



New Trends in IVS



Anticipating the Future of Volunteering:

Reflections from the IVS Study Session, Budapest 2025

1. Introduction

In early February 2025, the European Youth Centre in Budapest became a space of reflection, anticipation, and collaboration. For five days, from 3–7 February, thirty young people from around the world gathered not only to learn, but to question, challenge, and reimagine the future of International Voluntary Service (IVS).

The study session, titled “New Trends in International Voluntary Service,” was organised by the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) together with the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations, International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE), Service Civil International (SCI), and the Network for Voluntary Development in Asia (NVDA), in cooperation with the Council of Europe.

The event was born from a common concern: across IVS networks, the number of volunteers has been steadily declining. We knew it was time to come together, to understand why, and to think boldly about how our movement can adapt and thrive in the face of change. Building on years of collaboration, this session invited us to pause, reflect, and collectively anticipate the future of volunteering.

2. Participants & Methodology

Our group was made up of 30 participants representing IVS networks and organisations from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. They brought with them diverse experiences, backgrounds, and motivations, but all shared a connection to international volunteering.

The group was composed out of members of all present networks that fulfilled different roles inside of their organisation, from volunteers to staff members, board members,

local activists and coordinators. Our approach was to have a variety of roles and backgrounds in the room in order to have an overview of the trends from different angles as each of the roles had a different connection with the trends and their consequences.

To guide our discussions, we worked with the “Toolkit for Tomorrow: Anticipating Civil Society Futures” –a resource that helped us explore trends, think critically, and imagine different possible futures.

Through interactive workshops, daily group reflections, world café dialogues, and creative exercises, we not only analysed current challenges but also stretched our imagination toward 2035 and beyond.



The week was structured as follows:

Day 1 - Introduction, Getting to know each other, the space and the topics of our work;

Day 2 - Explaining trends, connections and consequences inside of IVS;

Day 3 - Trying out the Future and Foresight methodology to address the identified trends;

Day 4 - Project Lab for concrete ideas as a response of the developed scenarios from the previous day;

Day 5 - Exploring the role of each individual and their concrete resources in continuing their work on IVS trends, Evaluation;

The project team met every day after the workshops were over to assess how the day went in terms of methodology, content and other matters and to go through the plan of the following day making all the necessary adjustments.

3. Key Trends Shaping the Future of Volunteering

On the first days of the session, we began by mapping the forces shaping IVS today. Through conversations, debate, and reflection, participants identified a wide range of global trends influencing volunteering:

- Decolonisation
- Climate injustice
- Artificial intelligence
- New social movements
- Growing individualism
- Volunteers being treated as clients
- Mis- and dis-information

This long list painted a complex picture. Yet, when invited to prioritise, the group selected two trends they felt would be most decisive for IVS by 2035:

1. Climate injustice – how environmental crises and inequalities will shape who can engage in volunteering and who is left behind.

2. Voluntourism demands – the increasing risk of volunteering being treated as a product for personal experience rather than as solidarity-driven action.

One participant reflected:

“We should already start planning based on future trends and not only focus on the current ones.”

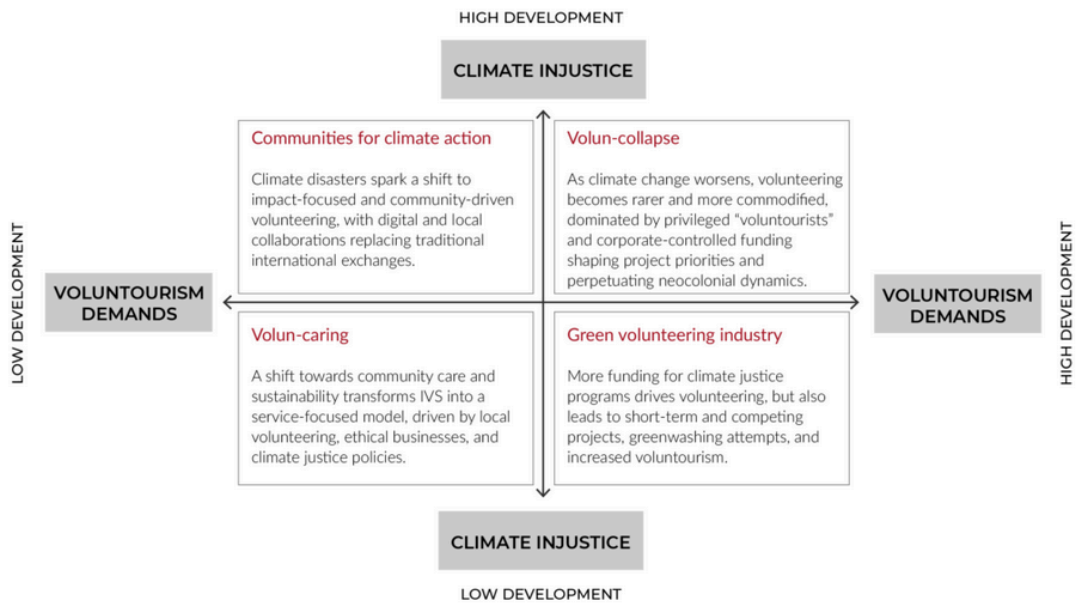
Another shared:

“The diversity of perspectives and the space created to rethink how we engage in volunteering made this session truly meaningful.”

