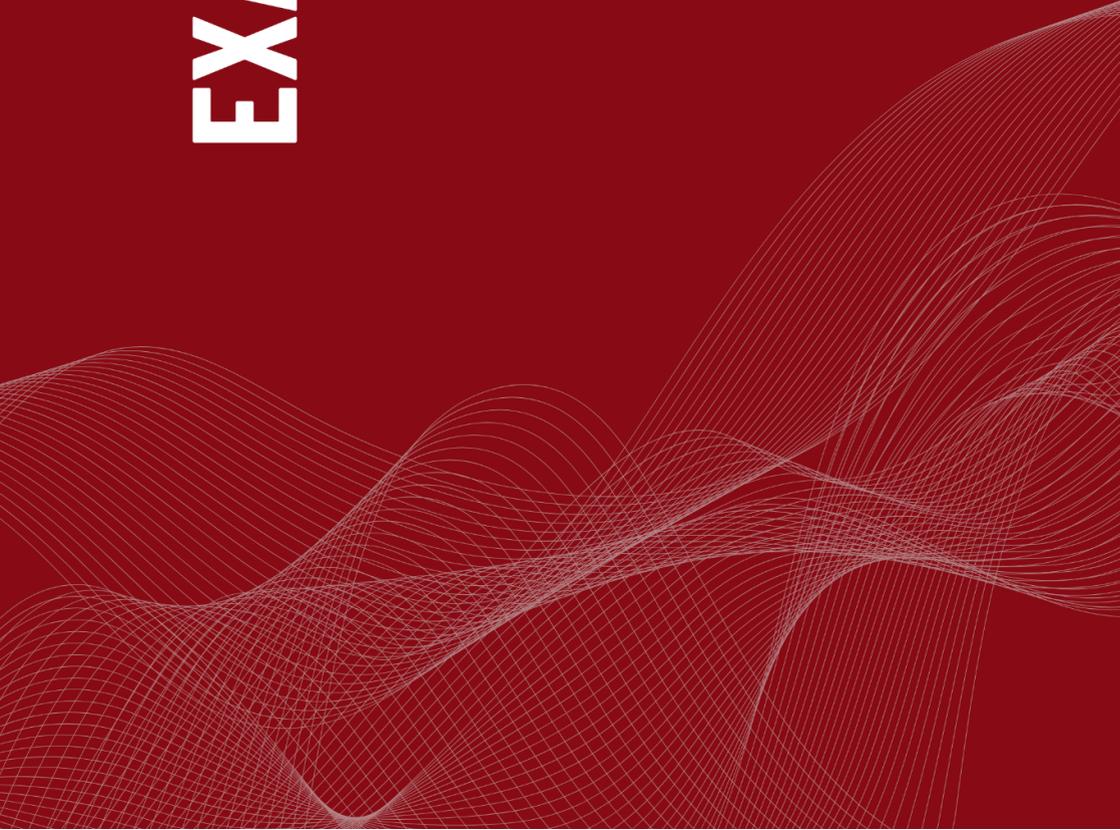
- **Grant applications:** Include impact data to strengthen funding proposals.
- **Donor reports:** Share compelling evidence of your organization's effectiveness.
- **Strategic partnerships:** Use impact evidence to attract collaborative opportunities.
- **Resource allocation:** Direct resources toward programs with demonstrated impact.
- **Efficiency improvements:** Identify cost-effective approaches and eliminate less effective activities.
- **Board presentations:** Provide concrete evidence to support strategic decision-making.
- **Fundraising campaigns:** Use success stories and data to demonstrate value to potential supporters.

For communication and advocacy:

- **Success stories:** Transform data into compelling narratives about individual beneficiaries.
- **Social media content:** Share key statistics and visual progress updates regularly.
- **Annual reports:** Present comprehensive impact evidence to stakeholders.
- **Website updates:** Keep online content current with the latest achievements and learnings.
- **Community presentations:** Share results with local partners and beneficiary communities.
- **Policy advocacy:** Use evidence to support broader systemic change efforts.
- **Media outreach:** Provide journalists with credible data to support coverage of your cause.
- **Peer learning:** Share findings with other organizations working on similar issues.

