

# STATE OF THE ART REPORT



**Museum And Restoration  
Volunteering for Inclusion**

Project Number: 2024-1-NL01-KA220-ADU-000254830



## Table of contents

Table of contents.....	2
Introduction .....	4
Literature Review .....	7
Introduction.....	7
Volunteering and Inclusion in Europe .....	10
Cultural Volunteering.....	11
Inclusion and integration from a European perspective .....	13
Integration and Inclusion: two different perspectives .....	15
Methodology.....	16
Contemporary Museum Volunteering in Europe: insights gained and best practices described .....	18
Examples of best practices that already engage with/through diaspora and migrant volunteers .....	19
Decolonization through diaspora and migrant volunteers in museums.....	20
Internal pluralism: for some a myth, for others daily reality .....	22
The forces needed for unity.....	24
European museums: islands or together on vast land?.....	27
The need for MARVI .....	28
Conclusion .....	30
References .....	30
Appendix.....	34
National Reports .....	34

Belgium .....	34
France .....	45
Germany.....	48
Italy .....	54
The Netherlands.....	62
Portugal.....	66
Spain .....	71
United Kingdom.....	75



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

*Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the National Agentschap Erasmus+ Onderwijs & Training. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.*

## Introduction

Museums play a vital role in preserving history and educating the public about diverse communities and experiences (Mudzanani, 2015). Yet, they often remain exclusive, reflecting predominantly elite and monocultural narratives (Kofi & de Wildt, 2017). In this State of the Art report of the Erasmus+ project *Museums and Restoration for Volunteering and Inclusion* (MARVI), a consortium embodied by six European partners examined the possible shift that could realize this dynamic. As several studies show, including minority voices such as migrant, diaspora and bi-cultural perspectives through formal volunteers could make museums more inclusive and representative. By involving formal volunteers from these backgrounds in meaningful ways, not only as beneficiaries but as active storytellers and co-creators, MARVI aims to transform museum spaces into platforms of intercultural dialogue and inclusive historical representation.

The economic crisis of previous years, together with the current military and trade conflicts in Europe, may shift perceptions regarding the role of volunteering in our civil society. There are real contemporary challenges in reducing volunteering to a mere provider of services that replaces or supplements the state, as this undervalues the scale and importance of the volunteer movement—whose numbers surpass the population of the most populous European countries.

However, the current socio-economic and socio-political situation has not diminished European citizens' willingness to act in solidarity across a wide range of initiatives that continue to generate significant, though hard-to-quantify, social capital. In this context, the European Year of Volunteering in 2011 highlighted that volunteering should not be exploited as a social or economic resource in response to Europe's challenges but rather recognized and valued as one of the clearest expressions of European values. Meaning, the fight against injustice, inequality, lack of democracy, and the absence of social and civil rights.

Although European countries share philanthropic traditions and institutions, they show significant differences in volunteering rates—that is, in the proportion of the population engaged in voluntary activities. Altruism and

charitable behaviour in Europe have their roots in shared medieval institutions and, in particular, in religious practices such as those of the Catholic Church. The modern voluntary sector began to take shape across much of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, driven by political changes including the rise of democratic institutions and popular movements (Harris et al., 2016).

Today, however, levels of participation in formal volunteering vary widely across the continent. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2011), which defines formal volunteering as organisational involvement without financial compensation, undertaken voluntarily and outside the family sphere, participation ranges from high levels in Nordic countries (with 30–50% of the population participating) to very low levels in some Southern European and post-communist countries (only 3–8% of the population involved). The wide range of activities considered as volunteering makes it difficult to define precisely. As the world evolves, so do the needs and forms of volunteering.

Formal volunteering is a powerful tool for fostering solidarity, as highlighted in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. It connects individuals across cultural divides, supports mutual understanding, and encourages civic participation (Moon, 2020; Brenner, 2020; Rijksmuseum, 2021; Museum van Loon, 2023). Formal volunteering is widely recognized for its positive impact on both individuals and society (Wilson, 2012). At a personal level, civic participation is linked to improved physical and mental health, including lower levels of depression and greater overall life satisfaction. Volunteers typically cite a variety of motivations: intrinsic ones, such as the desire to help others, contribute meaningfully, or give back to their community; and extrinsic ones, such as expanding their social network, gaining work experience, or applying skills acquired through education. At the community or national level, formal volunteering plays a fundamental role in fostering social trust, encouraging cooperation, and strengthening the social fabric. Helping others can build mutual trust, provide a sense of safety and belonging for both the giver and the recipient (Musick and Wilson, 2003). Given this wide array of benefits, it is crucial to explore not only personal factors but also the contextual ones that influence people's decisions to volunteer. Understanding these dynamics can shed light on variations in volunteer participation across different societies and historical periods. This theoretical and practice-based knowledge, in turn, can help volunteer organizations, policymakers, and practitioners design more

effective strategies, policies, and programs to promote and support civic engagement.

Drawing further on this knowledge, the MARVI project will therefore develop a targeted adult learning program for museum volunteer managers and curators, equipping them with the tools to better support and collaborate with volunteers of migrant/diasporic and/or bicultural backgrounds. Within the program, the MARVI project introduces innovation through three levels. First, by redefining narratives: MARVI promotes intercultural perspectives as essential to understanding European history, amplifying post-colonial and migrant voices within cultural institutions. Second, by empowering storytellers: volunteers from diverse backgrounds are trained and supported to represent their own histories and cultures within museum contexts. Third, by building a new model: MARVI proposes a scalable, transferable model of inclusive volunteer management that strengthens civic identity and European values through shared heritage and mutual understanding.

To achieve this, MARVI has the general objective to build the capacity of museum volunteer managers and curators to create inclusive volunteering opportunities that foster civic engagement and skill development among adult learners from diverse backgrounds. This aligns with the Erasmus+ Horizontal Priority on Inclusion and Diversity across education and training. Overall, diverse representation in cultural institutions may be enhanced which may expand pathways for marginalized groups to participate in civic and cultural life. Throughout the MARVI project, the consortium of volunteer managers, academic, scholars and experts from the field, will challenge traditional volunteering models by placing migrant and bicultural individuals at the heart of storytelling and museum practice—not as subjects of inclusion but as agents of change. It counters persistent stereotypes linking non-Western identities to exclusion or lack of qualification. By shifting representation from “about” to “by” diverse communities, the consortium introduces a fresh and much-needed approach to cultural inclusion, civic education, and museum engagement across Europe.

## Literature Review

### Introduction

The first contemporary museums, which emerged between the 18th and 19th centuries, played a fundamental political role in the construction and legitimization of national identities within the framework of emerging nation-states. They also contributed to consolidating the colonial ambitions of various Western powers. Through the selection and exhibition of cultural objects, these institutions shaped historical narratives and collective memories aimed at reinforcing official discourses and cementing the idea of the nation, both internally and in international projection. At the same time, they helped create stereotypical representations of the "Others," portraying them as subjects susceptible to domination and subjugation. Moreover, museums served a moralizing function. They did not limit themselves to preserving and exhibiting cultural heritage but also acted as educational and disciplinary agents within society. In this way, they contributed to the formation of citizens aligned with national values, promoting the internalization of official history, dominant culture, and patriotic pride.

Over time, these institutions have evolved, adapting to social and political changes, although they have maintained their role as privileged spaces for cultural and social construction. The main difference in recent decades is the attempt to give voice to all citizens, allowing the incorporation of new perspectives—such as feminist and decolonial—and encouraging the participation of minorities that were previously silenced. Decolonization, as an urgent process of transforming an epistemological matrix, inherently involves the effort to reconstitute. In current museological practices, professionals must grapple with the ruins of grand narratives, including modernity and activism. Following the collapse of 19th and 20th-century narratives—like nationalism or communism after the Cold War—new actions have emerged aimed at transforming or even abolishing conventional ways of thinking about and practicing museology. Decolonization in museums involves a critical review of the historical role of these institutions in the accumulation, representation, and narration of objects and cultures, especially those of colonized peoples (Procter, 2024). In this context, cultural volunteering, beyond its traditional logistical support role, can serve as a tool for cultural justice by facilitating new

narratives from the very communities affected by colonialism. For Hicks, the museum is not neutral; it is an institution that has participated in the construction of cultural hegemonies (2020), and therefore, necessary actions must be taken from within the institution itself to contribute to decolonial restitution.

Hence, there are three key points that should be considered to address and reflect on. First, the origin of collections. Many were acquired through colonial looting, unequal trade, or violence. Decolonization involves reviewing the legitimacy of these possessions and, in some cases, returning objects to their communities of origin (Procter, 2024). Second, dominant narratives. Museums often present history from Eurocentric viewpoints. The decolonial process seeks to include the voices and perspectives of indigenous or colonized peoples (Plummer, 2024). And finally, collaborative curation. There is a growing shift toward practices in which represented communities participate in curatorial decisions, rather than being mere subjects of study. However, these practices are not yet widespread in all former colonial countries. In this context, stories are not dictated solely by the curatorial team but are co-constructed with volunteers and the involved communities. This horizontal approach allows for the incorporation of multiple perspectives, local knowledge, languages, and lived experiences (Boast, 2011). These critiques of neoliberal multiculturalism align with Walsh (2010), who advocates for critical interculturality. According to her, the flaw in multiculturalism lies in its failure to question power inequalities and the coloniality of knowledge. Thus, Walsh proposes “critical interculturality” as a project that begins with this problem and, from a fully decolonizing perspective, aims to change asymmetric power structures and mechanisms. In this regard, an intercultural perspective is fundamental to decolonial museum practice.

Wilson (2012) highlights that socioeconomic status, prosocial values, religious beliefs, and social networks—such as family and friends—are among the most influential factors in predicting voluntary engagement. More recent studies also emphasize the importance of the broader social context in which people live. Elements such as a society’s level of religiosity and its economic conditions have been identified as key contextual factors influencing formal volunteering and civic participation in general. However, empirical findings on these relationships are inconsistent, and there remains limited understanding

of which contextual factors most influence individual decisions to volunteer. Research has shown that people living in more religious countries tend to volunteer more, as religious institutions often promote prosocial norms such as trust and altruism. The dominant religion also plays a role; for instance, Protestant-majority countries tend to report higher rates of volunteering, while in predominantly Orthodox or Muslim countries, religious institutions are less likely to promote volunteering. In wealthier countries, people generally have greater access to resources such as time and money, as well as a wider range of organizations through which to volunteer. Moreover, studies have found that high levels of social inequality are linked to greater social stratification, reduced trust and cooperation, and ultimately, lower levels of civic engagement.

The literature identifies four key characteristics that define formal voluntary work: it is performed voluntarily, benefits others, is unpaid, and takes place within an organized framework. This last characteristic primarily differentiates formal volunteering from informal help. Specifically, formal volunteering involves participation in structured environments—usually organizations—and is often directed toward people not personally known by the volunteer, such as the homeless, the elderly, or residents of developing countries. In contrast, informal volunteering refers to unstructured acts of help, usually directed toward neighbours or members of the local community. Thus, in this State of the Art report, we focus exclusively on formal volunteering.

A study by Damian (2018) sought to identify national-level cultural and economic factors that explain variations in formal volunteering within and between European countries. The results challenge previous assumptions, showing that higher religiosity and living in Protestant-majority countries are associated with lower rates of formal volunteering, while Catholic or Orthodox affiliation has no significant effect. This could be attributed to Europe's secularization and the prevalence of secular organizations in the voluntary sector. Contrary to theoretical expectations, a country's economic prosperity (e.g., GDP per capita) does not significantly affect volunteering once income inequality is considered. Instead, economic equality is more strongly associated with higher rates of formal volunteering, as people with low incomes in unequal societies often lack the resources or capacity to participate. The study also concludes that changes over time related to religiosity, economic

development, or inequality do not significantly explain variations in volunteering. This underscores the importance of using repeated cross-sectional data to analyse trends. Overall, the study supports the idea that in Europe, more egalitarian and more secular societies tend to exhibit higher levels of formal volunteering. It contributes to the existing literature by reinforcing known patterns and emphasizing the need for rigorous methodological approaches when examining changes over time.

### **Volunteering and Inclusion in Europe**

Volunteering is a transformative force that promotes social cohesion, inclusion, and equality in diverse societies. In the context of the EU, where immigration and accessibility are key challenges, volunteering emerges as an essential tool to combat social exclusion, encourage civic participation, and build resilient communities. Indeed, volunteering is key to transforming diversity into strength, as long as it is implemented inclusively, ethically, and sustainably (Eurobask, 2012; Radford, 2024). De Lucas emphasizes that integration is a political process centred on equality and recognition, beyond mere cultural assimilation (2012, p. 18). Volunteering supports this process by creating spaces for interaction between immigrants and host communities, breaking cycles of contempt that evolve into hatred and exclusion (de Lucas, 2012, p. 15). It is important to propose universalist policies that involve the entire population to avoid exclusion (Campelo et al., 2012, p. 174). By including marginalized groups, volunteering not only enriches cultural perspectives but also aligns with the EU's goals of promoting inclusion and social rights (Radford, 2024, p. 4).

In museum programs, volunteers are often offered educational and leadership skills — opportunities that not only enhance employability but also strengthen self-esteem and sense of purpose. These outcomes align with the interpersonal benefits of volunteering, such as community-building and tolerance for other perspectives (Radford, 2024, p. 4). Volunteering also encourages lifelong learning. By interacting with diverse cultures and realities, volunteers develop greater awareness of global challenges such as inequality and xenophobia. Diversity is a structural reality of the EU that requires democratic management, and volunteers are key agents in this process.

Specifically, in museums, it enriches understanding of identity and heritage (Radford, 2024, p. 8).

Despite its potential, volunteering faces significant challenges, notably sustainability issues, as many initiatives depend on limited resources (Campelo et al., 2012, p. 171). Policies that overlook immigrants' real needs may perpetuate their invisibility, a risk that also applies to volunteering (de Lucas, 2012, p. 18). Radford also identifies specific barriers in museum volunteering, such as educational requirements, long-term commitments, and lack of support or training (Radford, 2024, p. 6). Furthermore, in museums specifically, initiatives that fail to adequately include disadvantaged groups may perpetuate exclusion instead of combatting it (Radford, 2024, p. 10). To overcome these challenges, volunteering must be based on active listening, appropriate training, and flexible commitments (Solanes, 2020). Therefore, volunteering is a driving force for social change, promoting integration and accessibility in the EU. It transforms diversity into strength by fostering equality, recognition, and social capital (de Lucas, 2012; Campelo et al., 2012).

### **Cultural Volunteering**

With the advancement of globalization, interactions between people from different countries and cultures have become increasingly common. However, these encounters are not without tensions and challenges. Engagement with different cultures—what is perceived as “the other”—can lead to misunderstandings, especially in the absence of tools that facilitate mutual understanding. In this context, intercultural knowledge becomes key, offering a foundation to understand oneself in relation to others.

Throughout history, cultural exchange has been constant. Human cultures did not emerge in isolation but were shaped through contact and dialogue between peoples. It is precisely in these intersections where both particularities and cultural differences are revealed. Museums and art museums are usually institutions located in one or more buildings, dedicated to collecting, preserving, and exhibiting objects that reflect human culture, history, and the environment. Their main goal is to educate and engage both the general public and specialists. In Europe, these institutions play a key role in supporting the sustainability of the communities, cities, and regions in which

they operate. Economically, museums contribute through admission fees, operational spending, and the acquisition of cultural, heritage, and scientific objects. Culturally, they help safeguard local heritage by promoting education and public communication. Politically, they serve as platforms for raising awareness on issues of national importance such as cultural heritage, social justice, biodiversity, and sustainability. Socially, they provide educational and recreational spaces for both residents and visitors and foster community participation through volunteer programs. In this way, museums are essential to the economic, cultural, and environmental well-being of their communities.

