



Volunteer Rights



Framework

A Rights-Based Framework for International Voluntary Service

Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service
2026



Co-funded by
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Volunteer

Rights

**in International
Voluntary Service**



A Framework for Recognition, Protection, and Equity

International Voluntary Service (IVS) is rooted in solidarity, peace, and the belief that shared action can overcome injustice and division. Since the early 20th century, volunteers have worked side by side with communities to heal the wounds of war, rebuild societies, and promote a culture of peace, intercultural dialogue, and social justice. In the past decade, IVS, through the work of the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) and its member organisations, has also placed climate justice as a central concern, recognising that ecological breakdown is deeply intertwined with systems of inequality and colonial exploitation. This evolution reflects IVS's commitment to responding to contemporary global challenges through inclusive, community-led and transformative action.

CCIVS, founded in 1948 under the aegis of UNESCO, unites volunteer-driven organisations worldwide to promote this shared mission. IVS brings people of all generations, cultures, and identities together to co-create meaningful, community-led responses to global challenges, guided by the principle:

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together”¹

To volunteer is not only to give time — it is to listen, learn and co-create, honouring host communities as equal partners in shared struggles. IVS is inherently political: engaging with global injustice, power, and ecological crises in ways that resist extractive or paternalistic practices.

¹Aboriginal activist group, Queensland, 1970s

Yet participation in International Voluntary Service remains deeply uneven. Structural barriers from restrictive visa regimes and donor-driven metrics to lingering colonial narratives that frame volunteers as “helpers” continue to exclude many, particularly from historically marginalized contexts in global systems of power, often referred to as the Global South. Recognising the limitations of this term, CCIVS uses it critically to highlight structural inequalities while advancing inclusive and decolonial alternatives. For over a decade, CCIVS has actively integrated climate justice into its work, ensuring the IVS movement evolves in response to both planetary and political urgencies.

Therefore, CCIVS, together with its global membership, has developed the Volunteer Rights Framework. It clearly sets out the rights and responsibilities that the International Voluntary Service (IVS) sector and the environments in which it operates must uphold, so that all volunteers can participate safely, meaningfully, and with dignity. Rooted in the lived experiences of volunteers and organisations across the IVS movement, the framework builds on decades of shared learning and collective reflection.

Designed as both a political statement and a practical, advocacy-oriented tool, the framework supports IVS organisations in policy dialogue, strategic partnerships, and institutional advocacy. By defining the conditions volunteers have the right to expect through their participation in IVS, it also clarifies what institutions, governments, and funders must provide to make International Voluntary Service truly accessible, safe, and transformative.

This document is designed to stand alongside the **IVS Exchange Guidelines**, which set out the operational principles for implementing exchanges. It is complemented by a Stakeholder-Specific Advocacy Platform & Advocacy Agenda 2025-2030 that clarifies what institutions, funders, and governments must do to uphold these rights.



Collective Commitment



This Framework is both a call to action and a commitment to transformation. It reaffirms the IVS movement's belief that volunteering is not a privilege, but a right rooted in solidarity, justice, and shared liberation.

The rights and responsibilities outlined here reflect the lived realities of thousands of volunteers and IVS organisations across the globe—many of whom have built bridges across borders, contributed to ecological regeneration, and stood in solidarity with communities resisting oppression.

Collective action is required to uphold & ensure these rights:

- Volunteers must know their rights and advocate for their implementation.
- IVS organisations must recognise these rights and implement practices that protect volunteers and uphold ethical standards.
- Governments must recognise and guarantee these rights by dismantling structural barriers, enabling access, and recognising IVS as a legitimate force for social, environmental, and political change.
- Funders and institutions must resource, enable, and monitor the effective implementation of these rights through fair, transparent, and accountable funding and partnership practices.

The rights outlined here are aligned with legal and policy frameworks including:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 13, 20, and 23)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Articles 6 and 13)
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The African Union Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons
- The EU Youth Mobility Strategy
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goals 4, 5, 13, 16, and 17), and relevant national youth, education, and volunteering laws

This Framework complements the [***CCIVS Political and Ethical Charter \(2025\)***](#), which guides how these rights and responsibilities are understood and applied across the network. Together, they reflect CCIVS's commitment to ensuring that volunteering remains a space of solidarity, justice, and shared responsibility.

Below are eight fundamental principles that set out the rights and responsibilities to which IVS organisations are committed. Ensuring their full effectiveness requires the engagement of different actors, in line with their respective capacities, influence, and roles.

These principles entail rights and apply to all IVS participants, regardless of origin, identity, or context. Where relevant, principles are aligned with international human rights and policy frameworks; where no single instrument applies, they reflect IVS movement standards and ethical commitments developed through collective practice.