The most important thing is to use your impact information all the time to help make decisions, build better relationships, and help your organization grow, rather than putting the information in reports and neglecting it due to overwhelming amounts of work or prioritization of other tasks or directions of actions, or areas of activity.

EXAMPLES IN PRACTICE



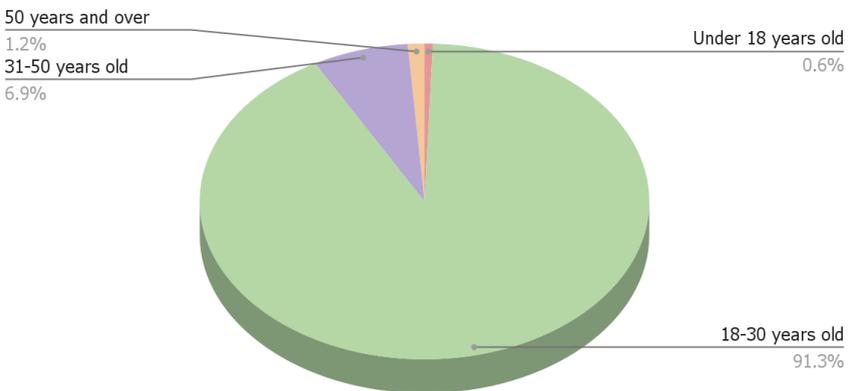
Results of the Impact Survey 2025

This 2025 Impact Measurement Survey collected responses from **333** participants involved in international volunteering service activities. The results provide an overview of participants' profiles, prior engagement in volunteering, and the perceived personal and developmental impacts of the experience.

Participant Profile

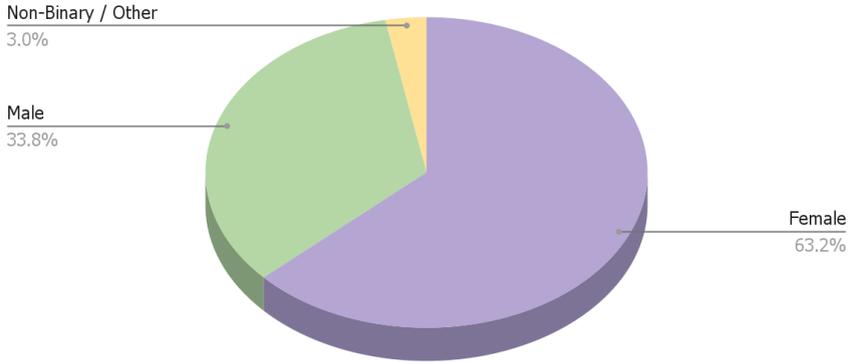
The majority of respondents were **young adults aged 18–30**, representing the dominant demographic in the sample, accounting for **~91%** of participants. Participation from older age groups was present but significantly lower than the 31-50 age group.

Age Distribution



In terms of gender identity distribution, respondents identified predominantly as **female**, accounting for **~63%** of respondents, followed by **male (~34%)**, and with **~3%** identifying as non-binary. This profile suggests the survey largely reflects the perspectives of young adult volunteers, a group typically highly engaged in mobility and civic participation programs.

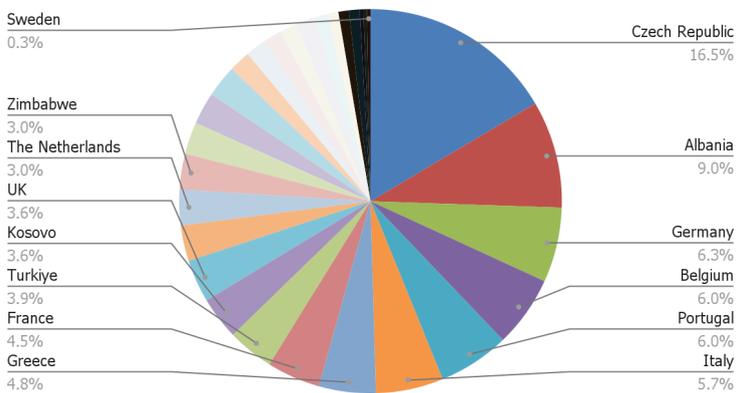
Gender Identity



Country Distribution

Participants represented a wide range of national contexts, with stronger representation from several European countries. This diversity reflects the international nature of volunteering initiatives and provides a broad cross-cultural perspective on the experience.