Despite their importance, museums currently face various challenges, including budget constraints, rising operating costs, staff restructuring, and increasing competition with other tourist attractions. To survive in a competitive market, museums are being pushed to diversify their offerings, generate more revenue, and better adapt to changing audience interests. In this changing landscape, volunteers have become increasingly vital to the functioning of museums.

Volunteering is defined as a voluntary and unpaid activity carried out within nonprofit organizations, for the benefit of the community, and performed freely and without coercion in officially designated roles. Museum volunteers not only contribute to institutions and society but also gain personal benefits from their involvement. These include fulfilling personal interests, applying skills, feeling competent in their roles, and enjoying social interaction. Given the significant amount of time many volunteers dedicate each week, their involvement can resemble a form of “career volunteering.” Interestingly, research suggests that personal interest, rather than altruism, is the main motivation for many volunteers, who report that their motivations focus on personal benefits such as developing hobbies, socializing, or engaging in meaningful activities beyond their usual routine.

Museum volunteers can perform a wide variety of roles and functions. Sheffer (1986) categorize them into three main areas: governance, management, and task-specific roles. Task-based volunteers are particularly essential, contributing to almost every operational aspect of the museum. Their responsibilities may include collection management (preservation, documentation, research); facilitating public access through exhibitions, educational programs, interpretation, and information services; and overseeing

security, marketing, and public relations. They may also assist with internal functions like fundraising and administrative duties. Many museums heavily rely on this volunteer support: without it, numerous institutions would face serious operational difficulties and, in the case of volunteer-run museums, might not even be able to exist. We could consider museum volunteering as a form of “serious leisure” and “career volunteering”.

According to Smith et al. (2017), individuals who show a high level of dedication and commitment to their volunteer roles may be considered “career volunteers”. This type of volunteering is characterized by regular involvement, based on skills and knowledge, allowing individuals to develop a long-term “career” within a specific social environment. Therefore, museums must value—and cannot afford to lose—their loyal stakeholders, such as Friends groups and volunteers, who generate and participate in self-generated leisure, accessing the museum’s social world to enjoy the rewards of serious leisure. However, museums are also aware of the costs associated with volunteering: recruitment and selection expenses to help screen out potentially unsuitable candidates; supervision costs, which may be substantial, especially if a paid volunteer coordinator is hired; and training costs, though these can often be minimized through on-the-job training provided by other volunteers. Finally, it is important to emphasize that museum volunteers can play a key role in including individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds or diasporic communities. And as mediators and interpreters in museums who can help create new narratives with a decolonial and restorative approach.

### **Inclusion and integration from a European perspective**

In the past two decades, progress has been made in conceptualizing and developing strategies to enhance the integration and inclusion of immigrants within the European Union. A turning point in this effort was the adoption of COM (2000) 757, which defined integration as “a two-way process based on mutual rights and corresponding obligations of legally residing third-country nationals and the host society, enabling the full participation of immigrants” (Solanes, 2020). Since then, it has been emphasized that integration must be understood from a multidimensional and holistic perspective involving various elements and actors. This approach, supported by Recommendation CM/Rec10 of the Council of Europe (2022), aims to manage diversity as a resource,

articulating multilevel policies involving governments, civil organizations, and migrant communities. To achieve this, it is essential to conceive immigrant inclusion in Europe in an integrated manner that seeks and develops strong synergies with the strategies of the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe's proposals, in order to promote equality and social cohesion. Only then will it be possible to guarantee full inclusion and participation of all citizens in pluralistic European societies.

It must be noted, however, that EU legislation does not mandate the harmonization of national legal and regulatory provisions. Both EU and Council of Europe provisions serve as guidelines for coordinating member states, but they are not binding, although they can guide a joint action program. This is outlined in Articles 79 and 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The situation is different in the field of asylum law, where the development of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) has required harmonization among state regulations. Similarly, the convergence promoted by Article 79.4 of the Lisbon Treaty, which supports European initiatives in aiding member states' immigrant integration policies, leaves room for these states to implement their own policies for integrating legally residing third-country nationals (Solanes, 2020). Additionally, the absence of a common integration and inclusion policy and of a legally binding secondary legal instrument results in differences among countries, although there is a degree of consensus that gives European inclusion policies some common characteristics (Porras and Requena, 2022).

In this context, as Solanes (2020) argues, European migration and asylum policy has prioritized border control and economic protection, relegating immigrant integration to a secondary concern.

Moreover, as observed by the Council of Europe (CDADI, 2023: 7-8), integration policies have often failed to meet European human rights standards, including those relating to social cohesion, equality, and non-discrimination, which poses challenges for the rule of law. Relevant laws include the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Social Charter, and the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level. Therefore, in line with the EU's own direction, achieving effective integration requires the promotion of diversity

management policies that treat it as a resource and promote it within institutions through the fight against discrimination and the promotion of inclusion.

### **Integration and Inclusion: two different perspectives**

Nonetheless, there are important differences between integration and inclusion. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019: 107, 111), integration refers to the two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, through which migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural, and political life of the host community. In contrast, (social) inclusion refers to improving the ability, opportunities, and dignity of disadvantaged people so that they can fully participate in society. Thus, the term “integration” is broader as it encompasses related concepts such as inclusion and social cohesion, although these terms can sometimes be used interchangeably. In this area, Europe has, over the past two decades, advanced in developing strategies to promote both integration and inclusion. COM (2000) 757 marked a turning point by defining integration as a two-way process of mutual rights and obligations between legally residing third-country nationals and host societies, enabling full immigrant participation. This Communication emphasized a multidimensional and holistic approach involving various stakeholders. This model, supported by Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10, seeks to manage diversity as a resource, articulating multi-level policies involving governments, civil organizations, and migrant communities. These are third-country nationals who reside legally within the EU.

Along these lines, the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 on 6 April 2022, during the 1431st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. This recommendation promotes multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration. It outlines three fundamental elements for integration. First, the concept of “intercultural integration” as the result of a set of policies aimed at leveraging diversity’s potential, managing its complexities, and achieving cohesion, stability, and prosperity.

Second, a “holistic approach” coordinating long-term policies across all levels of governance to promote equality, pluralistic belonging, appreciation of

diversity, and social trust. Third, “multilevel governance” that includes central, regional, and local governments, as well as civil society organizations. Its implementation may vary, but ideally involves participatory processes for policy co-creation, cooperation, and coordination across all relevant authorities and stakeholders.

The principles of such intercultural integration are based on ensuring equality, valuing diversity, fostering meaningful interaction, and promoting active citizenship and participation. However, as stated in section 5 of the recommendation, none of its provisions are intended to affect “the legal status of migrants or persons of migrant origin residing in a member state or the conditions of legal entry into that territory” (Solanes, 2020). It is crucial to note that for the intercultural model, coexistence among different groups is key — that is, recognition. Therefore, active interrelation is promoted as a survival strategy, allowing for the regulation of interethnic conflict and the consensual construction of coexistence. While multiculturalism emphasizes the goal of recognizing diversity by identifying differences, interculturalism focuses on building mechanisms that enable integration (Taylor, 2012).

Solanes (2024) adds that intercultural integration must address socio-economic and legal inequalities, promoting active immigrant participation in society. In this regard, volunteering, according to Venero, can reduce these barriers by offering mentorship programs, group activities, and the development of social skills essential to foster migrant integration (2024). However, volunteer programs face challenges such as difficulty recruiting mentors due to stigma and lack of resources for specialized training (Venero, 2024). Solanes proposes multilevel governance to coordinate efforts among governments, NGOs, and communities, using European funds such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to finance inclusive initiatives (Solanes, 2024). This approach is essential to addressing barriers to volunteering.

## Methodology

For the state of the art and further development of the MARVI objectives, insights from both empirical research and literature were needed. The latter has been demonstrated in the literature review, and the first empirical research

has been done through several qualitative methods. Through focus groups and distinctive analysis of 8 European countries (The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, UK, France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy), the main objective was to develop an inter-European comparison based on empirical data. This has been done to be able to identify best practices in line with the objectives of MARVI as mentioned in the introduction, common challenges, and recommendations that could help strengthen and replicate effective approaches of inclusive volunteering in European museums.

To deepen national contextual analysis, the consortium produced a national report on the current state of volunteering in general and volunteering in museums specifically. These reports offered an in-depth insight in each of the 8 European countries and in the heterogeneity of European museums and their volunteers. These national reports provided a clear and up-to-date picture of how volunteering is viewed and structured in each country. Through them, it was possible to identify trends, participation models, legal frameworks, public policies, volunteer profiles, as well as the main challenges and opportunities faced by the sector. This information was essential for establishing common starting points and understanding the differences and similarities among the participating countries. Besides, comparing the data and experiences gathered in the national reports enabled mutual learning, the exchange of innovative approaches, and the foundation on how to build a collaborative network at the European level. This comparative approach contributes to enriching the debate on the role of volunteering in culture and to promoting more inclusive and sustainable policies.

Each partner of the consortium organized a focus group in which museum volunteers, volunteer managers and curators came together to discuss the main focus of MARVI - *how do we engage volunteering for inclusion in our museum?* Each focus group included 8 to 10 individuals of different genders, including active museum volunteers, museum professionals (curators, cultural mediators, managers, volunteer-coordinators), and third-sector organizations. Beforehand and during the focus groups, participants were asked to discuss several dimensions belonging to the state of volunteering in their museum. Participants were asked to reflect on the following topics: inclusion of bicultural individuals, people with migrant and/or diaspora backgrounds, and

narratives about decolonization in museums. This allowed the collection of: personal experiences of volunteering in museums; motivations and barriers to participation; (un)identified training needs; and the participants' perception of museum staff. The sessions were designed to encourage active participation from all profiles. In the section below, the insights gained from the national reports and the focus groups have been combined and compared, resulting in both theoretical, empirical and practical gaps the MARVI project aims to fill.

## **Contemporary Museum Volunteering in Europe: insights gained and best practices described**

As demonstrated through the literature review, across Europe, despite differing national contexts regarding legal structures, volunteer demographics, and institutional support, volunteers are crucial for operational support and for fostering inclusive, reflective, and decolonial practices within museums.

The trends identified in compiling this State of the Art Report indicate a growing recognition of volunteers as partners in shaping museums into democratic and participatory institutions. Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands exhibit strong integration of volunteers actively involved in decolonization, provenance research, and community outreach. In France, the UK, and Spain, there's increasing institutional commitment to addressing colonial legacies, with volunteers serving as mediators, interpreters, and co-creators of more equitable narratives. While Italy and Portugal face challenges in fully integrating decolonial approaches, there is clear evidence that stakeholders in these countries recognize the transformative potential of volunteers, particularly those from migrant and diaspora communities, in making cultural spaces more inclusive and fostering dialogue.

The evidence gathered indicates that museum volunteering is adapting to broader societal changes, with decolonization, intercultural dialogue, and the re-evaluation of historical narratives becoming increasingly central to museum missions. Volunteers are seen to be increasingly involved in these transformative efforts as mediators, advocates, and collaborators, addressing critical issues like colonial legacies, restitution, and inclusion as institutions aim to diversify narratives and audiences.

The fact that this form of volunteering goes beyond merely filling resource shortages and embodies a dynamic and participatory approach to heritage stewardship is highly visible. Volunteers are contributing to reshaping museums into more reflective, accessible, and socially responsible spaces. Museum volunteering in Europe sits at the nexus of civic engagement and social transformation, with volunteers increasingly participating in critical processes related to colonial legacies, restitution, and inclusive representation as museums actively grapple with these issues.

### **Examples of best practices that already engage with/through diaspora and migrant volunteers**

The Multaka project in Germany is a pioneering initiative where refugees and migrants volunteer as cultural mediators within museums. These volunteers use their own personal and cultural experiences to bridge gaps between museum collections and diverse audiences. They “facilitate access to collections by offering personal narratives that resonate with diverse audiences”. By sharing their stories and perspectives, they contribute to creating more inclusive and accessible cultural spaces. Multaka exemplifies how volunteer involvement can actively challenge traditional narratives and promote intercultural dialogue in museum settings.

#### **Red Star Line Museum in Belgium:**

Volunteers at the Red Star Line Museum in Belgium, many of whom come from migrant and diaspora backgrounds, are actively involved in interpreting migration histories and supporting community outreach programs. Their contributions help contextualize the museum’s exhibitions and connect historical migration experiences with contemporary social issues. This model illustrates how integrating volunteers with relevant cultural backgrounds can enhance the museum’s efforts to represent diverse narratives and engage broader audiences.

Through these examples and others, it can be seen how Museum volunteering in Europe is evolving beyond operational support to become a crucial element of civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and historical understanding. In this context, there's a growing emphasis on diversifying volunteer bases to include individuals from migrant, diaspora, and bicultural backgrounds. This shift aims to enrich museums' cultural relevance and incorporate a wider range of perspectives into their storytelling and interpretations of European heritage in the global context.

Museum volunteer programs are increasingly aligned with efforts to address colonial histories, amplify marginalized voices, and connect with diverse communities. This represents a move from traditional, preservation-focused roles to more participatory and ethically conscious heritage stewardship. Volunteers with migrant and bicultural backgrounds are particularly important in bridging institutional efforts and community experiences.

The Maritime Museum Rotterdam represents a comprehensive approach to decolonization that includes changing the presentation of its collections, reviewing internal organizational structures, and providing educational training for staff and volunteers. Volunteers play a key role as primary points of contact for visitors and as agents of change within the institution. They receive training and engage in the process of reinterpreting collections. According to the volunteer coordinator: *“One of the goals is to be able to represent a diverse set of cultural backgrounds in the exhibitions, but also with regards to the volunteers and museum staff at the museum.”* Furthermore, the museum is part of the ***Musea Bekennen Kleur*** network, which promotes diversity and inclusion policies within Dutch museums.

### **Decolonization through diaspora and migrant volunteers in museums**

Museums gain numerous benefits from increased volunteer diversity, including richer visitor experiences and expanded programming capabilities. Visitors, in turn, benefit from more inclusive, multilingual, and personal interactions.

In countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and France, volunteers from diverse backgrounds are playing a key role in provenance research, engaging diaspora communities, and re-evaluating the legacies of colonialism. Initiatives such as those shared in this report exemplify how volunteers with migrant and diaspora backgrounds can connect institutions with historically marginalized groups. While decolonial discourse is developing more gradually in Portugal, Spain, and Italy, volunteers with migrant and diaspora backgrounds are increasingly acting as cultural mediators, especially in regions or institutions actively seeking more inclusive historical viewpoints. Across Europe volunteers are actively shaping institutional narratives through storytelling, exhibitions, and workshops, enhancing the museum's relevance by incorporating contemporary migration experiences. This transforms museums into interactive cultural platforms rather than solely educational spaces.

The volunteer program at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid embraced a decolonizing approach during the “*Colonial Memory in the Collections*” exhibition project. Senior volunteers in the museum’s education team underwent special training to reinterpret the art collection with a focus on colonial history and formerly silenced narratives. These volunteers – including migrants and bicultural individuals – were given a role in guiding tours and discussions that highlighted perspectives from colonized cultures, thus moving beyond Eurocentric views of the artworks. By incorporating stories of indigenous and colonized peoples and acknowledging Spain’s colonial past, the volunteers helped create space for dialogue about historical injustices. This initiative illustrates how volunteers can be co-educators in restitution and memory projects: they not only learn about provenance and contested heritage themselves but also engage visitors in conversations about why repatriation and reframing of collections matter. Such volunteer involvement humanizes the decolonization process and demonstrates a committed, collective effort to rewrite narratives within the museum.

Volunteer programs with the intentional inclusion of individuals from migrant, bicultural, or diasporic backgrounds vary across museums. They can include activities related to specific exhibitions or events and/or more permanent and

“behind the scenes” actions that contribute to daily museum operations. Examples of these are the already highlighted Multaka project at the Berlin State Museums (Germany), where refugees are trained as guides to offer tours in Arabic and German, presenting objects from their own cultural perspectives and the Red Star Line Museum in Belgium, where the museum cooperated with young people with a migration background in a youth participation project, resulting in an exhibition co-curated by these young participants.

