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YouthProAktiv

INSPIRING REPORT

The Social Impact of Youth-Led Volunteering Projects



2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

Across Europe and beyond, young people are increasingly stepping forward as leaders of social change, designing and implementing volunteering initiatives that respond directly to the needs of their communities. From inclusion and education to sustainability, environmental protection, and wellbeing, youth-led volunteering projects demonstrate the power of initiative, solidarity, and civic engagement when young people are trusted as agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries.

In a context marked by growing social inequalities, environmental challenges, democratic disengagement, and limited opportunities for young people –particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds– youth-led action plays a crucial role in strengthening communities and fostering social cohesion. Volunteering initiatives led by young people often emerge from lived experience and local realities, enabling them to address concrete challenges with empathy, creativity, and innovation. When adequately supported, these initiatives contribute not only to immediate social impact, but also to long-term outcomes such as leadership development, active citizenship, and community resilience.

The **Inspiring Report: The Social Impact of Youth-Led Volunteering Projects** has been developed within the framework of the **EU Youth Contest: Youth Shaping Communities**, coordinated by YouthProAktiv in 2025. The contest was created to recognise, support, and give visibility to youth-led volunteering initiatives that demonstrate meaningful social impact and strong youth leadership.

This report presents three outstanding projects selected through an open and competitive process. Beyond highlighting their achievements, the report aims to document their approaches, organisational models, and underlying values, offering concrete examples of how youth-led volunteering can be designed, implemented, and sustained. By sharing these experiences, YouthProAktiv seeks to inspire other young people, youth workers, and organisations to initiate or strengthen similar actions in their own communities.

2.RATIONALE OF THE INITIATIVE

Youth-led volunteering plays a crucial role in strengthening communities, particularly when initiatives are rooted in local realities and driven by young people who understand the challenges faced by their peers. However, many impactful youth initiatives remain under-represented, under-funded, or insufficiently documented, limiting their visibility and replication potential.

The EU Youth Contest: Youth Shaping Communities was designed to address this gap by identifying, supporting, and promoting volunteering projects that demonstrate clear social value, strong youth leadership, and sustainability. Beyond financial support, the contest aimed to create a space for recognition, learning, and inspiration, enabling youth-led initiatives to gain visibility and connect with wider networks of youth workers, organisations, and institutions.

This report is therefore not only a record of the contest outcomes, but also a tool to highlight what youth-led volunteering can achieve when young people are given trust, resources, and platforms to share their work.

3.HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report is intended as a practical and inspirational resource for multiple audiences:

- Young people who are considering launching their own volunteering or community-based initiative can use this report as a source of ideas, motivation, and concrete examples of how youth-led projects can start small and grow sustainably.
- Youth workers and educators can draw inspiration from the approaches presented, particularly in relation to non-formal learning, inclusion, community engagement, and youth leadership.
- Youth organisations and civil society actors may use the report to identify transferable practices, partnership opportunities, and innovative models that can be adapted to their own local contexts.

Each project featured in this report demonstrates different pathways to impact, showing that there is no single model for youth-led volunteering, but rather a diversity of approaches shaped by local needs, creativity, and commitment.

4. SELECTED YOUTH-LED VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS

Following an open call launched in May 2025, a total of **26 eligible applications** were received from young people, informal groups, and youth-led organisations across Europe and neighboring regions. Projects addressed a wide range of social challenges, including inclusion, education, sustainability, mental health, and community development. All applications were assessed by a jury based on predefined criteria, including social impact, youth leadership, relevance, feasibility, and sustainability.

Three projects were selected as winners of the 2025 EU Youth Contest and received financial support to further develop their initiatives.

Firstly, **UPlanet** is a Spanish youth-led organisation dedicated to advancing sustainability, social inclusion, and civic engagement through volunteering and community-based action. Founded and governed by young people, the organisation works across different geographical contexts, with a strong focus on communities facing structural disadvantages, particularly in rural and geographically isolated areas. UPlanet's approach is rooted in the belief that young people, when provided with trust, skills, and responsibility, can play a central role in driving sustainable development and social transformation.

The project selected under the EU Youth Contest, ***Birmograin Community Lab***, is implemented in a remote rural area of Mauritania and responds to multiple interconnected challenges affecting local youth and women. These challenges include high levels of youth unemployment, limited access to formal education and vocational training, gender inequality, and environmental vulnerability linked to climate change and resource scarcity.

The initiative aims to establish a multifunctional, solar-powered community space that serves as a hub for learning, collaboration, and local development. Within this space, young people and community members participate in non-formal education and skills-building activities focused on renewable energy, agroecology adapted to local conditions, basic carpentry and construction, literacy, and civic participation.

A defining feature of the project is its participatory methodology. Young volunteers are involved throughout the entire project cycle, including needs assessment, project design, coordination with local stakeholders, implementation of activities, and monitoring of results. This ensures strong community ownership and enhances the sustainability of the initiative beyond its initial phase.

By linking environmental sustainability with social empowerment and inclusive governance, UPlanet demonstrates how youth-led volunteering can generate meaningful and lasting impact while offering a replicable model for rural development driven by young people.