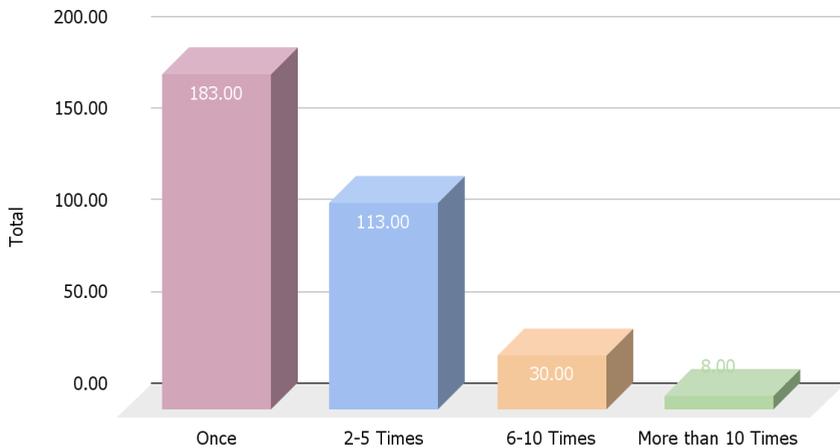
Participants by Country



Previous Volunteering Experience

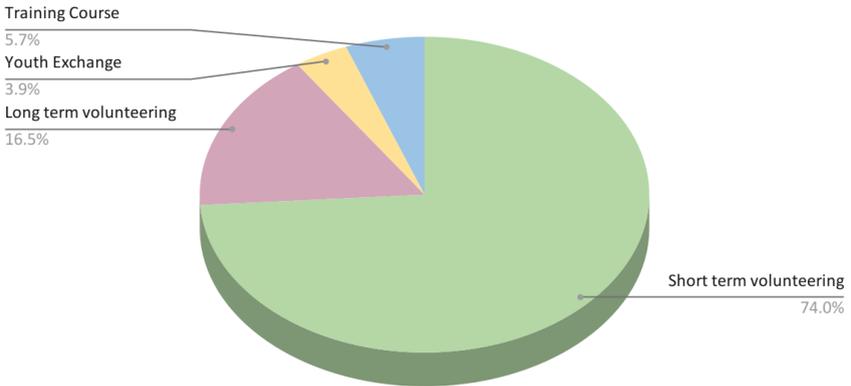
Most respondents had **limited prior volunteering experience**, with the largest group participating **for the first time (~54%)**, followed by those who had engaged **2–5 times (~33%)** previously. A smaller proportion reported extensive histories of volunteering. This distribution indicates that, for many participants, the activity represented an early or formative exposure to structured volunteering and international cooperation.

IVS Previous Volunteering Experience



IVS Activity type

IVS Activity Type



Impact Results

Thematic Analysis

This section presents aggregated self-assessment results across **23 indicators** measured on a 0–10 scale. Scores range from **~6.80 to ~8.19**, with an overall average close to **~7.85**, indicating **consistently positive and coherent participant perceptions**. To improve interpretability, indicators were grouped into four thematic domains that reflect key dimensions of participant development and experience.