### **Internal pluralism: for some a myth, for others daily reality**

An increasing number of museums are recognizing internal plurality as an asset and are actively revising historical narratives to include previously silenced voices. Institutional self-critique is becoming more prevalent, with greater openness to questioning traditional museum practices and exploring new forms of representation.

The Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium have worked with African diaspora communities to rethink colonial-era exhibits, an inclusive overhaul that attracted a broader and younger visitor base after the museum’s 2018 reopening.

The Rijksmuseum in the Netherlands have aligned volunteer programs with efforts to confront colonial history and elevate marginalized voices, a strategy that has helped connect the museum with new audiences from diverse communities. A groundbreaking step by curating an exhibition focused on the Dutch colonial past and the transatlantic slave trade included personal stories from enslaved people and descendants. This highlighted the role of the Netherlands in slavery, and integrated community voices marking a major shift in a traditionally canonical museum.

By engaging in this kind of self-reflection, and embracing volunteer contributions from diaspora groups, these museums and others have

successfully reached visitors who previously felt excluded, building trust and relevance with a wider public and successfully engaging new audiences.

Museumnacht Maastricht is an annual event that invites a broad and diverse public to experience museums in new, dynamic ways—through art, performances, workshops, and discussions—often extending into the night.

It focuses on inclusivity and cultural diversity, aiming to attract younger and more varied audiences who might not typically visit museums.

Delftse Blik is a long-term project by Museum Prinsenhof Delft that invites local residents, especially from underrepresented communities, to co-curate exhibitions. The initiative gives voice to new perspectives on the city's history and heritage, helping to reshape the museum narrative from a more inclusive and participatory standpoint. The museum collaborates with local communities to co-create exhibitions and public artworks, such as the "Cherished" mural in the Buitenhof district, developed with residents and artist BEYOND.

Volunteering plays a crucial role in building connections between museums and diverse social groups, allowing some communities to create a "symbolic home" and a sense of belonging through their relationship with these institutions. In certain instances, this relationship facilitates intergenerational transmission, with young bicultural individuals often exploring family histories and addressing inherited emotional wounds. Despite these positive trends towards a more diverse volunteering base in museums in Europe, integration and inclusion are hindered by diverse cultural backgrounds characterised by lack of mutual trust, negative migration experiences, assimilation policies, and generational tensions stemming from historical silences and differing understandings of the past.

Volunteer engagement in museums faces challenges due to limited resources and staffing, hindering effective management and training. High commitment

expectations, rigid scheduling, and sometimes inefficient organizational practices can also deter a diverse range of volunteers. The absence of structured training programs, with reliance on ad-hoc or peer-to-peer instruction, further complicates volunteer development. In some instances, "lack of training" or "high commitment" are cited to exclude volunteers, potentially masking discomfort with non-traditional perspectives.

### **The forces needed for unity**

The frequent absence of dedicated volunteer coordinators, with responsibilities often delegated to other volunteers or existing staff, can result in the underappreciation of volunteers, particularly when compounded by educational disparities.

Some volunteers perceive no structured plan within the museums where they are active to increase diversity and address colonial issues and report a general lack of knowledge about decolonization in museum leadership. Structural barriers persist, with institutional inertia and hierarchical frameworks hindering power-sharing and a lack of structural commitment rendering inclusion efforts symbolic leading to volunteer participation that can become tokenistic and lack meaningful impact. Confusion or denial exists in some museums regarding the role of volunteers in institutional transformation and narrative change.

Volunteer contributions are often undervalued in decolonial discourse, and volunteers frequently lack recognition or compensation despite their crucial involvement. Volunteering is sometimes viewed as unpaid labour rather than a tool for meaningful inclusion. In some cases, volunteers lack decision-making power and are limited to basic tasks.

Unequal power dynamics are evident, with influential groups sometimes resisting inclusion initiatives due to fears of losing control or status. Many individuals with bicultural backgrounds feel unrepresented in traditional institutions, leading them to prioritize their own community organizations based on their values and perceived urgency of issues. Community organizations often lack the financial resources of formal institutions, hindering their meaningful participation in historical projects. Exclusionary recruitment practices relying on informal networks further limit diversity. This is also the case for religious neutrality laws, such as Belgium's ban on religious symbols in public institutions that serve to also impede diversity and inclusion in public

facing museum volunteering roles in a context where most museums are public institutions. In Portugal, excessive bureaucracy is cited as a common barrier. Some museums resist diversifying programming for fear of losing conservative donor support.

In Belgium, the reimbursement of volunteer expenses can be exclusionary, attracting volunteers to higher-reimbursing sectors and limiting opportunities for those with fewer resources to engage in the museum sector that typically offers lower values of expenses refunds than other sectors. Also in Belgium, linking active engagement in museums alongside volunteers as part of “volunteer programmes” to the national integration program can risk undermining authentic volunteer engagement. Similarly, while financial compensation in Portugal might increase commitment, it can also compromise the voluntary nature of participation. Rewarding volunteers with cultural access or academic credit can incentivize museum volunteering and remove some barriers as higher value to the time dedicated can be attributed.

To create more impactful and equitable volunteer programs, institutions must actively embed volunteer engagement within broader decolonial and inclusive frameworks. This requires a critical examination of existing power structures and a commitment to dismantling systemic barriers that may prevent certain individuals or communities from participating. Concrete steps should be taken to remove these barriers, which could include addressing financial constraints through stipends or reimbursements, providing accessible transportation, offering childcare, and adapting program schedules to accommodate diverse needs and availability.

Suitable training for museum volunteer managers and curators can contribute to reducing and even eliminating some of these barriers. The evidence and data gathered for this State of the Art report points to a number of elements that should be considered in this regard. Volunteer managers and curators should be made aware of the increasing public discussion around colonial histories that is prompting many museums to re-evaluate their practices. To ensure that the volunteering they organise aligns with their museum's decolonial vision, training materials for managers must include the acquisition of skills and competencies to assess if volunteer programs offer meaningful participation for individuals from marginalized communities or if they

perpetuate Eurocentric hierarchies. Training materials and programmes should prepare museum managers to develop and implement inclusive, collaborative participation models that consider the specific historical and cultural contexts of their institutions.

Volunteer managers and curators should be supported to understand that the pressure to conform can suppress diverse identities and voices and that bicultural individuals may perceive cultural adaptation as a loss of freedom. They need to be equipped to recognise any institutional resistance to uncomfortable narratives, such as the reluctance to address slavery, which leads to simplified or distorted histories. They need to have the knowledge and confidence to address controversies rather than ignore them, a situation that can marginalize complex histories. Volunteer managers and curators need to be helped to fully appreciate that reinterpreting the past through contemporary lenses risks distorting historical experiences and that actively acknowledging and reframing colonial pasts through new perspectives can strengthen the overall impact and significance of their museum to the local community and broader society.

Volunteer managers and curators should be supported in gaining understanding around how bicultural communities often view museums as elitist institutions that fail to reflect their histories or interests. They should be equipped with the vision that utilizing museums as platforms for change and education allows for the inclusion of hidden or uncomfortable histories from new perspectives, preserving historical memory, and promoting collective healing. Training for Volunteer managers and curators should help them to better appreciate how new generations of volunteers can revitalize their museum's mission by giving voice to their silenced suffering and lead to a greater understanding of their own histories through volunteering, filling gaps left by older generations' silence.

Volunteer managers and curators should be assisted through the training to gain skills and competencies in how to integrate diverse voices and experiences not only in exhibitions but also in the internal operations of their museum. Training should emphasise that historical memory and the emotional impact of past painful experiences continue to affect people and that the role they play and can play in creating spaces for processing these emotions and

fostering intergenerational dialogue is crucial. The intergenerational transmission of emotions, such as anger over past injustices, motivates many young people to participate and in this context, when this energy and commitment is harnessed for good under expert management, bicultural youth and adults can act as bridges between museums and marginalized communities.

### **European museums: islands or together on vast land?**

Most volunteer programs in the analysed European museums as part of this report are managed directly by the museums, though some collaborate with local community organizations within their sphere of influence. Volunteer managers and curators should be guided in the training about how to complement their direct efforts in individually seeking volunteers by partnering with existing community organizations. This approach improves access to diverse communities.

Inter-museum exchanges can also promote mutual learning and help maintain high motivation levels and the training should also include step by step ideas on how to implement this. Organizing cultural events and competitions also offer creative ways to engage individuals with diverse talents and backgrounds and training on how to go about this should also be provided together with tips on how to use social media, a powerful tool for diversifying volunteer profiles and attracting new participants.

Considering their key role in training volunteers, volunteer Managers and Curators need to be trained as supportive and engaging trainers. They need to have the skills and competencies to ensure teams of well-trained volunteers are able to support a broad range of cultural services (guided tours, events, education), humanizing the visitor experience, particularly in heritage sites. Well-trained and diverse volunteer groups can bridge gaps between institutions and communities, amplify underrepresented voices, and enhance the impact of decolonial narratives. Volunteers develop practical skills (curation, event organization), soft skills (intercultural collaboration, communication), and a sense of belonging within a prestigious cultural space. Investing in ensuring that museum volunteer managers and curators can deliver comprehensive training that goes beyond task-specific instructions is vital.

This training should equip volunteers with the knowledge and skills to engage effectively with diverse populations, understand the historical and social contexts of the issues they are addressing, and promote culturally sensitive and inclusive practices. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities are equally important to ensure volunteers understand their contributions and feel confident in their ability to make a difference. Museum volunteer managers and curators need to understand how to ensure that this is the case. They should also be capable of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of their volunteers and have a clear understanding that many individuals may use or wish to use their volunteer experience as a stepping stone towards enhanced career opportunities, increased civic participation, and/or broader social integration. They should have the knowledge and skills to ensure that beyond the direct interests of the museum and their mission, that volunteering facilitates integration, skills development, and even access to employment. To this end, they should be trained in processes and procedures for the good quality validation of non-formal and informal learning acquired whilst volunteering.

European museums can achieve meaningful cultural restoration and de-colonialisation by actively involving volunteers, especially those from diverse and diaspora communities, in co-creating narratives and driving institutional change. This empowers museums to become spaces for shared memory, critical reflection, and collective healing, shifting the power of storytelling.

However, integrating volunteers effectively requires addressing challenges in training, role definition, and recognition, particularly for individuals from migrant or bicultural backgrounds. Successful inclusive volunteering models highlight the potential for empowering underrepresented voices and fostering intercultural understanding.

### **The need for MARVI**

Realizing the full potential of cultural volunteering for social justice, intercultural understanding, and historical reckoning and restoration demands stronger policy innovation, inclusive programming, and institutional accountability. Persistent challenges include inconsistent progress in decolonization, underrepresentation of migrant and bicultural volunteers, and

the need for improved training and role clarity for managers and volunteers alike.

Key success factors include:

- Community Partnerships: Collaborating with community groups to create relevant and impactful volunteer experiences built on trust and mutual respect, addressing community-identified needs, and fostering culturally sensitive programs rooted in the local context.
- Linguistic and Emotional Support: Providing necessary support to ensure inclusive participation.
- Co-creation with Volunteers: Involving volunteers in content development and institutional change.

Decolonization in museums is a continuous process of re-evaluating power, authority, and narratives, requiring institutional introspection, structural reform, transparency, humility, and shared power. Integrating inclusive volunteering is crucial for cultivating more equitable, reflective, and educational environments. While some institutions demonstrate holistic decolonial practices, others offer superficial gestures. Traditional museums often still present non-European cultures through biased perspectives. Sustainability in volunteer engagement can be achieved by recruiting volunteers from marginalized groups through trusted community organizations and hosting introductory events. Addressing language and cultural barriers through mentorship, on-site support, and informal learning spaces is essential.

Decolonization signifies a fundamental transformation in museums' relationships with communities, collections, and knowledge. Cultural volunteering, based on horizontal dialogue, recognition of diverse knowledge, and social justice, serves as a powerful tool for advancing institutional decolonization. Actively amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and centering their perspectives in program design and implementation is vital for equitable volunteer programs. Fostering intergenerational dialogue enriches volunteer experiences by combining diverse perspectives and skills. Finally, while digital tools offer benefits for recruitment, communication, and program delivery, their use should be balanced to avoid widening inequalities and excluding individuals lacking access or digital literacy.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated in this State of the Art report, the Erasmus+ project MARVI (Museums and Restoration Volunteering for Inclusion) represents a key opportunity to rethink the role of cultural volunteering in museums and archives from a critical and inclusive perspective. In this context, reaching conclusions and formulating recommendations is not only a formal closure to the research and participatory process, but also a political and transformative act. These conclusions help to identify good practices, highlight structural tensions, and generate collective learning that can inform future cultural policies.

A central dimension of MARVI has been the questioning of post- and neo-colonial structures that still persist in many cultural institutions. Decolonization must not be understood as a mere shift in narratives, but as a profound transformation in the way museums relate to their communities, their collections, and to knowledge itself. In this sense, cultural volunteering—when based on horizontal dialogue, recognition of diverse forms of knowledge, and social justice—can be a powerful tool for advancing institutional decolonization processes. The project's conclusions should make visible how volunteering can (or cannot) contribute to this change. For instance, by identifying whether volunteer programmes offer genuine spaces for participation to individuals from historically marginalized communities, or whether they reproduce Eurocentric hierarchies and vertical relationships. Recommendations, in turn, should aim to propose more inclusive, collaborative participation models that are sensitive to the historical and cultural contexts of each institution.

In sum, the conclusions not only serve as an evaluation tool but also as a foundation for action. The significance lies in the potential to foster museum practice that is more ethical, critical, and committed to the values of equity, inclusion and diversity.

## References

Alves, S. A., & Sancho Quero, L. (2024). La decolonialidad como acción colectiva para la construcción de una narrativa humanizada en los museos. *Revista PH*, (111), 173-175.

Ambrosini, M., & Artero, M. (2023). Immigrant volunteering: A form of citizenship from below. *Voluntas*, 34(1), 252-262.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00454-x>

Anderson, A., Rogers, A., Potter, E., Cook, E., Gardner, K., Murawski, M., ... & Machida, A. (2017). Interpretation: Liberating the narrative. MASS Action Toolkit, 89-103.

Barndt, K., & Jaeger, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Museums, Narratives, and Critical Histories: Narrating the Past for the Present and Future*. De Gruyter Brill.

Cappadozzi, T., & Fonović, K. (2021). Volunteering in Italy: Characteristics and profiles of organization-based and direct volunteers. In: R. Guidi, K. Fonović, & T. Cappadozzi (Eds.), *Accounting for the varieties of volunteering: New global statistical standards tested* (pp. 157-190). Springer.

Câmara Municipal de Leiria (n.d.). Programa Municipal de Voluntariado Cultural. Retrieved from <https://www.cm-leiria.pt/areas-de-atividade/cultura/programa-municipal-de-voluntariado-cultural>

CASES - Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social. (2018). Inquérito ao Trabalho Voluntário em Portugal 2018. Instituto Nacional de Estatística. Retrieved from <https://cases.pt/inquerito-ao-trabalho-voluntario/>

CESA - Centre for African and Development Studies. (2024). *Exhibition "Deconstructing Colonialism, Decolonizing the Imaginary" on display at the Museu Nacional de Etnologia from October 29, 2024*. Retrieved from <https://cesa.rc.iseq.ulisboa.pt/news/exhibition-deconstructing-colonialism-decolonizing-the-imagination-on-display-at-the-museu-nacional-de-etnologia-from-october-29-2024>

Círculo de Bellas Artes (2024). *Los museos ante la descolonización. Cuando restituir significa algo más que devolver piezas*.

<https://www.circulobellasartes.com/mediateca/los-museos-espanoles-ante-su-descolonizacion/>

De Haas, H. (2003). *Migration and development in southern Morocco: The disparate socioeconomic impacts of out-migration on the Togha Oasis Valley*. Amsterdam: De Haas.