1

Recognition of Learning & Contribution

IVS participants have the right to have their skills, knowledge, and competencies formally recognised as legitimate contributions to education, employment, and civic life, as set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966)

This includes the right to:

- 1.1** Access validation through formal mechanisms, including academic credits, micro-credentials, and recognised certification frameworks developed in partnership with educational institutions.
- 1.2** Have experiential, community-based, and non-formal learning recognised and valued, including when grounded in collaboration with local and Indigenous knowledge holders.
- 1.3** Reference IVS participation in educational, professional, and institutional settings with formal endorsement from host and sending organisations (e.g., certificates, letters of reference, competency documentation).
- 1.4** Have IVS participation considered as relevant experience in professional contexts, including for employment, career advancement, and qualifications that require demonstrated experience.

2

Safe, Dignified, & Equitable Cross- Border Participation

IVS participants have the right to engage in international volunteering regardless of country of origin, income, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ability. This includes the right to freedom of movement—particularly the right to leave any country and to return to one’s own as set out in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)

This includes the right to:

- 2.1** Access fair, transparent, and accessible visa procedures that eliminate dependence on costly intermediaries and minimise financial, linguistic, and bureaucratic barriers.
- 2.2** Benefit from alternatives to restrictive mobility systems, including local consular support and dedicated fast-track visa mechanisms for international volunteers.
- 2.3** Be protected from discrimination at all stages of mobility, from selection and preparation to travel, placement, and return.
- 2.4** Receive tailored support that enables participants from marginalised, underrepresented, or underserved contexts to navigate cross-border systems safely and effectively.
- 2.5** Exercise freedom of movement grounded in solidarity, not privilege.

3

Environmental Rights & Contributions to Climate and Social Justice

IVS participants have the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and to access environmental information and meaningful public participation. CCIVS and its members recognise their responsibility to promote actions that avoid negative environmental impacts and foster responsible citizenship in relation to local environments, as recognised in the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972) and affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly (2022). (Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1972; United Nations General Assembly, 2022).

This includes the right to:

- 3.1** Participate in regenerative practices, including agroecology, food sovereignty, ecosystem restoration, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable water and soil management.
- 3.2** Engage in community-led and/or youth-driven climate justice action, especially within marginalised, Indigenous, or frontline communities.
- 3.3** Contribute to the protection of soil as a living commons and the revitalisation of degraded ecosystems through solidarity-based volunteering in support of community-led efforts.
- 3.4** Contribute to territorial care by working in solidarity with community-led and local ecological governance efforts to support sustainable land stewardship and community resilience.
- 3.5** Advance agroecological and solidarity-based models that challenge extractivist, industrial, and neocolonial environmental approaches, centering local knowledge and community-led priorities.

4

Access to Decolonised Funding Ecosystems

IVS participants have the right to engage in volunteering opportunities regardless of cultural or ethnic origin, religion, age, gender, or physical, social, or economic condition. Ensuring equitable access requires funding systems grounded in fairness, transparency, and decolonial values.

This includes the responsibility of IVS organisations and stakeholders to advocate for:

- 4.1** Ensuring equal access to funded opportunities, regardless of income level, nationality, or country of origin.
- 4.2** Removing financial and structural barriers, including application costs, upfront payments, and hidden expenses that disproportionately affect participants from the Global South or low-income backgrounds.
- 4.3** Enabling participation in long-term projects without economic constraints.
- 4.4** Promoting funding approaches that do not reproduce donor–recipient hierarchies.

5

Safe, Inclusive & Rights-Based Participation

IVS participants have the right to engage in volunteering experiences that are safe, inclusive, and grounded in robust Rights-Based protections. International voluntary service organisations have a responsibility to provide appropriate training, development, and well-being measures, as recognised in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which affirms volunteers and volunteer groups as key actors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. (United Nations, 2015).

This includes the right to:

- 5.1** Be protected from discrimination, harassment, exploitation, and gender-based violence.
- 5.2** Access mental health and well-being support, including trauma-informed care, psychosocial resources, and space for emotional processing.
- 5.3** Participate in culturally inclusive and intersectional environments.
- 5.4** Use independent and confidential reporting mechanisms.
- 5.5** Receive comprehensive intercultural preparation and ongoing mentorship.

6

Respect for Local Communities & Cultural Contexts

IVS participants have the right and the responsibility to engage with host communities in ways that respect local cultures, values, and community leadership.

This includes the right and the responsibility to:

- 6.1** Build relationships based on equality, humility, and trust.
- 6.2** Learn about local contexts, traditions, and histories.
- 6.3** Follow the guidance of local partners and community leaders, who understand local realities, risks, and protection measures.
- 6.4** Recognise that solidarity is reciprocal: volunteers contribute with communities, not for them.

7

Protection in Conflict-Affected & Politically Sensitive Contexts

IVS participants have the right to be protected, informed, and supported when volunteering in contexts affected by conflict, occupation, political repression, or systemic violence, as guided by the principles and rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).