1. Personal Skills and Agency

Average score: 8.07

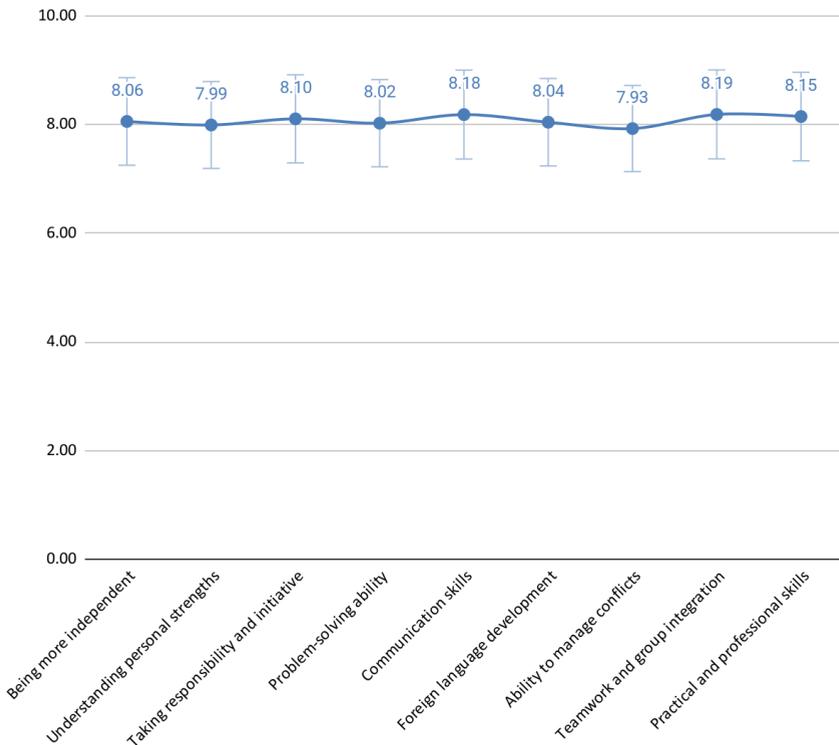
This domain captures functional, interpersonal, and adaptive competencies developed through the experience. It includes:

- Being more independent (8.06)
- Understanding personal strengths and weaknesses (7.99)
- Taking responsibility and initiative (8.10)

- Problem-solving ability (8.02)
- Communication skills (8.18)
- Foreign language development (8.04)
- Ability to manage conflicts (7.93)
- Teamwork and group integration (8.19)
- Practical and professional skills (8.15)

Scores in this group are the **highest and most stable** across the dataset. Participants consistently report strong improvement in communication, teamwork, initiative, and practical competencies. These findings indicate that the project effectively strengthened **transferable and interpersonal skills**, which are central to both personal development and employability.

Personal Skills and Agency



2. Social Awareness and Civic Orientation

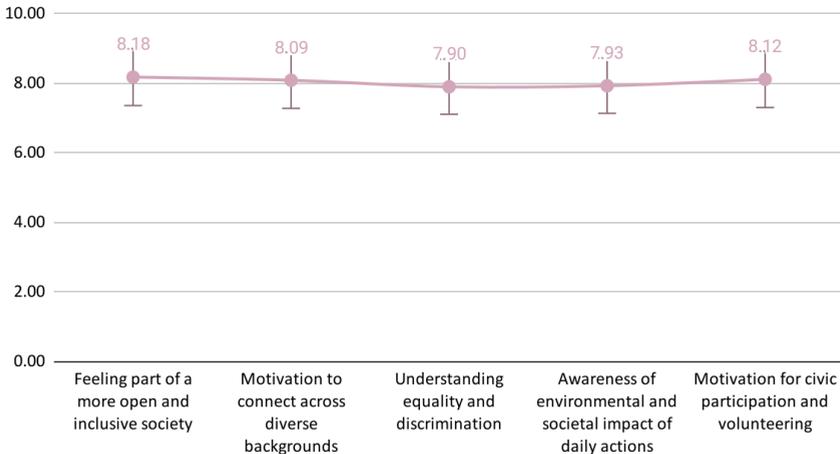
Average score: 8.05

This domain reflects participants' awareness of diversity, inclusion, and societal engagement. It includes:

- Feeling part of a more open and inclusive society (8.18)
- Motivation to connect across diverse backgrounds (8.09)
- Understanding equality and discrimination (7.90)
- Awareness of environmental and societal impact of daily actions (7.93)
- Motivation for civic participation and volunteering (8.12)

Scores remain consistently high, showing that the experience contributed to increased **social sensitivity, openness, and civic awareness**. Participants report stronger understanding of diversity and social responsibility, alongside increased motivation to engage in community and societal life.