Direção-Geral do Património Cultural. (n.d.). *Manual de acolhimento de voluntariado cultural*. Retrieved from [https://backend.museusemonumentos.pt/uploads/Manual\\_de\\_Acolhimento\\_de\\_Voluntariado\\_Cultural\\_519966a409.pdf](https://backend.museusemonumentos.pt/uploads/Manual_de_Acolhimento_de_Voluntariado_Cultural_519966a409.pdf)

Fundação Eugénio de Almeida. (2025) Oportunidades de Voluntariado. Retrieved from <https://wwwfea.pt/social/voluntariado/ser-voluntario/em-outras-organizacoes>

Grbic, G. (2010). Social and Cultural Meanings of Tolerance: Immigration, Incorporation and Identity in Aotearoa, New Zealand. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36:1, pp.125-148.

Hagerty, B. M., Lynch-Sauer, J., Patusky, K. L., Bouwsema, M., & Collier, P. (1992). Sense of belonging: A vital mental health concept. *Archives of psychiatric nursing*, 6(3), 172-177.

Holmes, K. (2007). Volunteers in the heritage sector: a neglected audience?. In: *Museum management and marketing*. Routledge.

INE - Instituto Nacional de Estatística. (2018). Inquérito ao Trabalho Voluntário 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.ine.pt>

International Council of Museums (ICOM). (n.d.). Guidelines for museum volunteer programs

Lopes, M. (2020). Volunteer programs in Portuguese museums: An evolving role in cultural heritage. *Museum Journal of Portugal*, 34(2), 45-58.

Koning, H. (2017). Benaderingen van erfgoededucatie en tentoonstellingen met betrekking tot sensitief erfgoed die een richtlijn kunnen bieden bij het ontwerpen van kunsteducatieve projecten in musea.

McAuliffe, P. (2021). Complicity or Decolonization? Restitution of Heritage from 'Global' Ethnographic Museums.

Museum of Aljube – Resistance and Freedom. (n.d.). "(De) Colonial Act". Retrieved from <https://www.museudoaljube.pt/en/expo/de-colonial-act/>

Museu de Marinha (Maritime Museum). (n.d.). *Museu de Marinha - Home*. Retrieved from <https://www.museudomarinha.pt/en>

Museu do Aljube – Resistência e Liberdade. (n.d.). *Volunteer opportunities*. Retrieved from <https://www.museudoaljube.pt/en/volunteering/>

Museu do Fado. (n.d.). *Museu do Fado – Home*. Retrieved from <https://www.museudofado.pt/en>

Museu Nacional Ferroviário. (n.d.). *Volunteer program*. Retrieved from [https://www.fmnf.pt/en/customer-service/volunteer-program/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.fmnf.pt/en/customer-service/volunteer-program/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Museu Nacional de Arqueologia (n.d.). *Público e Voluntariado*. Retrieved from <https://www.museunacionalarqueologia.gov.pt/?p=4967>

Museus e monumentos de Portugal (n.d.). *Manual de Acolhimento de Voluntariado Cultural*. Retrieved from [https://backend.museusemonumentos.pt/uploads/Manual\\_de\\_Acolhimento\\_de\\_Voluntariado\\_Cultural\\_519966a409.pdf](https://backend.museusemonumentos.pt/uploads/Manual_de_Acolhimento_de_Voluntariado_Cultural_519966a409.pdf)

Procter, A. (2024). *El cuadro completo. La historia colonial del arte en nuestros museos*. Capitan Swing Libros.

Ravia, D. (2023). *Beyond the decolonization of museum collections: improving inclusivity through volunteering programs: a case study of Dutch History museums and the effects of the changed narrative on the sense of belonging experienced by volunteers*. Master Thesis, Erasmus University

RECIL Repository – Lusófona University. (2023). *Decolonial Narratives in Portuguese Maritime Museum Exhibitions*. Retrieved from <https://recil.ulusofona.pt/items/4e5b52a9-4735-4ed9-bb75-4b80204dc286>

Schavemaker, M., Modest, W., Brandon, P., Fatah-Black, K., de Wildt, A., van Bijnen, E., ... Feenstra, M. (Eds.). (2024). *The Future of the Dutch Colonial Past*. Amsterdam University Press.

Sheffer, G. (Ed.). (1986). *Modern diasporas in international politics*. Croom Helm. London.

Smith, D. H. (2000). *Grassroots Associations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Smith, D. H. (2015a). "Voluntary Associations". *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2). J. D. Wright, ed. Oxford, UK: Elsevier. pp. 252–260.

Smith, D. H., Stebbins, R. A., and Grotz, J. eds. (2017). *The Palgrave handbook of volunteering, civic participation, and nonprofit associations*. Springer.

Sul Informação. (2023, January). *Vem aí um novo programa de voluntariado no Museu de Lagos*. Retrieved from <https://www.sulinformacao.pt/en/2023/01/vem-ai-um-novo-programa-de-voluntariado-no-museu-de-lagos/>

Velani, F., & Rosati, C. (2012). Guida ad uso del volontario informato: La Magna Charta del Volontariato per i Beni Culturali. Cesvot.

Visser Travagli, A. M. (2011). Il volontariato nei musei italiani. La formazione dei professionisti e dei volontari. *IL CAPITALE CULTURALE: Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage*, 2, 91-113. Edizioni Università di Macerata.

## Appendix

### National Reports

#### Belgium

The national level of volunteering in Belgium in 2022 indicates that 2,656,968 people were engaged in volunteering activities, representing 22.74% of the total population of Belgium. [Volunteering Database](#)

"The legal framework in Belgium reflects the federal character of the state and the specificities of the three major communities, the Dutch, the French, and the German one. The legal framework for volunteering is mainly governed at the federal level, while each of the three communities has its own good practice. Each community has the right and the possibility to set specific rules on volunteering, by establishing decrees which fall within the framework as set forth by federal legislation. The Law on the Rights of the Volunteer being

adopted in July 2005 and implemented since January 2006 starts with a clear definition of what can be understood by “volunteering”:

“Volunteering is an activity executed by an individual, on a free and unpaid basis, and not aimed for their own benefit and neither that of close friends or family, but aimed towards the organisation itself, a certain aim or the society as a whole, within a non-profit organisation” ([Law original](#)), ([National report BE.doc](#)).

The Law regulates among the other issues the following: volunteering by people with a state

allowance; reimbursement of expenses incurred by volunteers; liability of volunteers; insurance obligations; information duty. The Law sets criteria for volunteering by people with different types of State allowances such as unemployment benefits or health benefits and also sets limits to the amounts that a volunteer can be reimbursed throughout one year. The liability issue is mostly protecting the volunteer, especially if the volunteering is done through a legal organisation, but there are differences with regard to liability for volunteers outside a formalised organisation. Similar provisions apply for the insurance of volunteers. This difference between volunteers of legally registered organisations and volunteers outside this type of organisation is acknowledged to be a weakness of the legal framework as it regulates different treatment for volunteers and may thus inhibit spontaneous volunteering, outside a legally registered organisation” [from Volunteering infrastructure in Europe by Eva Hambach](#)

Over time, the law has been updated (e.g. a 2019 amendment) to expand and clarify volunteers’ rights. For instance, since 2014, regulations have ensured that non-EU citizens with legal residency (including asylum seekers) can volunteer without needing a work permit, reflecting a policy choice to open up volunteering to everyone legally in Belgium ([Law original](#)) ([National report BE.doc](#)). The major benefit brought by the Law is the setting of a unified framework guiding the activity of organisations involving volunteers. The Law is accompanied by several sector specific regulations and also states specific regulations. Its’ implementation is guarded by governmental bodies according

to the level of government (federal, state, local) and to specific competences (related to unemployment, taxes etc.)”

Belgium also created a High Council of Volunteers (Conseil Supérieur des Volontaires) in 2002 as a permanent advisory body to the Minister of Social Affairs ([2.2 Administration and governance of youth volunteering](#)). This council gathers stakeholders to advise the government on volunteering issues and to address practical questions across different sectors (e.g. volunteer insurance, tax questions, etc.). Furthermore, Belgium’s linguistic communities have their own support networks for volunteering (for example, the Plateforme francophone du Volontariat in the French-speaking community and Vlaanderen Vrijwilligt in Flanders), which provide resources, training, and information on the volunteer law to associations and volunteers. A report carried out by the King Baudouin Foundation on volunteering in Belgium at the request of the State shows that 23% of volunteering activities are culture-related, in socio-cultural or nature-themed associations. ([Report](#)). There is not a single consolidated statistic for museum volunteering on national level, but we may see a significant involvement using the museums websites.

For instance, in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels (a federal museum complex), about 100 volunteers are active just in the visitor welcome and information services, organized via the museum’s Friends association ([Become a Friend – Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium](#)).

The Royal Museum for Central Africa (AfricaMuseum) in Tervuren similarly runs a volunteer program and regularly “looks for motivated volunteers who want to support [the] daily work” of the museum ([Volunteers | Royal Museum for Central Africa - Tervuren - Belgium](#)). Tasks offered there include working with the public or assisting staff behind the scenes.

The Royal Institute of Natural Sciences in Brussels engages volunteers (often via its “Friends of the Institute” group or citizen science projects) for helping with collections and research (e.g., fossil prep, specimen cataloguing) and in public education ([Découvrir & Participer | Institut des Sciences naturelles](#)).

These examples illustrate that even at major museums, volunteers are integrated into the workforce in structured ways (usually supplementing professional staff). Beyond museums, archives and libraries are also related

cultural institutions making use of volunteers. The National Archives of Belgium has for years enlisted volunteers – typically retired historians, local history enthusiasts, or experienced genealogists – to help preserve and make accessible its collections <https://www.arch.be/index.php?l=fr&m=en-pratique&r=devenir-benevole>. They work on tasks like indexing historical records (such as notary registers or old civil documents), rehousing and labeling archive files, assisting archivists with preparing documents for researchers, helping with library duties, and even contributing to exhibitions and digitization projects.

According to Eurostat's [Migration and migrant population statistics](#), as of 1 January 2023, there were about 606 600 third-country nationals (TCNs), representing 5.2% of the population, and another 981 700 EU citizens (8.4%) living in Belgium at the time. The data on numbers of bicultural volunteers or those with a migrant or diaspora background in Belgium is scarce. However, Belgium's inclusive legal stance and active projects suggest a commitment to involve migrants. The change in 2014 opened up volunteering to "any foreign person with a residence permit," which has enabled many newcomers to get involved as volunteers from the early stages of their integration.

The High Council of Volunteers and regional integration centres encourage associations to open their doors to volunteers of foreign origin. Several examples of involving migrants as volunteers are, e.g. in May 2023, the Belgian government, in collaboration with the Platform for Citizen Service, initiated a program allowing young asylum seekers aged between 18 and 25 to volunteer for six months at one of the 800 member organisations of Platform for Citizen Service. The initiative engaged over 600 young people in 2022 ([An Article](#))

The Plateforme francophone du Volontariat (PFV) created a "toolkit for volunteering by newcomers and asylum seekers" with practical guidance for both volunteers and organizations ([Pour un volontariat ouvert aux nouveaux arrivants](#)). They also run the "Volonterre d'Asile" network, sharing best practices on involving refugees in volunteer work producing a series of stories as part of our 2020 campaign "[Newcomers today, volunteers tomorrow? Together in the adventure!"](#)

A notable program tapping into the potential of bicultural volunteers is DUO for a JOB, a Belgian NGO that pairs young job-seekers of immigrant origin with older, experienced professionals as mentors (who serve as volunteers)

<https://www.unhcr.org/be/que-pouvez-vous-faire/portez-vous-volontaire>

Another example is SINGA Belgium, which creates volunteer-based networks linking locals and newcomers for social activities. According to report 2023 305 volunteers participated in organizing and facilitating activities (36 out of 103 were newcomers!) or in supporting the integration of newly arrived individuals. [Report 2023, https://en.singa-belgium.org/](https://en.singa-belgium.org/)

Red Star Line Museum have pioneered volunteer programs that involve migrants as guides and hosts, creating a win-win for integration and visitor experience. Example of The Red Star Line Museum focuses on Language volunteers: <https://redstarline.be/nl/pagina/taalvrijwilligers>

Museum volunteering entails a wide range of tasks and activities that support the institution's mission. The concept is that volunteers supplement and enhance the work of professional staff, often by dedicating time to tasks that improve visitor experience or collections care. Common roles and tasks include:

Many museum volunteers serve as docents or tour guides, leading guided tours or providing information to visitors in exhibit halls. Volunteers usually receive training to perform these interpretive tasks. In some cases, they might staff the welcome desk or reception, scanning tickets or orienting visitors on where to go. Volunteers often help with organizing events, workshops, or special museum days. This can include tasks like setting up rooms, registering participants, or even demonstrating crafts and activities (especially if the volunteer has specific expertise). Some volunteers work behind the scenes with curatorial or archival tasks. They might help catalogue new acquisitions, label and sort collection items, or enter data into databases. For example, the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences

(<https://www.naturalsciences.be/fr/decouvrir-participer/sciences-participatives>).

The State Archives volunteers, for example, perform tasks such as indexing archival records, rehousing documents in protective folders, assisting archivists in preparing exhibits, and even helping input data for genealogy databases

([Devenir bénévole - Archives de l'État en Belgique](#)) ([Devenir bénévole - Archives de l'État en Belgique](#)). These are skilled tasks that significantly improve access to historical documents for researchers. In archaeology, volunteers might join excavation teams during digs. Under professional supervision, they help with excavating, cleaning artifacts, sifting soil, or documenting findings. Belgium has organizations like Archéolo-J that coordinate volunteer archaeological camps for youth, indicating a structured way for volunteers to engage in digs ([2024 - Fouilles archéologiques ouvertes aux étudiants](#))

We may distinguish several categories of volunteers based on their roles, motivations, or affiliations. Here are some common categories, with examples: Friends of the Museum: typically, a nonprofit group of supporters, members, and donors who raise funds and provide volunteers. For example, the Friends of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium is an association of over 3,000 art lovers that supports the national art museums in Brussels ([Become a Friend – Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium](#)). Friends associations frequently include patrons and donors (people who give money or art to the museum) as well as active volunteers – indeed. Friends of Musée L was created in 1985 by a professor together with other “*founders, donors, and volunteers of the museum*”, and over the years it built up an enthusiastic network of supporters . Today that association has 1000+ members and about 30 regular volunteers who actively contribute to the museum’s activities ([Les Amis du Musée L | Musée L](#))

Volunteer Guides and Docents: This category refers to individuals who primarily volunteer to educate and guide the public. Larger museums often have a corps of volunteer docents who undergo training in art history or science communication to conduct tours. Smaller museums might simply rely on knowledgeable locals to guide visitors on weekends. Collections and Research Volunteers: Sometimes called “*nonprofit researchers*” or “*scientific volunteers*”, these are volunteers who contribute their expertise to the museum’s research or curatorial work. They might be amateur archaeologists, hobby historians, or aspiring students. In Belgium, a good example is the group of volunteers at the State Archives: many are avid genealogists or local historians who volunteer to help sort and interpret archival materials ([Devenir](#)

[bénévole - Archives de l'État en Belgique](#)). These volunteers operate somewhat like unpaid research assistants or cataloguers.

This category has gained importance with the push for museums to be more inclusive. These are volunteers who provide the museum with specialized cultural knowledge or community connections. For ethnographic and historical museums, this might include members of diaspora or indigenous communities who act as advisors, storytellers, or demonstrators of cultural practices. In Belgium's case, the AfricaMuseum commissioned projects by African diaspora artists and activists as part of its decolonization strategy. While the artists might be paid for their art, activists collaborating in workshops or providing feedback often do so in a volunteer/advisory capacity.

A patron of a museum may also volunteer time on the board or in planning events. In Friends groups, major donors are often honorary volunteers helping lead the association. For example, the Friends of Musée L case shows founders and *donateurs* in the volunteer mix ([Les Amis du Musée L | Musée L](#)). This category underscores that contributions to a museum can be multi-faceted – someone might start as a volunteer and later donate funds, or vice versa.