This includes the right to:

- 7.1** Be protected from harm by both state and non-state actors.
- 7.2** Be recognised as civilians engaged in solidarity and peacebuilding.
- 7.3** Receive comprehensive preparation, including conflict-sensitivity training and safety protocols.
- 7.4** Receive digital safety training and protocols—particularly for volunteers speaking out in surveillance-heavy or repressive environments—to ensure secure communication, data protection, and online anonymity where needed.
- 7.5** Benefit from risk assessments and real-time monitoring throughout the project duration.

IVS participants are civilians engaged in solidarity work. In conflict-affected settings, protection depends on robust duty-of-care measures, informed consent, context-specific risk assessment, and locally grounded safeguarding and referral mechanisms.

8

Youth Participation & Intergenerational Governance

IVS participants have the right to be meaningfully involved in the governance, decision-making, and strategic direction of IVS organisations, networks, and projects, in line with the UN Youth2030 commitment to meaningful youth participation.

This includes the right to:

- 8.1** Be represented in decision-making spaces, including boards, steering committees, and evaluation bodies.
- 8.2** Access transparent processes for selecting and supporting youth representatives.
- 8.3** Receive capacity-building and mentorship to enable active, informed participation across generations.
- 8.4** Have the unique insights of young people recognised within peacebuilding, environmental action, and social justice movements.
- 8.5** Participate in intergenerational exchange that strengthens collective learning.

ANNEX

Reference documents:

- » **CCIVS Strategic Plan 2021-2027**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/stronger-together-2022-2027-ccivs-strategic-plan/>
- » **CCIVS Political and Ethical Charter**
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eJT6SytoHe595OTqgnYW86ikNMhsJoHk/view?usp=sharing>
- » **White Paper on International Voluntary Service**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/white-paper-on-international-voluntary-service/>
- » **Universal Charter of International Voluntary Service 2018:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/universal-charter-of-international-voluntary-service-2018/>
- » **CCIVS Impact measurement Report 2010-2020:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/ccivs-impact-report-2010-2020/>
- » **CCIVS Constitution:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/constitution-of-the-coordinating-committee-for-international-voluntary-service/>
- » **IVS Exchange Guidelines:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/ivs-exchange-guidelines/>
- » **Volunteering in Conflict Areas Toolkit:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/volunteering-in-conflict-areas-toolkit/>
- » **Voices for Change Needs Assessment:**
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VAIqF5skvfHG_orz8obykwM8sSJMd9R/view?usp=sharing
- » **Voices for Change Global Reflection Meeting report:**
https://ccivs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/VFC_GlobalReflectionMeetingReport.pdf
- » **The Power Behind Good Intentions**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/the-power-behind-good-intentions/>
- » **Decolonial practice and discourse in International Voluntary Service**
<https://ccivs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Decolonial-practice-and-discourse-in-International-Voluntary-Service.pdf>
- » **Volunteer Rights Inquiry Recommendations and call to action**
https://assets.uea.ac.uk/f/185167/x/90a7f0fd85/volunteer_rights_inquiry_final_report1.pdf

ANNEX

Position Papers:

- **Freedom of Movement :**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/freedom-of-movement-a-position-paper/>
- **IVS4Peace Policy Recommendations:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/ivs4peace-policy-recommendation-paper/>
- **Soil4Life Manifesto:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/soil4life-manifesto-with-signatures-collectives/>
- **Decolonising Visa Mechanisms Policy paper:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/decolonising-visa-mechanisms-policy-paper/>
- **Decolonising Funding Mechanisms:**
<https://ccivs.org/resource/decolonising-the-funding-mechanisms-of-european-union-youth-programmes-policy-paper/>

Website links:

- **Decolonise:**
<https://ccivs.org/decolonise>
- **Living Earth:**
<https://ccivs.org/livingearth/>
- **Regenerate Reconcile:**
<https://regenerate-reconcile.ccivs.org/advocacy-asks/>
- **Voices for Change:**
<https://ccivs.org/voices-for-change/>
- **UN Youth2030:**
<https://www.unyouth2030.com/>

Volunteers Rights in International Voluntary Service

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Published in March 2026

by the Coordinating Committee of
International Voluntary Service (CCIVS)

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Layout and design by
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What every IVS participant should have access to...

1

**Recognition of Learning
& Contribution**

2

**Safe, Dignified, & Equitable
Cross-Border Participation**

3

**Environmental Rights & Contributions
to Climate and Social Justice**

4

**Access to Decolonised
Funding Ecosystems**

5

**Safe, Inclusive
& Rights-Based Participation**

6

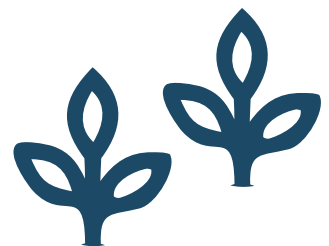
**Respect for Local Communities
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