Social Awareness and Civic Orientation



3. Project Experience and Perceived Work Value

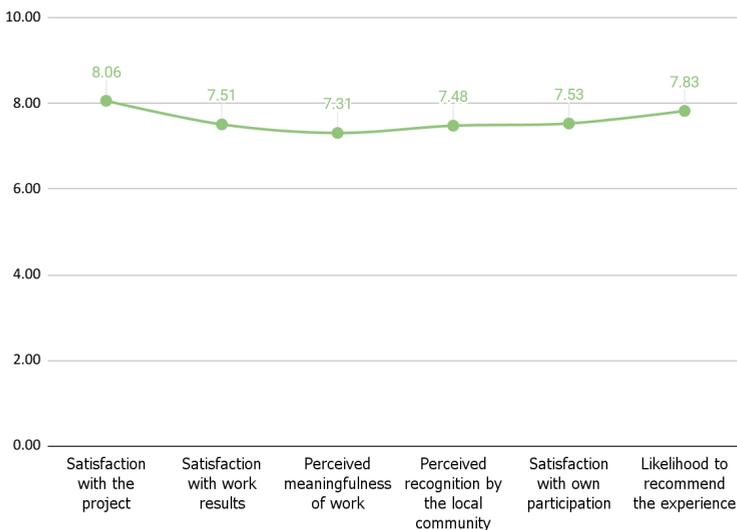
Average score: 7.62

This domain captures participants' evaluations of the project and the perceived value of their contributions. It includes:

- Satisfaction with the project (8.06)
- Satisfaction with work results (7.51)
- Perceived meaningfulness of work (7.31)
- Perceived recognition by the local community (7.48)
- Satisfaction with own participation (7.53)
- Likelihood to recommend the experience (7.83)

While still positive, scores in this category are **moderately lower than those of personal and social development indicators**. This suggests that participants valued the **learning and personal experience more strongly than the perceived external impact of their work**, a common pattern in experiential and volunteer-based programs.

Project Experience and Perceived Work Value



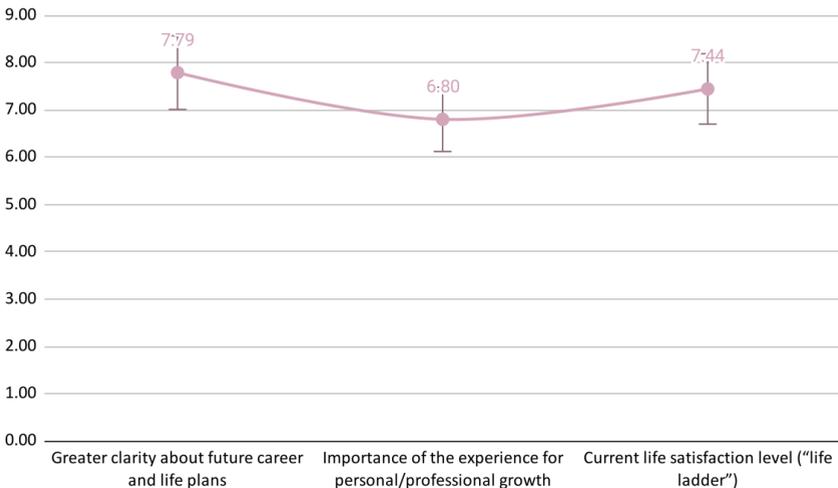
4. Future Orientation and Life Perspective

Average score: 7.34

This domain reflects perceived longer-term personal impact and life outlook. It includes:

- Greater clarity about future career and life plans (7.79)
- Importance of the experience for personal/professional growth (6.80)
- Current life satisfaction level ("life ladder") (7.44)

Future Orientation and Life Perspective



This group records the **lowest scores**, although they remain positive. The results suggest that while participants experienced meaningful personal development, the perceived long-term structural impact on career or life trajectory is less immediate. This pattern is typical of short-to-medium-term experiential programs, where deeper life effects often emerge progressively over time.