These are volunteers who are not continuously involved but step in for specific projects or short-term needs. Many museums have volunteer opportunities for example for a summer digitization project, an exhibition installation period, or an annual festival. University students might volunteer during their vacation on an archaeological dig or to help run a cultural event. Such volunteers don't fit into the year-round structure but are crucial during peak times. Belgian museums, for instance, often recruit extra helpers for big public happenings like Brussels Museum Night or heritage days. Even larger museums may have "volunteer day" events where corporate volunteers come in for a day of service (like repainting a gallery or moving collections). SMAK Museum in Ghent has 20 volunteers working on Late Thursday, a Teachers' Day, Children's Art Day, the Art Matinee on Sunday, Museum Night, ... and the list goes on (<https://smak.be/en/news/de-vrijwilligers-van-s-m-a-k>).

All these categories show the diverse ways people engage as museum volunteers – from regular weekly docents to one-off event helpers, from local

teenagers to international scholars. Museums typically coordinate these roles through a volunteer manager or through the Friends association leadership.

In Belgium, this balance is actually codified by law. *“A volunteer cannot perform the same activity both as an employee and as a volunteer for the same employer... a clear distinction must be made between the activity [one] performs as paid staff and the activity [one] performs as a volunteer.”* ([National report BE.doc](#)). This means, for example, if a museum employs professional guides or interpreters, it should not use volunteers to do the exact same job in the same context, especially not with the effect of replacing or undercutting the paid employees.

In practice, compatibility is achieved by role differentiation and collaboration. Professional museum guides are usually certified or have specialized training and are paid to conduct in-depth tours, educational programs, and scholarly interpretation. Volunteers may also guide tours, but typically either in a more limited capacity (perhaps only general highlight tours or weekend volunteer-led tours) or in areas where the museum staff doesn't provide coverage. Many museums reserve certain types of tours for professionals – for instance, school group tours might always be led by museum education staff, whereas a free volunteer-led tour for individual visitors might be offered on Sundays. Volunteers often handle the lighter or supplementary guiding tasks: greeting and orienting visitors, answering basic questions in galleries, or leading non-critical tours, thereby enhancing the visitor experience without taking away work from paid guides.

Museums also often pair volunteers with professionals. A volunteer might serve as an assistant in a guided tour handled by a professional, helping herd the group or distribute materials. From the professional guides' perspective, as long as their employment is secure and volunteers are properly trained and supervised, having volunteers can even be a boon. It allows professionals to delegate simpler tasks and focus on high-skill work. For interpreters (like those who provide translations or sign-language interpretation in museums), similar logic applies: volunteers can help interpret in informal ways (say, a multilingual volunteer might spontaneously help a tourist), but official translation or interpretation services remain with pros to maintain quality.

In summary, museum volunteering is designed to be compatible with paid professional roles through legal safeguards and thoughtful role design. The Belgian legal requirement for a distinction is a strong foundation. Museums adhere to it by ensuring no volunteer job description is a copy-paste of a paid job. Instead, volunteers and professionals work side by side, with volunteers extending the reach of the museum and professionals guaranteeing the core quality.

In recent years, Belgium has been grappling with how to “decolonize” the narratives presented in its museums and heritage institutions, especially those dealing with colonial history. This comes in the wake of a broader reckoning with the legacy of Belgian colonialism in Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. Several initiatives and projects have emerged to introduce more critical, inclusive narratives that acknowledge past injustices and include the voices of colonized peoples and their descendants.

The most prominent efforts have centred around the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren. A major renovation project (2013–2018) was undertaken with the explicit goal of re-examining the colonial narrative. The museum reopened in December 2018 with revamped exhibits intended to confront its own history. The administration of the AfricaMuseum placed heavy emphasis on inclusivity and diversity as pillars of decolonization, bringing in external voices to reshape content

Another initiative at RMCA was to commission contemporary art and input from African artists and activists as part of the new displays. The idea was to juxtapose colonial-era artifacts and statues with modern works that critique or recontextualize them. The museum’s administration explicitly stated that they “commission projects created by African artists and activists of the diaspora as a decolonial strategy ([An Article](#)).

In 2023, for its 125th anniversary, the Africa Museum launched a special program titled “125/5” with the central theme of decolonisation. This included a variety of public activities such as workshops, performances, and guided tours explicitly addressing colonialism. Notably, the museum partnered with external groups: for example, a workshop on decolonizing the museum was organized by BAMKO, a Brussels-based Afro-feminist collective that works

against racism. There were also workshops on the impact of colonization run by Kuumba (the Flemish-African cultural house in Brussels ([An Article](#))

The Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp created an exhibition specifically about its colonial collection and actively involved the Congolese diaspora in Antwerp in the process. The exhibit featured 100 Congolese objects and probed how they were collected, what they meant to Congolese communities, and the legacy of their acquisition ([An Article](#))

The Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp ( KMSKA), recently re-opened in 2022 conducted research to confront its own colonial-era connections. Leading up the reopening, the KMSKA reviewed its colonial history, examining how colonial money or activities may have contributed to its collections and building ([Review of the KMSKA's colonial history](#)). A published report now openly addresses topics such as colonial funding of art acquisitions and the museum's context in 19th-century imperial Belgium. For instance, the museum investigated the 1894 World Exhibition in Antwerp, which included a human zoo of Congolese people on its square, and the involvement of museum officials in that event . By acknowledging these “unedifying” aspects of its past and summarizing findings along with “ambitions for the future” KMSKA has integrated a decolonial awareness into its institutional narrative and policy.

Decolonizing museum narratives is an ongoing, iterative project. Some critics argue that despite renovations, institutions like the AfricaMuseum still have far to go indicating inconsistency. This critique suggests that true decolonization requires deep changes in mindset and structure, not just cosmetic updates. “The article problematizes the idea of inclusivity and diversity as two principal elements of decolonization upon which the administration of the AfricaMuseum insists. Drawing on the work of scholars such as AnaLouise Keating (2012), Karen Barad (2014), and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2016)”

Volunteer contributions have become a valued part of Belgian museum culture over the last decade. Many museums in Belgium have formed their own volunteer circles or partner with “friends of the museum” associations. These friends’ associations are often volunteer-driven themselves and provide a structured way for enthusiasts to contribute.

Here are several examples:

- Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (Brussels) – The Friends of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts support the museum with a large volunteer corps. About 100 volunteers assist with visitor reception and information, and help various museum departments with projects ([Become a Friend – Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique](#)).
- Royal Museums of Art and History (Brussels) – This federal museum group (which includes the Cinquantenaire Museum and others) has actively recruited volunteers for public-facing roles. For example, a 2022 call invited volunteers to help welcome visitors on weekends at the museums (including the Musical Instruments Museum), offering perks like free access to exhibits <https://art-histoire.be/les-mrah-recrutent-des-volontaires>
- Royal Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren) – runs an ongoing volunteer program to support its daily operations. It regularly invites motivated volunteers (via an open call on its website) to assist with tasks and join its team, especially if they enjoy engaging with the public [https://www.africamuseum.be/fr/get\\_involved/volunteers](https://www.africamuseum.be/fr/get_involved/volunteers)
- The War Heritage Institute which oversees the Royal Army Museum and other sites (Brussels) benefits from dedicated volunteers in its operations. A notable example is the affiliated Belgian Tank Museum association: it counts around 60 core volunteers who help maintain and restore historic tanks and armoured vehicles in the national collection ([Belgian Tank Museum | Belgium Battlefield of Europe](#)).
- Red Star Line Museum (Antwerp). All volunteers are Dutch learners at the museum who practice the language while serving as hosts for visitors ([Taalvrijwilligers | Red Star Line Museum](#)). The program is mutually beneficial: volunteers improve their Dutch in a meaningful context, and the museum strengthens its connection to the city's diverse communities. Museum has included people from Syria, Morocco, Poland, and beyond, reflecting Antwerp's diversity

- The Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (MSK) has engaged volunteers for exhibition support and public outreach (<https://www.mskgent.be/community>).
- S.M.A.K. (Museum of Contemporary Art Ghent) collaborates with refugee communities through partnerships with organizations like Globe Aroma and Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, organizing events and projects that engage refugees in the museum's activities.<https://smak.be/en/activities/projecten-met-vluchtelingen>
- World War I history museum (Ypres) – relies on volunteer involvement for its educational mission. An enthusiastic group of educational volunteers supports the museum's staff, helping to interpret the complex WWI history for school groups and the public (<https://www.inflandersfields.be/en/bezoek-e/school-e/>). These volunteers, coordinated by the museum's learning team, guide visitors through exhibits and even assist in research on soldiers' personal stories ([https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/opportunity/37067\\_no](https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/opportunity/37067_no)).

Many other regional museums host volunteers or “Friends of the museum” groups – for instance, the KMSKA (Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp) or Musée royal de Mariemont (Hainaut) and various local heritage museums have supporters who donate their time.

### *France*

Between 2010 and 2016, the proportion of people volunteering in associations increased. In 2010, 22.6% of French people were volunteers, compared to one quarter in 2016. Since then, this proportion has been declining and reached 20.1% in 2022.

There is no general legal framework regulating volunteering. On the one hand, various provisions scattered among different laws give certain rights to bénévoles in relation to their activity or status (e.g. unemployed people, pensioners). On the other hand, there are a number of laws regulating the various forms of volontariat (e.g. volontariat in associations, for social cohesion and solidarity, etc). The legal status of volontariat is extremely complex, and it

is currently under reform. The bénévole has no legal status and is totally free to combine for profit and non-profit commitments, contrary to the volontaire who has a legal status and a contract of exclusive commitment with the structure that compensates him. It is important to note that this absence of legal framework is generally supported by the associative sector, as it reflects the nature of bénévolat, based on the free engagement of an individual. The new law adopted on 15 April 2024 has created 3 new employee volunteering options in the French Labour Code: Employees can request up to 6 days per year to work for the French government's Ombudsman ("Défenseur des Droits"). Employees can already request such leave of absence to support certain charities and non-profit organizations. Employees can donate a certain number of unused rest days to certain charities and non-profit organizations. A company can send an employee on secondment, for up to 3 years, to a new or small to medium-sized company to help train their staff or to work on a common project.

In terms of the volume of voluntary work, the following breakdown is provided by the MATISSE Survey: 29% Sport, 16% Culture (including museums), 13% Social and health sector, 12% Leisure and social clubs, 10% Advocacy organisations, 10% Humanitarian action, 4% Economic interests, 4% Education and training, and 1% other.

The profile of volunteers is similar to that observed in previous years. The volunteer remains primarily a female volunteer. More than half (61%) are between 18 and 30 years old; most are between 26 and 30 years old (43%). Almost all (89%) are French nationals. What is interesting here, is that these numbers show nearly anything about the cultural background of the volunteers. Making it difficult to determine whether they're bi-cultural or not. Nearly 8 out of 10 have a Master's degree or higher (79%).

Free admission is a key factor when volunteers choose which museums to visit. While a few local units have a small budget for cultural outings, the majority have no budget for what is often simply a complement to another activity and only choose museums that can be visited without paying. Giving charity groups the widest possible choice of benefits (free admission, the right to speak for volunteers, or even free guided tours and workshops) should therefore be a priority for museums.

In addition to offering these activities free of charge, one way to encourage the development of such activities would be to improve communication with charities. The most committed volunteers are often passionate and knowledgeable, or even professionals in the cultural sector, and are familiar with the Paris museum network and the possibilities available to charity workers. However, this is far from being the case for all volunteers, some of whom are unaware of the existence of the agreement with Paris Musées or the possibility of free admissions. Getting in touch with volunteers in the field in the various local units, rather than prioritising contacts in the central structure, could thus make it possible to organise more visits and encourage other volunteers to plan museum outings.

In 2005, the amount of time dedicated by volunteers to bénévolat was 935,000 FTE.<sup>20</sup> The total annual number of voluntary hours was 1,538,596,000 hours. The time dedicated to volunteering by bénévole has increased by 5% between 1999 and 2005 (i.e. 1% per year).<sup>21</sup> Important differences exist between different types of associations, depending on whether they rely exclusively on volunteers, or also employ paid staff (this is the case in 15.6% of associations). Time spent on volunteering increases only in associations that rely exclusively on volunteers. This trend suggests that the increasing “professionalization” of associations happens in associations that already employ staff. This may be related to the increasing need for specific skills and competences. This also suggests a trend towards a more selective attitude of bénévoles, confirmed by observations on the ground, which make choices depending on the attractiveness of the association, the quality of the support provided etc

Decolonizing the museum necessitates rethinking not only collections but also power structures, narratives, and the very purpose of museums in the 21st century (Paul, 2024). When focusing on two of the new museums in metropolitan France, the MQB and the CNHI, and two new museums in former colonies (both of which are now among the French Départements d'Outre-Mer–Territoires d'Outre-Mer [DOM-TOM; Overseas departments and territories of France]), the Centre Culturel Tjibaou in the overseas territory of New Caledonia and the Maison des Civilisations et de l'Unité Réunionnaise (MCUR) in the French overseas department of Réunion. Three of the museums in this

group are exclusively devoted to non-European culture, among them the MQB, which houses many of the spoils of French imperial expansion. What all of them have in common is a focus on non-European peoples and cultures. Obviously, the CNHI includes European immigrants to France, but there is nevertheless a striking emphasis at this museum on immigration to France from outside Europe—and, more particularly, from France's former colonies, the source of most of France's postwar immigration. As Nancy Green, a historian at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris who was involved in the CNHI's planning, points out, "Colonial and postcolonial immigration dominate the conceptualization of immigration, to the extent of rendering earlier immigrations almost invisible.". While one might argue that older museums and collections in Paris—such as the Musée Guimet, which is devoted to the art of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia; the Islamic collections in the Louvre; the relatively new Institut du Monde Arabe; or the Musée d'Ennery, which contains decorative art from the Far East—also share a focus on non-European art and culture, these collections have been presented as "high art" produced by the world's "great civilizations.".

### **Germany**

Since 1999, statistical data on voluntary engagement has been regularly collected on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth and published in the German Volunteer Survey (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey). According to the 2019 report, 39.7% of the population—approximately 28.8 million people—are engaged in voluntary activities across the country.

Germany does not have a single law regulating volunteering. However, multiple laws and regulations directly or indirectly impact volunteer work. For instance, the Social Protection Law for Volunteers (Sozialgesetzbuch VII) provides insurance coverage for certain types of voluntary activities. Additionally, German tax laws offer incentives such as tax deductions for nonprofit organizations and volunteers. Specific regulations may vary depending on the federal state and the type of voluntary activity.

The 2019 German Volunteer Survey indicates that approximately 9% of German volunteers participate in the cultural sector, which includes museums,

archaeological sites, monuments, and other cultural institutions. This translates to around 2.6 million people engaged in cultural volunteer work.

Volunteering plays a significant role in museum cultural institutions in Germany, contributing to visitor engagement, education, and curation. As the 2019 German Volunteer Survey shows, culture and music represent the second-largest area of volunteer engagement in Germany. Civic engagement in the cultural sector is seen as part of a comprehensive reorganization of the cultural landscape, considering that governmental services are supplemented by social activities, institutional structures are partially modified, and citizens' identification with cultural institutions is strengthened overall. Many cultural institutions and cultural offerings can only continue to exist or be made possible thanks to extensive volunteer engagement (Bernd Wagner, Ulrike Blumenreich, 2004). Volunteering in the cultural sector is diverse, ranging from board and committee work to volunteer-run museums and libraries, cultural associations, and amateur theatre.

