



### Why measuring the impact of volunteering matters?<sup>1</sup>

The European Economic and Social Committee in 2016 (INT/721EESC-2013-6135) have already stressed the importance of social impact measurements for third sector (social enterprises, volunteer involving organisations, NGOs). At that time, key recommendations stressed the need of standardized indicators of impact of third sector at the macro-level, standardisation of practices and methods at the organisational level. They concluded that attention must be dedicated to developing methods and indicators for measuring the impacts generated by the specific nature and distinctive traits of third sector: participation, societal change and creation of relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Third Sector Impact found that volunteering can have positive impact on the socio-economic development in Europe. However, systematic reviews of research do not support unconditional and general claims about improvement of health, wellbeing, innovation, social capital, empowerment, or economic development. Only by using the best available sources of data and suitable methods, can we understand under which circumstance the volunteering can have positive impacts. It is important to »collect data, evidence and testimonies« and »use data, evidence and testimony to get political attention«.<sup>3</sup>

Recently, impact measurement has been an important topic among civil society organisations and academics. However, measuring the impact of volunteering on social inclusion as important component of individual wellbeing is yet not explored and affirmed. The existing measurement tools are mostly focusing on general impact of volunteering on volunteers, organisations and communities and use traditional approaches to evaluation based on the financial benefits of volunteer activity, particularly the financial benefits to the organisation.

In recent years the focus on impact measurement has grown in general. It has been widely recognised that measuring impact demonstrates organisation's accountability and dedica-

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from »MAKING IT MATTER – the impact of volunteering on social inclusion« IMPACT MEASUREMENT TOOL MANUAL, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on social impact measurement (own-initiative opinion) 2014/C 170/03

([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C\\_.2014.170.01.0018.01.ENG](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2014.170.01.0018.01.ENG))

<sup>3</sup> <http://thirdsectorimpact.eu/news/giving-third-sector-visibility-deserves>

tion to achieving its mission and goals. Besides that, it serves as a basis for further fundraising and report to relevant stakeholders, especially in times of shrinking funding opportunities.

VolontEurope in its Position paper on Measuring the Impact of Volunteering states several reasons why measuring the social impact is relevant.

»Measuring the social impact of volunteering is important as it:

- Showcases the value of volunteering through enhanced communication and reporting of community actions and involvement;
- Increases accountability of the action of civil society organisations through proper tracking of resources spent on community initiatives;
- Ensures the quality of volunteering is measured and improved through improved internal management and more effective benchmarking;
- It enables to analyse performance with a more critical approach, supporting the understanding of intended and unintended benefits, which might influence the strategy in allocation of future resources;
- Increases sustainability of projects as it will support the case with funders who are increasingly looking beyond the traditional annual report and including financial, social and environmental indicators as evidence of impact and sustainability;
- It supports evidence based decision making for policy makers, funders and investors.«<sup>4</sup>

General studies on the impact of volunteering have identified a series of stakeholders and dimensions in which volunteering has a great potential to impact it: volunteers (effects and impact on personal level); volunteer involving organisations (effects and impact at institutional level); direct beneficiaries/social services users; the wider community (family members, friends of beneficiaries, local NGOs, etc.).

So, why measuring the impact of volunteering on social inclusion matters? The most important reason why measuring impact of volunteering on social inclusion matters is because it can give a clear picture of the enhanced changes that have been done through the volunteering on a personal, organisational and community level.

Besides that, evidence on the quality of the services and organisational results became of high importance for the beneficiaries, the potential volunteers and the community, but also for donors and other relevant stakeholders. The new context requires clear proof that the work of an organisation and its projects are actually contributing to the desired expected change.

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<sup>4</sup> de Bonfis, L.; King, L.: Measuring the Impact of Volunteering – Position paper, VolontEurope, March 2018. ([https://volonturope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Measuring-impact- Paper\\_Final.pdf](https://volonturope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Measuring-impact- Paper_Final.pdf))

Measuring the impact of volunteering on social inclusion:

1. demonstrates the effects of your inclusive volunteer programmes on different levels (individual, organisational and community level);
2. demonstrates the impact of inclusive volunteer programmes to donors;
3. provides evidence that can be used in other project applications;
4. increases the visibility and credibility of your organisation by promoting the measurement results;
5. improves the volunteer management practices;
6. Motivates volunteers for their future volunteer engagement.

### **The Importance of Measuring Impact**

As social organisations, your mission and purpose are central to your existence. Delivering on that mission is why you carry out your work, so having definitive proof of how you are achieving your aims is paramount. When impact measurement is carried out effectively, it will not only provide access to finance but also support your organisation's overall effectiveness. The question is not whether to measure impact, but how to do it effectively and efficiently, and how to ensure that it is embedded into your organisation.

### **Telling your Story to Stakeholders**

Communicating your work effectively builds engagement with stakeholders. Stakeholders increasingly want to see the return on their investment, whilst the wider community wants to know how your work is progressing and what it means for service users. Telling a good story needs facts and impact, not just output, i.e. the stories behind the numbers. Numerical data is essential in order to make the most of your outcomes, however the stories behind those numbers bring your work to life. It is even better if these stories can be readily re-told e.g. »Because of our work three more families now have a place to live«.

### **Access to Finance**

Demonstrating impact is becoming increasingly important to funders and opens doors to funding streams that organisations may not have considered or been considered for. Embedding and implementing relevant impact measurement will ensure your organisation stands out in competitive funding processes. Demonstrating exactly how you deliver on your mission can make the difference between securing funding and missing a valuable opportunity.

### **Monitoring Performance**

Measuring impact is a very visible way of judging the success of your organisation. It is a signal to funders and service users that your organisation cares about improving service delivery and is willing to be held accountable for its performance. This transparency increases engagement from funders and can also help to motivate employees and volunteers as they see the progress they are contributing towards and the impact of their contribution.

### **Outcome and Impact Measurement and Reporting**

As the move from output to outcome and impact measurement moves forward, being ready with your relevant impact indicators and data will help to ensure your competitive advantage over those organisations that have not embedded and implemented impact measurement.

*Paul Collins , Outcomes and Impacts Manager, volunteer Ireland*

*The ERASMUS+ project »Making it matter« will enable the creation of methods and indicators for impact measurement that will help volunteer involving organisations to understand the key benefits, and shape the most inclusive volunteer programs. It will also assist institutions and decision-makers to formulate policies and support programs through comparable systematic data on the circumstances in which volunteering is useful for personal development, empowerment and inclusion of young people.*

#### **Redaktion**

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