Overall Interpretation

The results demonstrate **strong and consistent developmental impact**, particularly in interpersonal skills, communication, teamwork, and social awareness. Participants widely report increased confidence, improved interaction abilities, and greater openness toward diversity and civic engagement. The experience is perceived as personally enriching and socially meaningful.

At the same time, participants assign slightly lower scores to the perceived external impact of their work and to the experience's longer-term influence on their life trajectory. This indicates that the primary value of the project lies in **personal and social development**, whereas structural or long-term effects may unfold gradually beyond the activity's immediate timeframe.

Overall, the findings present a **coherent, positive, and development-oriented impact profile**, consistent with the objectives of experiential learning, civic participation, and intercultural cooperation supported under European programme frameworks.

The development of the joint Impact assessment questionnaire offers us an overview of results across a wider geographical area, and it allows us to understand patterns better. The developed Impact measurement questionnaire, which was used by all partners during the Pilot 2 testing, can be found in Annex I, together with a few technical aspects for conducting the impact assessment.

At the end of the ICON project, we have already reached multiple organizations who have decided to adopt and use the developed Impact assessment questionnaire. Connecting this work to Alliance, SCI and CCIVS, means we have already tested it and the wider NGO community is aware of the questionnaire. In the upcoming years, we aim to promote it more through our networks in order to increase the number of results and provide us with strategic insights. We also want to work further with this questionnaire, as we see civic engagement and volunteering very connected, and creating supporting materials for policy changes could be a next step.

Annex I

Questionnaire for volunteering activities, developed through ICON project

Original	Answer Type
Email	Required
Name Surname (optional?)	Optional
What is your age?	Optional?
What gender do you identify with (optional)?	Optional
Country/ nationality	Required
Do you consider yourself part of a minority or an underrepresented group in your country? (could be optional)	Option: → If yes, can you elaborate
How many times have you been engaged before in volunteering or similar activities?	It's my first time 2-5 times 6-10 times over 10 times
What was the type of activity you participated in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Long term volunteering (EVS, ESC, Weltwaerts) * Short term volunteering (SCI workcamp, ESC team, scouts etc) * Civil Service * Workcamps * Youth exchange * Training course * Other (can specify what)

Original	Answer Type
1. I believe that participating in an international voluntary service project helped me to... Answer on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much)	
...gain more autonomy: prepare for a journey, travel alone, deal with administrative needs.	0 through 10 rating
...realise what my strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and potential are.	0 through 10 rating
...accept responsibilities and take initiative when the situation calls for it.	0 through 10 rating
...improve my ability to face and solve problems	0 through 10 rating
...improve my communication skills: listening to others, expressing my feelings and opinions.	0 through 10 rating
...improve my foreign language skills	0 through 10 rating
...develop my leadership skills and learn how to effectively lead a team. [LEADERSHIP]	0 through 10 rating
...improve my organizational skills: planning, coordinating, and managing activities. [ORGANIZATION]	0 through 10 rating
2. Thanks to my participation in an international voluntary service project, I also feel... Answer on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much)	
...more capable to face and solve conflicts with other people.	0 through 10 rating
... better equipped to integrate a group and be part of a team: to work, to play, to cooperate together.	0 through 10 rating
...that I live in a more diverse and inclusive society.	0 through 10 rating

...more motivated to meet and interact with people from different backgrounds (cultures, values, age groups, social and economic situations).	0 through 10 rating
...that I have a better understanding of the different opportunities and discrimination linked to gender, cultural ethnic or social origin.	0 through 10 rating
"...more able to reflect on things from different perspectives and question taken-for-granted assumptions." [CRITICAL THINKING]	0 through 10 rating
"...more prepared to face uncertainty, adapt to new situations and deal with unexpected challenges." [RESILIENCE & ADAPTABILITY]	0 through 10 rating
<p>3. Finally, after taking part in an international voluntary project, I believe that...</p> <p>Answer on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much)</p>	
...I have gained some work-related and professional skills (such as using tools or techniques, working with my hands, working in a team, etc.).	0 through 10 rating
...I am more clear and optimistic about my future career and perspectives.	0 through 10 rating
...I have a better understanding of the consequences of my daily actions on the environment, culture and society.	0 through 10 rating
...I am more motivated to be active and involved in the society (volunteering, engaging for the environment, minority groups, campaigning, etc.).	0 through 10 rating
"...more aware of environmental issues and the importance of sustainability." [ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS]	0 through 10 rating