The cultural and music sector (8.6%) ranks as the second-largest area of engagement, following the sports and exercise sector (13.5%) (Julia Simonson, 2021). A nationwide survey conducted in 2020 among 1,076 participants on the online engagement platform [vostel.de](https://vostel.de) examined the preferred volunteering areas of the "Volunteer Generation 2.0." Among those who had not yet volunteered, 14.6% expressed interest in engaging in arts, culture, and music-related activities. This represents an increase compared to 11% of participants who were already active in this field. For its survey, [vostel.de](https://vostel.de) defines "Volunteer Generation 2.0" as individuals between the ages of 18 and 33, 69% of whom live in large cities. Among them, 75% are female, 23% male, and 2% identify as diverse.

The German Volunteer Survey identifies the primary motivations for voluntary engagement as:

- Enjoyment of the activity,
- Social interactions,
- Shaping society,
- Intergenerational exchange, and
- Acquiring new skills (especially relevant for younger volunteers).

In Germany, museum volunteers can include members of museum friends' associations, independent researchers contributing without financial compensation, volunteer guides, educators, conservators, and other individuals who dedicate their time and skills to supporting museum activities without remuneration.

The German Volunteer Survey 2019 states that individuals with migrant backgrounds make up about 12% of volunteers in Germany. Although this percentage is lower compared to volunteers without migrant backgrounds, there has been an increase in participation from this demographic in recent years.

In 2014, the Institute for Museum Research found that 49% (n = 3,129) of surveyed museums rely on volunteers, who take on tasks in all areas of museum work. Various museum-specific umbrella organizations provide practical guidelines for volunteering. (Statistische Gesamterhebung an den Museen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 2014). In this context, the German Museums Association (Deutscher Museumsbund) published the report "Civic Engagement in Museums" in 2008, stating:

*"Volunteers are an important source of time, talent, and energy. They help a non-profit organization fulfill its mission. They complement the work of full-time staff, expand their capacities, and bring new perspectives and energy."*

In today's German social context, cultural institutions face increasing competition for volunteers, making recruitment and retention more challenging. In recent years, conferences have increasingly focused on volunteer work in museums. Examples include:

- Hessian Museums Association (2019): "SOS Museum – Help, Volunteers Are Missing!"
- Baden-Württemberg Museums Association (2019): "Cooperations with Voluntary Engagement and Supporters"
- Lower Saxony and Bremen Museums Association (2020): "What Kind of Engagement Do Museums Need: Volunteering, Volunteers, Time Donors?"

- Thuringian Museums Association (2020): "Volunteering in Museums: Opportunities and Perspectives of Voluntary Engagement in Museum Work", which was addressed in a full-day training session.

In Germany, museum collaborators who can be considered volunteers include members of museum friends' associations, independent researchers who contribute without financial compensation, volunteer guides, educators, conservators, and other individuals who offer their time and expertise to support museum activities without remuneration.

Volunteers support German museums in various ways, including conservation and restoration, where volunteers assist in preserving artifacts, artworks, historical structures, and archaeological sites. In education and outreach, they guide visitors, conduct workshops, and participate in community programs. Research and documentation efforts involve cataloguing collections, conducting historical research, and maintaining records. Additionally, volunteers support events and exhibitions by helping to organize and execute temporary displays, special events, and public activities, contributing to the dynamic and educational role of museums and cultural institutions. Volunteers act as cultural mediators, enhancing public engagement with exhibitions and collections.

Museum volunteering is also compatible with professional guides or interpreters. Museum volunteering can complement the work of professional guides and interpreters. While professionals handle specialized tasks and receive compensation for their services, volunteers can provide additional support, enrich visitor experiences, and offer diverse perspectives. It is essential to clearly define the responsibilities of both volunteers and professionals to ensure effective collaboration and avoid conflicts.

In recent years, German museums have increasingly confronted their colonial legacies, integrating decolonial approaches into their exhibitions, collections, and public engagement strategies. German museums house numerous artifacts acquired during the colonial era, many of which lack context regarding their origins and the circumstances of their acquisition. The traditional Eurocentric museum narrative often excludes or marginalizes the voices of

communities affected by colonialism. In Germany, criticism of the inadequate reckoning with colonial history and its impacts is primarily driven by various civil society groups (such as Berlin Postkolonial, diaspora groups, etc.).

The Deutscher Museumsbund 2021 has presented a guide that entails a practice-oriented resource for all German museums on handling collection items from colonial contexts. It also serves as an informational foundation for international professional colleagues, political decision-makers, as well as representatives of postcolonial initiatives and diasporic communities.

Museum initiatives to incorporate decolonial narratives in museums, aim to reassess and reinterpret collections, especially those acquired during colonial periods, to provide more inclusive perspectives. Efforts include collaborations with indigenous communities, exhibition revisions, and the restitution of artifacts to their countries of origin. However, the implementation and scope of these initiatives vary across institutions.

Institutions such as the Brücke Museum, the German Museum of Technology, and the Berlin City Museum have taken significant steps in this direction, reflecting on their historical narratives, exploring transformative practices, and addressing the consequences of colonial histories in their collections (Jörg Rüsewald, Daniela Bystron, Anne Fäser, 2022).

Decolonial approaches aim to:

- Acknowledge colonial histories and their ongoing impact.
- Recontextualize collections with perspectives from source communities.
- Engage with restitution and repatriation debates.
- Foster dialogue between museums, and marginalized communities.

Volunteer programs can support decolonial initiatives in the following ways:

Engaging Volunteers with migration background

- Museums recruit volunteers from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, including individuals with migration histories.

- Community-driven volunteering programs bridge gaps between institutions and underrepresented groups.
- Volunteers act as cultural mediators, interpreting collections, integrating narratives of resistance, and colonial critique aiming at creating a space for dialogue and reflection on decolonial issues, as this initiative exemplifies:

### Supporting Provenance Research and Repatriation Efforts

- Volunteers assist in research efforts to trace the origins of artifacts. Museums include the knowledge and expertise of people from countries and communities of origin from which the collection items come in provenance research; here the knowledge and the expertise of citizens from countries of origin or communities of origin from which the items originate is be considered important sources, especially with regard to aspects of the history of the items before they were acquired (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK), Basic SPK positions on dealing with its non-European collections and on researching the provenances, Berlin 2015).
- Museum outreach programs involve volunteers in public discussions about restitution.

Notable examples: Decolonial narratives in German museums Several German museums have begun integrating decolonial approaches into their programs:

- [Multaka](#): Museum as Meeting Point project, launched in 2015 by the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. This program employs refugees as museum guides, offering unique perspectives and fostering intercultural exchange.
- [Humboldt Forum, Berlin](#): Focus and critical reflection about their colonial legacies. Initiatives include the engagement of volunteers in discussions about contested artifacts and colonial histories, among others.
- [MARKK \(Museum am Rothenbaum\)](#), Hamburg: Incorporates community voices and volunteer participation in its decolonial exhibitions.

- [Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne](#): Implements guided tours that critically examine Germany's colonial past.
- [GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde, Leipzig](#): Hosts the "[GRASSI invites](#)" program, encouraging scholars, artists, and curators from origin countries to engage with the museum's collections.
- [MigrationsGeschichte\(n\) in Berlin](#). An exhibition at the Museum of European Cultures illustrates why and how they have done so through eight objects and their cultural or historical contexts.
- [TheMuseumsLab](#). As a platform for collaborative engagement, the project seeks to build a sustainable network of professionals connected to museums and cultural institutions on the African and European continents and to foster joint reflection on a new ethical framework for international cooperation for museums.
- [A Place. Somewhere', Hanover](#). Guided tour of the exhibition by people with refugee and migration backgrounds from Lower Saxony lead the tour of the exhibition 'A Place. Somewhere' and share their perspectives.

Volunteering is an integral part of German society, with millions of people dedicating their time to various sectors, including culture and heritage. The legal framework supports volunteer work through social protection and tax incentives, and museums greatly benefit from these contributions in research, education, and conservation. While the presence of bicultural volunteers is growing, their numbers remain relatively low. Additionally, initiatives aimed at decolonizing museum narratives reflect an increasing awareness of historical accountability and inclusivity. Ultimately, volunteering enriches both cultural institutions and the communities they serve, making it a vital force in preserving and interpreting Germany's cultural heritage.

### *Italy*

According to a study conducted in 2013 and published in 2021 (Cappadozzi and Fonovic) on the profile of volunteering in Italy, voluntary participation is most prominent among individuals aged 55 to 64 (15.9%), followed by young adults between the ages of 24 and 31, consolidating these age groups as the most active within the volunteer sector.

With respect to gender, men exhibit a slightly higher participation rate (13.3%) compared to women (11.9%), particularly in volunteering channelled through organizations. Regarding the type of volunteering, over half of volunteers (54.3%) participate exclusively through organizations. Approximately 37.6% engage in direct volunteering—Independently and without institutional intermediation—while 8.1% combine both forms of participation.

In terms of employment status, volunteering rates are higher among employed individuals (14.8%) and students (12.9%). It is notable that students show a stronger inclination toward organizational volunteering (9.5%) and lower participation in direct volunteering (4.3%). Education level is a key factor in volunteer engagement. A clear trend is observed in which higher educational attainment correlates with increased volunteer participation. Only 6.1% of individuals with a primary-level education or less volunteer, compared to 22.1% of those with university degrees—more than three times the former rate. From an economic perspective, volunteering is more prevalent among those with better financial conditions. About 23.4% of individuals living in households considered to have “very good” economic resources engage in voluntary activities.

A critical element for sustained volunteer engagement is the internalization of a volunteer role identity, which is key to maintaining long-term commitment. The typical volunteer profile corresponds to a middle-to-upper-class individual with higher education, predominantly within the middle-aged demographic (particularly between ages 55 and 64), though the engagement of young adults is also significant. Organized volunteering predominates, and sustained involvement is closely tied to identification with the volunteer role. From a socio-economic perspective, this group represents an elite segment of the volunteer population. University graduates constitute 34.8% of volunteers (compared to 12.3% of the general population aged 15 and over, and 21.7% of total volunteers). Moreover, 68.3% have adequate financial resources, and 39.1% exhibit high engagement in cultural activities.

On August 11, 1991, Law No. 266—commonly referred to as the "Framework Law on Volunteering"—was enacted. This legislation marked a turning point by legally recognizing the active role of volunteer associations in the social

transformation of the country. Over more than two decades, a complex system of engagement involving social and civil forces has developed across essential sectors such as child and youth welfare, elder care, disability support, civil service, and the cultural and sports domains.

Although cultural volunteering was anticipated by this law, its diffusion has remained limited, albeit progressively expanding. Over time, cultural volunteering has extended into various cultural domains, especially archaeology and museum-related activities, often in unregulated forms. The phenomenon of volunteering is also addressed within the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, which acknowledges and promotes the participation of private entities—including cultural and volunteer associations—in enhancing cultural heritage. This collaboration, deemed to serve a social utility and a solidarity purpose, is fully integrated into the legal framework, allowing for agreements between the State, regional governments, and public territorial entities with associations whose statutes aim to promote and disseminate knowledge of cultural heritage.

The Code defines "enhancement" as an activity aimed at promoting knowledge of heritage and ensuring optimal conditions for its use and public enjoyment, with the overarching goal of fostering cultural development. Subsequently, Law No. 266 was repealed, and on July 3, 2017, Legislative Decree No. 117—known as the Code of the Third Sector—was enacted. This decree expanded and reorganized the regulatory framework concerning volunteering and social participation. The Third Sector also includes social enterprises, regulated by the Law of June 13, 2005 (No. 118), Legislative Decree of March 24, 2006 (No. 155), and their 2008 implementing decrees.

In this context, regional authorities play a crucial role, as they may set minimum quality standards for museum staff based on the national standards decree issued by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities (Ministerial Decree of May 10, 2001). In particular, the region of Tuscany has undertaken significant initiatives in the field of cultural volunteering by drafting the *Magna Charta del Volontariato per i Beni Culturali*. This document serves as a framework agreement and a guiding reference for institutions that collaborate or wish to collaborate regularly with associations. The Charta must be shared

with volunteers through a training process, culminating in the signing of an implementation agreement. Signing the agreement signifies adherence to the *Magna Charta*, participation in its principles, and a mutual commitment to a structured collaboration, defined through a series of organizational and logistical points to be respected by both parties.

Ultimately, the *Magna Charta* and its model agreement are tools resulting from a complex process of study, dialogue, and experimentation. They are designed to provide stakeholders with effective and structured means of collaboration while ensuring alignment with shared principles and objectives in the context of cultural and social volunteering.

In Italy, comprehensive national data on the status and impact of volunteering in the cultural sector is lacking. Although cultural volunteering has expanded across various fields, national-level statistics are scarce and do not fully capture the sector's reality. However, a 2011 study conducted in the region of Tuscany offers valuable insights into the collaboration between cultural institutions and volunteers in that region. An online survey was administered to all cultural institutions in Tuscany to assess the current state of collaboration from the public administration's perspective. A total of 1,192 institutions—including museums, libraries, archives, botanical gardens, among others—were contacted, with 103 responding. The territorial distribution revealed that most responses came from the provinces of Florence (35%), Siena (14%), and Lucca (14%). In terms of institutional type, 50% of the responses came from museums, followed by libraries (34%), with the remaining categories ranging between 3% and 5%.

Among the respondents, 65% expressed willingness to collaborate with volunteers, and of those, 71.9% had been doing so for over five years. The identified areas of collaboration were generally transversal across the value chain and applied to most institutions. However, respondents indicated specific areas in which they sought more active volunteer collaboration, including fundraising, staff support to ensure facility access, and external promotional activities.

Regarding actions to enhance volunteer engagement in institutions with established relationships, 32% of respondents emphasized the need to

increase the visibility of volunteer roles. An additional 12% pointed to the necessity of expanding the "functions" assigned to volunteers, and 21% stressed the importance of providing training. Conversely, 35% of respondents reported not collaborating with volunteers. Within this group, 43% cited a lack of local proposals, while 27% stated they did not perceive a "need" for such collaboration or did not consider it "useful." The remaining 30% identified challenges related to management and organization, including a lack of adequate staff. When asked about barriers to fostering volunteer participation, 58% pointed to economic and bureaucratic burdens, while 23% highlighted a general lack of training. Nonetheless, 29% of respondents indicated an interest in collaborating with volunteers on specific occasions such as events, exhibitions, conferences, and special openings.

In 2022, a study by Maurizio Ambrosini and Maurizio Artero documented the experiences of hundreds of immigrant volunteers in Italy, based on 658 questionnaires and 89 in-depth interviews. The study explored three main questions: the level of social inclusion of immigrant volunteers, their motivations for engaging in volunteer work, and the connections between volunteering and other forms of social and political participation. While the country of origin of volunteers was not systematically recorded, various sociodemographic characteristics were gathered. The volunteers in the sample exhibited a higher level of education compared to the general immigrant population: 11% of immigrants hold university degrees, whereas this figure rises to 38% among immigrant volunteers. Additionally, data indicate a positive correlation between length of stay in Italy and involvement in volunteer groups. Most immigrant volunteers have over 15 years of migration experience and between five to six years of volunteer experience.

Overall, immigrant volunteers in Italy tend to come from a segment of the migrant population that is already relatively well integrated. As other studies confirm, the length of residency and employment status significantly influence volunteer participation, with immigrants who have spent more time in the host country more likely to adopt its prevailing volunteering culture. Approximately 63% of study participants have lived in Italy for ten or more years, and 5% are second-generation immigrants. Moreover, most participants have a stable legal status: 40% are naturalized citizens, 11% are in the process of

naturalization, and 23% hold long-term residence permits. Regarding employment, 63% of participants are active in the labour market, while 37% are students, retirees, homemakers, or unemployed. Immigrant volunteers often report that their decision to engage in volunteer work emerged after securing employment and stable housing in Italy.