While having all of the identified trends in the background, we decided to continue our work with 2 main trends in order to be able to experiment with the methodology of Future and Foresight.

4. Scenario Building Exercise

With these two trends in focus, we moved into a scenario-building exercise. Using a 2×2 matrix, participants imagined four distinct futures for IVS by 2035, each shaped by the varying influence of climate injustice and voluntourism demands.



This exercise was not just theoretical. It asked us to confront uncomfortable possibilities: what if IVS becomes a commercial product disconnected from solidarity? What if climate breakdown makes cross-border volunteering impossible for many? What if we do nothing to change our course?

As one participant noted:

“Considering different possible futures could actually show us how close we are to some of them.”

The scenarios challenged us, but they also opened space to think creatively and strategically about how we can shape the future we want.

5. Building New Projects After the Scenarios

Out of the scenario exercise came a wealth of concrete ideas – projects that could turn our discussions into action. Together, participants proposed:

- Partnerships between IVS organisations and educational institutions to introduce young people to volunteering at an earlier age.

- Workshops and training for teachers on how to include IVS in formal education.
- Development of local gender- and climate-focused social entrepreneurship initiatives.
- An international annual IVS fair to bring together organisations, donors, and prospective volunteers.
- “Volunteers without borders“: encouraging local volunteering while creating a global network of solidarity, reducing the need for long-distance travel.
- A green travel campaign within IVS, including a target of 75% of participants using sustainable travel and providing structural support.
- Partnerships between universities and IVS organisations to promote formal recognition of volunteering.
- A study session on decentralising CCIVS structures and governance.

These proposals were not left hanging. A follow-up session will be organised in the coming months to further develop and implement them.

6. Dream Board Dialogues

On the final day, we shifted from trends and scenarios to an honest, open conversation about the reality of our networks today. In the Dream Board Dialogue, participants discussed:

- How IVS organisations can adapt to declining volunteer numbers.
- Whether the language we use (“participation fee“ vs. “training fee“) influences how people perceive volunteering.

- How to break out of communication bubbles and reach new audiences.
- How to avoid treating volunteers as “clients,” and instead invite them into meaningful participation.

Participants shared frustrations but also creative solutions. We collected best practices in volunteer recruitment and reflected on lessons from the World Café dialogues held earlier in the week.

7. Actions & Next Steps

By the end of the week, participants left not only with ideas but with a commitment to act. Together, we outlined concrete next steps for IVS organisations:

- Build stronger partnerships with schools, universities, and humanitarian institutions.
- Learn from grassroots social movements and community-led initiatives.
- Support social entrepreneurship initiatives linked to volunteering.
- Decentralise networks and decision-making.
- Promote sustainable, low-carbon travel options for volunteers.
- Reaffirm the social change dimension of IVS and explore partnerships with humanitarian actors.
- Develop common guidelines to ensure IVS organisations share core values.
- Strengthen local volunteering infrastructure.
- Increase advocacy efforts and visibility of IVS to funders.

- Diversify funding streams.
- Experiment with new project formats and forms of cooperation.
- Results of the Needs Assessment Survey



We also agreed on specific follow-up steps:

- Disseminating the session results at the General Assembly of the Centre of European Volunteering in April 2025.
- Including the outcomes in CCIVS strategic planning discussions in April 2025.
- Including the identified trends and information resulting from the study session in an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 application focusing on the recognition and certification

of IVS (C-IVS project).

- Organising a follow-up session later in the year.

In addition to this, after the study session, the IVS networks that were part of organising the session decided that being more active inside of advocacy and decision making spaces related to the identified trends can support the implementation of the networks' strategic planning and shape the future of IVS.

As a result, the two IVS networks that are present in the European Youth Forum (YFJ) are supporting motions introduced and voted on during the YFJ's General Assembly (GA) in May 2025, to ensure the representation of the IVS interests. Another step taken towards shaping policy related to the IVS trends is the nomination of an SCI member and activist for the Advisory Council on Youth, mandate January 2026-December 2027. The election will also take place during the YFJ GA in May.

One participant expressed the feeling of many:

“There is hope to solve the upcoming problems. Through discussions and different points of view, we can get concrete ideas about future opportunities.”

8. Foresight Workshop Insight

A highlight of the week was the Foresight Workshop facilitated by Eva Gondor. Reflecting on the experience, Eva wrote:

“In early February, we were invited to facilitate a foresight workshop in Budapest, Hungary, as part of the study session on 'New Trends in International Voluntary Service.' ... The workshop underscored the value of futures thinking in helping to anticipate potential challenges and opportunities, empowering people to make better decisions today.”



You can read Eva's full article "[Anticipating Futures of Volunteering: Insights from Budapest's Foresight Workshop](#)" (26 February 2025) online.

9. Final Words

The IVS Study Session in Budapest was not just a training or a meeting. It was an invitation to dream, to reflect, and to act. It was a space where young people, connected by a common commitment to solidarity and volunteering, could come together to reimagine the future of IVS.

As political theorist John Schaar once said:

“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating.”

The work does not end here. It continues – in our organisations, in our projects, in the communities we serve, and in the movement we are building together.



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