4. About your experience, we'd like to know... Answer on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very much)	
...how satisfied are you with the project you have joined?	0 through 10 rating
...how satisfied are you with the practical results of the work performed during the project?	0 through 10 rating
...how meaningful do you think the work performed during the project was?	0 through 10 rating
...how much do you feel the local community appreciated the work done?	0 through 10 rating
...how satisfied are you with your own involvement and active participation in the project?	0 through 10 rating
...how would you rate your willingness to recommend this experience to your close friends or family?	0 through 10 rating
...how relevant do you think this experience is to your personal/professional development?	0 through 10 rating
5 Imagine an eleven-run ladder where the bottom (0) represents the worst possible life for you and the top (10) represents the best possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?*	0 through 10 rating
OPEN QUESTIONS	
What motivated you to join this activity?	Open-ended
Did the project change how you approach your daily life (e.g. habits,	Open-ended

values, decisions)?	
Looking back at your volunteering experience, what skills or abilities do you feel you've developed? Which of them are you most aware of?	Open-ended
How do you think this experience and the skills you've gained will impact your future and enhance your employability?	Open-ended
Would you do such experiences again or recommend it to someone else?	Open-ended
Is there anything you'd like to share with us — any suggestions, feedback, or thoughts about your experience?	Open-ended
Can we contact you again to measure the impact in the long term?	Open-ended

Additional technical aspects that are noted as relevant when conducting impact assessments:

1. Collection of data

The partners mainly used Google-Form to collect data, and having explanations on the importance of data collection supports the participants to fill it in. Also, creating a visually attractive form is helpful, as it has a more approachable appearance.

Even though our organizations generally collect data anonymously, it is recommended to include an optional question about respondent's contact in the end (with regard to contacting them again afterwards), if your organization wants to follow long-term impact.

2. Timing of conducting the impact assessment

Examples of partners when it comes to timing: from 2 weeks after the activity to several months after the activity. The experience in getting answers also depends on timing - you might get more respondents directly after the activity, however, in that case no long-term impacts can be observed.

The experience of the ICON project and two Pilot testings showed that the best ratio of respondents and diverse impact (reflection on both short-term and longer-term impact) depends on the type of the project. It is recommended to adapt the channel of communication based on the respondents and enter additional communication.

It is possible to conduct the impact assessment:

1. Immediately after the activity: most participants will respond, however, it is difficult to differentiate what is a reflection of the experience itself and what is impact
2. 2 weeks - 1 month after the activity: most participants will respond, however, it will not show the long-term impact results
3. At the end of the season or after a longer period of time (6+ months): participants need to be informed in advance that they will be asked to fill it in the questionnaire and why it is important, in this case more impact (both short-term and long-term) can be measured, however, communication is key in receiving responds

It is recommended that impact assessment is presented during each activity, and that engagement of volunteers to fill in the questionnaire is a common responsibility of coordinators and volunteers.

3. Example impact assessment communication

A common way to share the questionnaire would be sending it out through email, however, it can be shared through newsletters or direct communication, especially through social media (WhatsApp groups, etc.). Younger generations are not using email communication regularly, thus an appropriate communication channel is needed.

Example of email communication:

Dear volunteers and friends,
I hope you are doing well!

After years of welcoming and hosting participants to a range of activities in different communities around [your region of work], [the organization] wants to hear about the impact of these experiences.

We kindly ask you to take a bit of time to fill in this impact survey [insert a link to the questionnaire], it should take between [number] and [number] minutes to fill it in.

There are 3 sections with questions that will help us discover patterns, but we've also included a few open questions where you can share your personal reflections and story.
[Description of the questionnaire can also be different, depending on your impact focus.]

Please fill in this questionnaire by [date of deadline], so we have enough time to analyse the data before next volunteering season!

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to write to [organizations email or contact persons email].

Kind regards,
[contact person for impact measurement]
on behalf of [organization]