Volunteering in Italy, particularly in the cultural sector, has become a key component of museum institutions. The role of the volunteer in Italian museums extends beyond internal support; they function as a vital link between the museum and broader civil society. The volunteer serves as a connective figure, working collaboratively with museum staff while engaging with external audiences. Committed to the institution's mission and values, the volunteer assumes a dual role: acting both as a "guarantor" for visitors and as "support" for the institution. In this sector-specific context, the volunteer's role surpasses basic assistance, often representing the diverse needs of contemporary audiences. Volunteers mediate between curators, with their specialized knowledge, and the public, who seek greater understanding of collections and exhibitions. Furthermore, within a museum landscape that frequently faces financial and operational challenges, volunteers may lead awareness campaigns, advocate with public authorities, and propose initiatives to cultural policymakers.

Museum volunteers also play a significant role in education and public engagement. Their efforts help disseminate museum values and knowledge, fostering a widespread culture of heritage appreciation. This is achieved through the personal testimony of their civic commitment, contributing to a new model of cultural heritage management—one that is *participatory* (involving the community), *sustainable* (complementing public efforts), *integrated* (bridging conservation and public engagement), and *subsidiary* (encouraging active citizenship). Beyond direct involvement, volunteers contribute through financial support, event organization, provision of equipment or services, and by offering expertise not otherwise available in the institution. This support often comes from individuals, groups, organizations, or companies donating their time and resources. Numerous associations, such as the "Amici dei Musei" (Friends of Museums), the Italian Environmental Fund

(FAI), the Italian Archaeological Groups, Archeoclub, and various local groups, are continually engaged in these supportive roles across Italy's museums.

Volunteering in museums, archaeological sites, and monuments has historically been essential in Italy, particularly for small institutions, where day-to-day operations often rely heavily on volunteer support. Local individuals, often without formal training but with a strong sense of cultural attachment, have offered their time and knowledge to help preserve and promote their community's heritage. Today, cultural volunteering has evolved into a broader, more structured, and diverse phenomenon, encompassing various forms of participation—from close, ongoing collaborations with museums to occasional, altruistic contributions. Groups such as the “Friends of Museums” exemplify this hybrid role, blending that of regular collaborators with that of committed visitors.

Volunteers in Italian museums perform a wide range of tasks that extend far beyond operational support. They serve as intermediaries between the museum and society, collaborating with internal staff and interacting with the public. Their responsibilities may include welcoming visitors, cultural mediation, supporting event organization, promoting museum activities, and leading awareness campaigns. Many also bring specialized skills, offer organizational assistance, or provide financial and logistical support—including equipment and services otherwise unavailable to the museum. Volunteers are key actors in fostering a participatory, sustainable, and integrated cultural heritage management model. Their presence strengthens the bond between local communities and their cultural institutions.

Yes, museum volunteering in Italy is compatible with the work of professional guides and interpreters, provided that roles are clearly defined and professional boundaries are respected. Volunteers fulfil complementary functions—supporting staff, mediating with the public, promoting heritage education, and contributing resources and expertise—without replacing professionals. While guides and interpreters offer specialized training, regulated services, and paid work, volunteers contribute on a non-remunerated, community-based basis. This complementarity allows both

profiles to coexist, as long as professional standards are upheld and unfair competition is avoided.

Yes, Italy has launched some initiatives aimed at incorporating decolonizing narratives in museums, though they remain limited and face considerable resistance. These efforts have emerged in response to growing awareness of colonial legacies and the need to rethink cultural relations between Europe and the Global South, particularly Africa. As part of this process, Italian museums have slowly begun to engage in critical reassessment of their non-European collections—especially African artifacts—many of which were acquired under violent or unequal colonial circumstances.

This shift is partly driven by the demographic and cultural transformation of Italian society, shaped by migration flows and the growth of Afro-descendant communities. These communities are increasingly demanding more equitable representation, recognition, and participation in cultural discourse.

Nevertheless, the process is still in its infancy. While there is political discourse around restitution and cultural cooperation—such as the “Mattei Plan for Africa” promoted by the Italian government—museums still struggle with inadequate documentation practices, lack of transparency, limited access to catalogues, and insufficient involvement of diasporic communities or Afro-descendant artists in reinterpretation efforts.

In Italy, various museums—both at the national and local levels—run volunteer programs in collaboration with cultural associations that actively support museum activities. Most of the known examples are concentrated in the Tuscany region:

- National Museums of Lucca, in partnership with *Amici dei Musei di Lucca*, support outreach and cultural promotion.
- Archaeological Museum of Arezzo, alongside *Associazione Giano di Arezzo*, engages volunteers in educational programs, guided tours, and heritage conservation.
- Archaeological Museum of the Waters in Chianciano Terme, with the *Associazione Geoarcheologica*, promotes local archaeological and geological heritage.

- Civic Museum of Fucecchio, in collaboration with the *Associazione Archeologica Volontariato Medio Valdarno*, involves volunteers in community and educational activities.
- Textile Museum of Prato, supported by *Amici dei Musei e dei Beni Ambientali Pratesi*, includes volunteers in cultural mediation and conservation tasks.
- Museum of Natural History and the Territory (University of Pisa), with *Amici del Museo Naturalistico di Calci*, mobilizes volunteers and experts for conservation and science education.
- Museums of Viareggio, supported by *Amici dei Musei di Viareggio*, maintain an active volunteer network involved in exhibitions, education, and public engagement.

The “Patrimonio e Intercultura” platform serves as a permanent archive of projects undertaken by museums and cultural institutions across Italy that are committed to protection, enhancement, and intercultural mediation of cultural heritage. This resource documents initiatives in which museums have engaged with more inclusive, decolonizing approaches—though such efforts remain sparse and are often constrained by institutional and political limitations.

### *The Netherlands*

In 2023, 49 % of the Dutch population aged 15 and older said they had participated in volunteer activities for an organisation or club at least once in the previous twelve months. The %age of volunteers has increased sharply compared to the pandemic period, when 41 % were active in volunteer work, on average, and is now back to pre-pandemic levels. This is evident from new figures released by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). The figures have been taken from the annual survey on social cohesion and welfare, which also includes additional questions about volunteer work at the request of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the volunteer umbrella organisation NOV. These included questions about what respondents expect from the organisations they volunteer for. In 2023, the share of volunteers among all age groups increased to the same levels as before the pandemic. Among those aged 65 and over, the share of volunteers was actually higher than it was in 2019.

The legal framework for volunteering includes the following terms and have the following meanings:

- public benefit institution: institution that has been designated as such by the inspector on the basis of Article 5b of the General Tax Act and the provisions based thereon;
- general benefit activities: activities that are not performed at commercial rates and that are aimed at realising or promoting the objective of an organisation or institution that aims to serve the public interest;
- unpaid labour: activities for which no compensation or benefits are provided, the - combined value of which is higher than the amounts referred to in Article 2, paragraph 6, of the Wage Tax Act 1964;
- non-profit organisation or institution: organisation or institution that is not subject to profit tax or is exempt from it and that, as is actually evident from both its own regulations and from the actual activities of predominantly public benefit activities, serves almost exclusively the public interest;
- social benefit institution: institution as referred to in Article 5c of the General Tax Act;
- SBBI support foundation: institution as referred to in article 5d of the General Tax Act and the provisions based thereon, which has been announced as such by the inspector;
  - work location: a branch of the institution if the institution in question has more than one branch.

In addition to visitors, practitioners and consumers of arts and culture, there are also Dutch people who actively support the sector: for example through donations, volunteer work or membership of a friends' association. According to figures from the VTO, donating money is particularly popular among the various forms: 17 % of Dutch people indicated in 2022 that they support the arts and culture sector with money. This share has clearly declined in recent years. From 23% in 2012 to 17% in 2022. According to the biennial survey [Giving in the Netherlands](#) households donated 2022 million euros to the cultural sector in 58. In [Boekman #138: Private financing of arts and culture](#) also addresses questions such as what drives donors to donate to culture. Asking for money, on the side of the maker, is discussed in the multi-year

study [Long live giving](#) further explained. On the page [Money flows](#) we further explain private contributions to culture, including from households and legacies.

In 2022, according to CBS figures, 19% of the bi-cultural volunteers in the Netherlands were originally from European background. Compared to 15% that was from top 5 countries (Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Suriname, Dutch-Antillies).

According to CBS figures from 2023, 6% of the Dutch population did volunteer work for cultural associations or organizations, such as music or theatre associations, public libraries, museums, pop venues or movie theatres (CBS, 2023). These figures also look at the frequency with which people do volunteer work, how long they have been involved in cultural associations as volunteers and whether there is an intention to remain involved. More than half of the people who volunteer for cultural associations do so weekly (33,4 %) or monthly (19,7%). Two-thirds of the volunteers for a cultural association (66,1 %) have been volunteers for more than a year and 64,1% of the volunteers in 2023 planned to continue doing the work in a year's time. This shows great involvement of volunteers at cultural organization CBS 2023). According to VTO figures, 10 % of Dutch people supported the arts and culture sector by doing volunteer work in 2022. Despite a slight decrease in volunteer work between 2014 and 2020, volunteer work in 2022 will be back to the 2012 level. Dutch people who support the cultural field in this way did so most often in 2022 within the music field (16 % of volunteers, followed by heritage and ancient art (11 %) and festivals (10 %).

According to CBS figures from 2023, 6% of the Dutch population did volunteer work for cultural associations or organizations, such as music or theatre associations, public libraries, museums, pop venues or movie theatres (CBS, 2023). These figures also look at the frequency with which people do volunteer work, how long they have been involved in cultural associations as volunteers and whether there is an intention to remain involved. More than half of the people who volunteer for cultural associations do so weekly (33,4%) or monthly (19,7%).

Two-thirds of the volunteers for a cultural association (66,1%) have been volunteers for more than a year and 64,1% of the volunteers in 2023 planned to continue doing the work in a year's time. This shows great involvement of volunteers at cultural organization CBS 2023).

Arts and culture practice is supervised by a large number of 'providers', both in-school and out-of-school (Goossens et al. 2024). Since this page is about practice in leisure time, we focus here on findings regarding out-of-school provision. According to the latest edition of the [Association Monitor](#) By 2024, there were more than 10.000 amateur arts associations in the Netherlands. This monitor research associations or foundations that bring people together to be artistically, creatively or musically active in their free time. 73% of the associations focused primarily on music (instrumental & singing) in their offering. This was followed by theatre (17%) and dance (5%). The large share of associations in Noord-Brabant compared to other provinces is striking.

Rather than highlighting their collections as masterworks from the 'Dutch Golden Era' that have brought along a major increase in wealth in the Netherlands, thus highlighting and reenforcing the colonial narrative, museums have started to change the perspective through which history is narrated (Kofi & de Wildt, 2019). Instead of ignoring the horrific violent events that have occurred in the colonies in the past, museums have begun to redirect their focus towards a previously less popular perspective: (de)colonization and the role of the Dutch in transatlantic slavery practices. As a result, the ways in which indigenous populations of colonial territories are depicted has drastically moved away from them being the 'primitive other' (Moon, 2020; Brenner, 2020). For instance, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam created the temporary exhibition *Slavery* in 2021 in the form of personal and real-life stories rather than slavery as a general and abstract concept (Rijksmuseum, 2021). Natural and art history museums are furthermore focusing their attention on the people portrayed in the artworks and the role they fulfilled with regards to colonial violence against indigenous populations (Koning, 2017). Here, a critical approach is taken when analysing their achievements and stories, shifting the image from national heroes to powerful historical characters involved in dehumanizing practices. For example, the Mauritshuis in Den Haag started a new project in 2019 called *Shifting Image*, aiming to research the life

of Johan Maurits, for whom the museum building was originally built, as a transatlantic slave trader and governor in Brazil (Mauritshuis, 2019). Current developments and socio-political discussions around diversity, inclusion and colonial pasts in the Netherlands have caused for a disruption in what is to be considered 'normal' (Moon, 2020). Increasingly, museums are moving towards functioning as discursive spaces where visitors can discuss ideas and topics displayed in museum exhibitions and collections (Patterson et al., 2017).

Moore (2020, as quoted in Moon, 2020, p. 202) stated that we have entered a new paradigm with new norms, where "the things that made us normal before were the things that actually hurt our discipline". However, having launched a new project or exhibition about slavery and the Dutch colonial past does not indicate that we can now close our critical eye and move on to the next 'trend'.

More importantly, Dutch museums must be careful in ensuring that decolonization of museum collections does not result in another complex situation where white western communities assimilate to take over, or colonize, the concept and process of decolonization (Kassim, 2017). Many museums in the Netherlands nowadays have tried to confront their colonial pasts in order to become more inclusive to their local communities and visitors. However, one can argue that it may be necessary to perform changes to the organization internally in order for such institutions to initiate change externally and inspire people outside of the organisation (Moore, 2020).

### *Portugal*

In Portugal, the number of volunteers has varied over the years. According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), in 2018, a total of 695,000 Portuguese citizens aged 15 and over were involved in volunteering activities, whether in formal or informal contexts, representing approximately 7.8% of the population. This involvement generated a total of 263.7 million hours of volunteering, which corresponds to an average of around 32 hours per month dedicated to volunteering for each person involved. This figure reflects a decrease compared to 1999, when the rate of participation in volunteering was 17%. Over the years, there has been a gradual reduction, with the rate falling to 14% in 2008 and to 7.8% in 2018, below the European average of 19.3%.

Although there is no official data specifically quantifying the number of volunteers involved in museums, art centres and cultural spaces in Portugal, it is known that the majority of volunteers are distributed among organizations focused on social, cultural and recreational areas. In general terms, social welfare institutions are the ones that recruit the most volunteers, accounting for 36.2% of the total, followed by religious organizations and, equally, those linked to culture, communication and recreational activities, both with 15.7% of the participation. According to data from the Volunteer Survey (2018), compared to the areas of social services and health, cultural intervention, including museums and art centres, has attracted a significant percentage of male volunteers, around 22.3%, compared to 17.8% of female volunteers dedicated to religion. Although there are volunteer initiatives in the Portuguese cultural sector, the lack of aggregate data prevents us from determining an exact number of volunteers involved in these areas at a national level.

Volunteering in museums, art centres and other cultural spaces is a form of civic participation that aims to involve citizens in the preservation, promotion and enhancement of cultural and artistic heritage. This type of volunteering is key to ensuring that a country's cultural and historical wealth is not only preserved, but also accessible to current and future generations, fostering greater knowledge of local history and culture.

Through cultural volunteering, volunteers play an essential role in preserving heritage, supporting the institutions responsible for conserving cultural and historical assets. In addition, they contribute to promoting access to culture, helping to democratize cultural experiences and encouraging interest in culture through guided tours, events or other activities. This type of volunteering also has a strong impact on community integration, by fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility for safeguarding cultural heritage among citizens. By actively participating in these initiatives, volunteers develop a bond with the history and culture of their country or region, feeling more connected to their cultural identity.

In addition, cultural volunteering offers participants the opportunity for personal development, providing the acquisition of knowledge, skills and experiences that can be fundamental to their professional and personal lives. By working in contact with professionals in the field and with other volunteers,

individuals can expand their network of contacts, improve their communication skills and learn new skills. In Portugal, several institutions promote cultural volunteering, including public organizations such as the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage (DGPC), and the Museums and Monuments of Portugal, as well as private organizations such as art centres, foundations, and cultural and scientific associations, which organize cultural events and activities related to culture, archaeology, among others. They all play a crucial role in promoting volunteering in the cultural field.

The benefits of cultural volunteering are mutual: institutions gain additional resources, new perspectives, museums and heritage sites become closer to the communities in which they are located, and the possibility of joining leading institutional projects is promoted. Volunteers, in turn, have the privileged opportunity to receive training in the cultural field, to enrich their experiences, to acquire and develop new skills, and to have direct contact with cultural agents and participate in cultural and social events. According to the legislation in force in Portugal, namely Law no. 71/98, which regulates the legal framework for volunteering, the examples mentioned, such as “friends”, “non-profit researchers”, “donors”, do not qualify as volunteers. This law defines a volunteer as a person who, in a free, disinterested and supportive manner, gets involved in activities aimed at social welfare, through organized collaboration with an entity, without any employment relationship. Therefore, for a person to be considered a volunteer in Portugal, their actions must be formally registered in a volunteer program or project, with proper guidance and supervision, and they must not have any economic or professional interest. Therefore, although the examples given may play important roles in cultural institutions, they are not recognized as volunteers under Portuguese law.