Secondly, **Asociația Oportunități de Viitor** is a youth-led organisation based in Romania that works to expand access to education, employment, and civic participation for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged, rural, or non-urban backgrounds. The organisation was established in response to the recognition that many young people face barriers not due to lack of motivation or ability, but because of limited access to information, guidance, and professional networks.

The selected project, ***Oportune***, addresses these challenges by creating a community-driven digital platform that centralises verified educational, professional, and volunteering opportunities for young people aged 16–24. The platform is designed to be accessible, youth-friendly, and responsive to the needs of young people navigating key transitions in education and employment.

In addition to the digital component, the project includes offline activities such as workshops, mentoring sessions, peer-to-peer learning initiatives, and community events. These activities ensure that

digital tools are complemented by human support, non-formal learning, and direct interaction.

Young people play an active role in shaping the platform's content, outreach strategy, and development process. Volunteers contribute to identifying opportunities, testing functionalities, collecting feedback, and engaging peers, ensuring relevance and long-term ownership. Particular emphasis is placed on reaching young people from rural areas, low-income backgrounds, and those with limited access to career guidance services. Through its combination of digital innovation, volunteering, and peer support, Asociația Oportunități de Viitor illustrates how youth-led initiatives can reduce inequalities, strengthen agency, and empower young people to make informed decisions about their futures.

And, thirdly, **B-Inclusive** is a Romanian youth-led volunteering initiative dedicated to promoting inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunities for young people with visible and invisible disabilities within education systems and broader social participation. The organisation was founded by young people with lived experience of exclusion and discrimination, and these experiences are central to its mission, values, and working methods.

The project focuses on awareness-raising, non-formal education, and dialogue-based activities aimed at challenging stigma, stereotypes, and structural barriers related to disability. Through interactive workshops, participatory research, public discussions, and educational sessions, B-Inclusive creates safe and reflective spaces for students, educators, youth workers, and institutions.

A core strength of the initiative is its commitment to meaningful youth participation. Young people with disabilities are not positioned as beneficiaries, but as leaders, facilitators, researchers, and advocates. This approach strengthens empowerment, builds leadership skills, and ensures authenticity in the narratives and practices promoted by the organisation.

By fostering empathy-based learning, promoting accessibility, and advocating for systemic change, B-Inclusive demonstrates how youth-led volunteering can contribute to more inclusive educational and civic environments and advance human rights, dignity, and equality.

5. CROSS-CUTTING INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The youth-led volunteering projects presented in this report highlight recurring patterns and lessons that are relevant for young people, youth workers, organisations, and policymakers alike. Despite their diversity in focus, scale, and geographic context, the initiatives share common success factors related to youth leadership, community ownership, inclusion, and sustainability. These insights provide valuable guidance for the design, support, and scaling of future youth-led volunteering actions.

First, the projects demonstrate the importance of **trusting young people as leaders and decision-makers**. In all three initiatives, young people are not only involved as volunteers but are central to the conception, management, and implementation of activities. Providing young people with real responsibility, mentorship, and flexible support structures enables them to develop leadership skills while ensuring that projects remain relevant to local needs.

Second, the initiatives underline the value of **locally rooted and community-based approaches**. The strongest impacts were achieved where projects responded directly to concrete challenges identified within local communities. Youth-led volunteering is particularly effective when it builds on existing community assets, involves local stakeholders, and fosters long-term ownership rather than short-term intervention.

Third, **visibility, communication, and storytelling** emerge as essential elements for maximising impact. Documenting activities, sharing results, and communicating stories of change help youth-led initiatives gain recognition, attract new supporters, and inspire replication. Public platforms, networks, and reports such as this one play a key role in amplifying youth voices and making their contributions visible.

Fourth, the projects highlight the importance of **peer learning and exchange**. Opportunities for youth organisations and initiatives to share experiences, challenges, and methodologies contribute to capacity building, innovation, and sustainability. Structured spaces for exchange can strengthen cooperation across sectors and geographic areas.

Finally, all initiatives reaffirm the need to **prioritise inclusion and accessibility**. Ensuring that volunteering opportunities are open to young people from diverse backgrounds, including those facing social, economic, geographic, or disability-related barriers, is essential for equitable participation and social cohesion. Inclusive design and representation should be embedded from the outset of any youth-led initiative.

6. CONCLUSION

The projects showcased in this report demonstrate that youth-led volunteering is a powerful driver of social impact, community resilience, and civic engagement. When young people are supported to lead initiatives rooted in local realities, they develop innovative and inclusive responses to complex social challenges, while strengthening their own skills, confidence, and sense of agency.

Through the EU Youth Contest: Youth Shaping Communities, YouthProAktiv has contributed to recognising and amplifying youth-led volunteering initiatives that place young people at the centre of community transformation. Beyond financial support, the contest and this report provide visibility, validation, and inspiration, reinforcing the role of youth as key actors in building inclusive and sustainable societies.

This report invites young people, youth workers, organisations, and decision-makers to learn from the experiences presented, to connect with youth-led action, and to create enabling environments in which volunteering initiatives can emerge, grow, and thrive. By continuing to invest in youth leadership, participation, and inclusion, communities across Europe and beyond can be shaped by young people who are empowered to act for positive change.



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