In Portugal, volunteering in museums constitutes an excellent opportunity to participate in actions aimed at safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage that represents the national cultural legacy. Volunteers acquire specialized professional skills, build privileged opportunities, develop communication competences, engage directly with cultural agents and participate in cultural and social events. The program called Museus e Monumentos de Portugal (MMP) offers each volunteer a chance to gain an insider's perspective on the world of culture and become part of an active, creative and dynamic

community, contributing to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. (Direção-Geral do Património Cultural, n.d.) In regard to the volunteers at the museum of Lagos in the south region of Portugal, they engage in tasks related to the museum's activities and cultural heritage.

- The tasks are agreed between volunteer and museum and can include:
- Assisting with visitor services, as in helping guide visitors, providing information about exhibitions and ensuring a positive visitor experience.
- Educational support in assisting educational programs for schools and public.
- Conservation assistance.
- Event participation and assistance on organising and executing museum events.
- Administrative support on cataloguing, data entry and other administrative tasks (Sul Informação, 2023).

As far as the volunteers in the Eugénio de Almeida Foundation's Cultural Volunteering Project in southern Portugal are concerned, they take part in tasks related to the activities of the Art and Culture Centre, the Paço de São Miguel House Museum and the Eugénio de Almeida Library.

The tasks are diverse and can include:

- Supporting and welcoming visitors, such as providing information about the exhibitions, pieces and heritage spaces.
- Supporting the educational service's activities for schools and the general public.
- Support for cultural events
- Supporting cataloguing and data entry, organizing collections and inventorying objects

Museum volunteering in Portugal can be compatible with professional guides or interpreters. Here's how the two roles might intersect:

1. Complementary Roles: Volunteers often assist with general tasks such as greeting visitors, assisting with exhibitions, and providing basic

information. Professional guides or interpreters, on the other hand, offer specialized knowledge and lead guided tours. In some museums, volunteers may be trained to support professional guides by helping with group management or preparing materials, but they do not typically replace the work of a qualified guide.

2. Training Opportunities: Some museums may offer training programs for volunteers that can eventually prepare them for roles as professional guides. Volunteers might shadow experienced guides, gaining valuable insights into the history, art, or culture of the museum and preparing for more formal roles in interpretation or guided tours.
3. Specialized Tasks: In larger museums, the roles of volunteers and professional guides are often distinct but complementary. Volunteers might focus on tasks like helping with educational workshops or assisting in administrative duties, while professional guides conduct in-depth tours.
4. Collaborative Events: In some museums, volunteers may work alongside professional guides during events like special exhibitions or educational programs. Here, volunteers may offer support while the guides focus on delivering expert commentary.

There are initiatives in Portugal to introduce decolonizing narratives in museums. Notable examples include:

- Museu Nacional de Etnologia (National Museum of Ethnology): The 2024 exhibition "*Deconstructing Colonialism, Decolonizing the Imaginary*" challenges colonial narratives and reexamines representations of African cultures.
- Museu do Aljube – Resistência e Liberdade (Museum of Aljube): The exhibition "*(De)Colonial Act*" explores Portugal's colonial wars and anti-colonial resistance, linking them to the broader struggle for freedom.
- Museu de Marinha (Maritime Museum): Ongoing discussions are reshaping the museum's exhibitions to offer a more critical view of Portugal's colonial past.

These efforts are part of a broader movement in Portuguese museums to critically reassess and decolonize their narratives.

Examples of museums at state level that have a volunteer program:

- Museu Nacional Ferroviário (National Railway Museum): Offers a Volunteer Program aiming to engage the local community in railway heritage. Opportunities include visitor reception, guided tours, fundraising support, collection inventory assistance, special programs, restoration and preservation tasks, model building, and project proposals by volunteers.
- Museu da Lourinhã (Lourinhã Museum): Welcomes volunteers to assist in various activities, particularly in its paleontology hall, which features casts of famous dinosaurs and fossils from the Late Jurassic Lourinhã Formation.
- Museu Rainha Dona Leonor (Queen Dona Leonor Regional Museum): The oldest museum in Portugal, housed in a 15th-century convent, offers volunteer opportunities to support its operations and engage with its rich history.

Examples of museums at the state level that were susceptible to applying decolonizing narratives:

- Museu Nacional de Etnologia (National Museum of Ethnology), Museu do Aljube – Resistência e Liberdade (Museum of Aljube), Museu de Marinha (Maritime Museum) - As mentioned above.
- Museu do Fado (Fado Museum): Fado music's connection to colonial and post-colonial narratives is being explored, reflecting issues of identity and colonial memory.

### *Spain*

According to the recent study by the Plataforma del Voluntariado de España (PVE) "La acción voluntaria en 2024", volunteering engages 10.1% of the Spanish population over the age of 14. This means that more than 5,105,067 people volunteer in Spain. This figure represents an increase compared to previous years, such as in 2022, when this rate was 8.2% of the total population. Regarding gender, 55% of volunteers are women, while 45% are men. The data on volunteers by age group reveal that younger individuals (14-24 years old) are slightly underrepresented in volunteering (13.1%) compared

to the general population (13.7%), as are individuals aged 35-44 (12.3% among volunteers vs. 15.8% in the general population) and those aged 55-64 (12.9% among volunteers vs. 16.3% in the general population). In contrast, in the remaining age groups (25-34, 45-54, and 65+), the percentage of volunteers surpasses the percentage in the general population by one to five percentage points.

An important aspect for the MARVI project is the educational level of those who volunteer. Almost 40% have university studies (38.9%), while 3.6% have only primary education and 57.5% have completed secondary education.

Regarding employment status, almost half of the volunteers are currently employed (49.9%), and more than a quarter are retired or pensioners (27.4%). The remaining categories are distributed as follows: 9.5% are students, 7.5% are unemployed, 5.8% dedicate themselves to household work. The activity rate among volunteers is 57.4%, which is almost the same as the general population, at 58.6%. Regarding income levels, 30.8% earn between €2,001 and €3,500 per month, followed by those earning between €1,001 and €2,000 (19.2%), those earning between €3,501 and €5,000 (15.2%), and those earning up to €1,000 (10.3%). The remaining group, those earning over €5,001, represents 7.6%.

In Spain, there is a national volunteering law as well as 16 regional volunteering laws, corresponding to the administrative division of the country into 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities. According to Law 45/2015, of October 14, on Volunteering, the concept of volunteering refers to activities of general interest, carried out by individuals, as long as they are not performed under a labour, official, commercial, or otherwise remunerated relationship, and meet the criteria of freedom, gratuity, orientation towards the common good, and organization. At the national level, volunteering is managed by several ministries. The Ministry of Health, Social Services, and Equality oversees general volunteering through its NGO and Volunteering Subdirectorate. This ministry also hosts the State Council of Social Action NGOs, an important consultative body that facilitates dialogue between social NGOs and the national government. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for cultural volunteering, including museum volunteering.

At the regional level, autonomous communities have legislative and policy responsibilities for volunteering, particularly in environmental and cultural volunteering, which are managed by relevant regional departments. At the local level, provincial and municipal administrations typically have personnel in charge of social services, civil protection, environmental issues, and culture, who also oversee volunteering in their respective areas. Additionally, Law 45/2015 recognizes the important role of universities in promoting volunteering, as well as the potential of corporate volunteering initiatives.

Spain does not have a specific study providing concrete data on volunteering in museums, monuments, or archaeological sites. Instead, these categories are included under cultural volunteering, which encompasses tangible and intangible heritage, artistic dissemination, and advocacy. According to research by PVE, the most common volunteer field is social volunteering, with 46.8% of volunteers participating in this area. Other sectors include:

- Social and healthcare volunteering (17.3%)
- Cultural volunteering (11.9%)
- Educational volunteering (10.8%)
- Community volunteering (10.6%)

Other categories, such as environmental, international, and civil protection volunteering, make up 2.8%. Regarding gender differences, women are more involved in environmental, socio-health, international, leisure, and cultural volunteering, whereas men are more active in sports and civil protection volunteering.

According to the PVE study (2022) "*Volunteering in Spain: Who, How, and Why. Immigration and Volunteer Action*", the foreign-born volunteer rate is 12%, slightly higher than the proportion of foreigners in the general population (11.62%), meaning there are approximately 600,000 foreign-origin volunteers in Spain. By nationality, the largest group comes from Latin America (53.1%), followed by volunteers from EU countries (excluding Spain) or other European nations (26%). Smaller groups come from Africa (11.4%) and other regions (9.6%).

There is a higher percentage of women among foreign-born volunteers compared to the general volunteering population. While women represent 59.5% of all volunteers, this figure rises to 62.8% among foreign-born volunteers. In terms of volunteer areas: the 51.6% engage in social volunteering, similar to the general volunteer population (48.5%), 28.3% participate in educational volunteering. The third most common area for foreign-born volunteers is community volunteering (24.4%), while in the general population, it is leisure and free-time volunteering (26.5%).

Museum volunteers participate in activities such as:

- Guided tours and interpretation, primarily for disadvantaged groups, schools, and elderly visitors.
- Providing information to visitors.
- Assisting in conservation and restoration.
- Helping with museum research and administrative tasks.

Volunteers act as a link between the museum and the community and help enhance visitor services.

In institutions where professional guides and interpreters are employed, volunteers generally do not replace them. Instead, they assist in supervision and conservation of museum spaces and visitor orientation. In contrast, where there are no professional guides, volunteers may conduct guided tours and educational activities. In January 2024, Minister of Culture Ernest Urtasun announced plans to review national museum collections to "overcome their colonial framework."

Museums targeted for these efforts include:

- Museo de América (Madrid)
- Museo Nacional de Antropología (Madrid).
- Museo Reina Sofía (Madrid)
- Museo Etnológico y de Culturas del Mundo (Barcelona)
- Museo de Arte Precolombino Felipe Orlando (Benalmádena)
- Centro de Interpretación de la Cultura Andalusí (Algeciras)

These initiatives aim not only to return artifacts obtained illegitimately but also to reframe historical narratives to acknowledge the suffering, destruction, and colonial exploitation associated with these collections.

### *United Kingdom*

Less than one in five (16%) people volunteer formally at least once a month. This is approximately 7 million people in England and 8.3 million in the UK. Informal volunteering is more common. This is when people give unpaid help to another person who is not a family member. It includes activities like helping a neighbour with shopping or childcare. In 2022, 46% of people (around 21 million in England and 25 million in the UK) volunteered informally at least once a year. 26% of people (12 million in England, 14.2 million in the UK) did so at least once a month. In the UK there's no upper age limit on volunteering. Some organisations' insurance policies do not cover volunteers if they're under 16 or over a certain age. Volunteers cannot work for a profit-making organisation if they're under 14, even if they're not paid. A local council might have extra rules about the work one can do as a young person. One can volunteer and claim benefits if the only money one get from volunteering is to cover expenses, like travel costs, or if one continues to meet the conditions of the benefit one get ([Gov.UK](#)).

When asked about the recruitment of volunteers, museums were relatively split on whether recruitment had risen or fallen over the last 12 months, with more than a third saying that more volunteers had been hired in the last 12 months (35%), however almost three in 10 said that the number has fallen (29%). The Annual Museum Survey polled 765 non-national museums -- which are part of the Arts Council England's UK Museum Accreditation Scheme -- across nine regions of England, to provide information about their workforce, finance, audiences and insights and help understand how museums are recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2022 survey found that virtually all the museums polled relied on volunteers to some degree, with four volunteers for every one employee overall. The survey also found that 30% of museums polled had more than 50 volunteers, while 44% relied on up to 25 volunteers. Three in 10 museums polled for the survey were volunteer run entirely, with this percentage even higher amongst micro museums (58%).

A survey by Historic England has found there is a lack of diversity across the heritage sector workforce, with no respondents in higher managerial positions describing themselves as Black. The research found that 90% of respondents, at all levels of seniority, identify as white, while less than 1% identify as Black or Black British. The [Heritage Sector Workforce Diversity Survey](#), which published its results last week and was commissioned in order to gain “a more robust understanding of who is currently part of the sector”, surveyed over 500 individuals from an undisclosed number of heritage organisations. Participants were asked about a range of characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010, including ethnicity, gender identity, disability, and socioeconomic status. The survey found that almost 20% of the workforce identify themselves as disabled, and 25% identify themselves as neurodivergent. However just 50% of disabled people in the sector have a full-time, permanent contract, compared to 67% of respondents overall.

The collaborative data and insight project for the UK’s heritage sector has been created by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. In March, 241 members of the Heritage Pulse panel, all working in the heritage sector, completed the latest UK Heritage Pulse survey on the theme of volunteering. Among the results from its latest survey, it reports that 45% of respondents agreed that the sector is over-reliant on volunteers, but 24% think that there is an opportunity to make more use of those volunteers. The report overview suggests that smaller organisations tend to feel the overreliance more keenly. In the same report, 46.7% of respondents said that their own organisation was reliant on volunteers to engage with visitors, primarily through interpretation, tours, or room hosting. Results show 42% of respondents were reliant on volunteers for technical skills including maintenance, 39% for administration and finance, and around a third for research, archaeology and conservation, and collections management.

Conversations on the decolonisation of museums are increasing in British academia and popular discourse. The recent revelation of thefts from the British museum have once again throw museums into the spotlight, but attention on individual artefacts such as the Rosetta Stone or Benin Bronzes has been intensifying for some time. British museums have started to respond to decolonisation demands, but in a climate where museums directors claim

that “to decolonise is to decontextualise”, does this work produce an anti-racist, educational atmosphere that addresses the coloniality of museums? The holdings of many British museums were formed through colonialism and its legacies. Imperial networks were vital for acquiring objects from Asia and Africa through purchase, excavation, and theft. For example, a myriad of Egyptian wings in various British museums display objects acquired through European imperial interventions in Egypt since 1798, and especially after Britain’s colonisation of Egypt, which began in 1882.

Recent research focuses on the coloniality embodied by North African objects in British museums (Ahamed-Barke, 2024). Part of this work involves research on specific objects held by the Victoria and Albert Museum. Coloniality proved to be deeply embedded in these objects: from Islamic ornaments taken from Egypt to illustrate British claims about the ‘backwardness’ of Islam; to luxury dishes made from minerals extracted from Algeria by the French Empire; to Amazigh (Indigenous Algerian) pottery collected by British elites who saw Europe as the custodians of African culture. Five other English museums (the Ashmolean, Brighton Museum, Bristol Museum, the British Museum, and the Pitt Rivers Museum) are exploring the coloniality of their displays.

Multiple museums contain praise of Egyptologists like the eugenicist Flinders Petrie or Francis Llewelyn Griffith, an archaeologist praised as a local hero in the Brighton Museum without reflecting on how colonialism enabled his work (Ahamed-Barke, 2024). Similarly, the Ashmolean has a board celebrating archaeologist John Myres for his excavations in Cyprus without mentioning that Cyprus was colonised by Britain at the time of his work. These museums dedicate space to education about their histories, such as the British Museum’s ‘Collecting the World’ room. They demonstrate an interest in their own histories of acquisition, so the absence of information on the coloniality of acquisitions is a striking silence. By failing to mention colonisation as the context that archaeologists operated in, the celebratory tone that museums often employ obscures imperialism and the violence committed to allow archaeological interventions to occur. Far from Victoria and Albert Museum director Tristram Hunt’s claim that “to decolonise is to decontextualise”, by failing to decolonise, British museums are failing to contextualise at all. Ahamed-Barke research’ has allowed reflection on the personal experience of

museum coloniality. He states that people of colour are well-acquainted with histories of the British Empire and its cruelties. They even considered their understanding of imperialism, from family and academic degrees, to be sufficient preparation for the coloniality of British museums.