



ESC Report

Overview of European Solidarity Corps Projects Addressing “Democratic Participation” (2021–2024)

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Resource Centre

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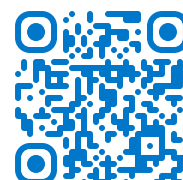


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List of Abbreviations

DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PFO	(Young) Participants with fewer opportunities
E+	Erasmus+

Introduction

This report sets out to provide data on all European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Projects funded in the call years 2021 to 2024 that contributed to the [“Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement”](#) priority within the Erasmus+ (E+) programme.

The ESC has several project types:

- ▶ **Solidarity projects**
- ▶ **Volunteering projects**
(including both team and individual volunteering)
- ▶ **Teams volunteering in high-priority areas**
- ▶ **Volunteering in support of humanitarian aid operations**
- ▶ **Jobs and Traineeships**

The ESC makes a substantial contribution to the “participation priority”, largely because civic volunteering – the central focus of the programme – is closely aligned with participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement. Accordingly, all ESC projects, with the exception of *jobs and traineeships*, were treated as contributing to the participation priority for the purpose of this analysis.

A similar analysis of E+ projects can be found in the linked report.



Methodology

This report is based on an analysis of the publicly accessible version of the ESC Results Database, supplemented with additional data from a linked internal, unpublished version of the same database provided by the European Commission (DG EAC), to create a consolidated database. The public database served as the primary data source, while the additional variables from the internal database enabled analysis of data variables that are not accessible from the public database alone.

The report analyses data on ESC projects funded during the 2021–2024 call years. Of the five types of ESC projects, three are included in the analysis: *solidarity projects*, *volunteering projects*, and *volunteering in support of humanitarian aid*

operations. Ideally, *teams volunteering in high-priority areas*¹ would also have been included; however, data for these projects were not available for all variables in the source databases. For simplicity, all project types included in the analysis are referred to as “participation projects” or simply “projects”. The source data have a number of limitations. A full description of the methodology and its limitations can be found in the accompanying technical document. The results of the analysis are summarised in this report and illustrated with figures. Unless otherwise stated, all figures and tables were produced by the authors using the consolidated database, and all data relate to the 2021–2024 period.

1. This is not a significant limitation, as publicly available data show that these projects only account for around 1% of all ESC projects. Their exclusion therefore has a negligible impact on the overall results.

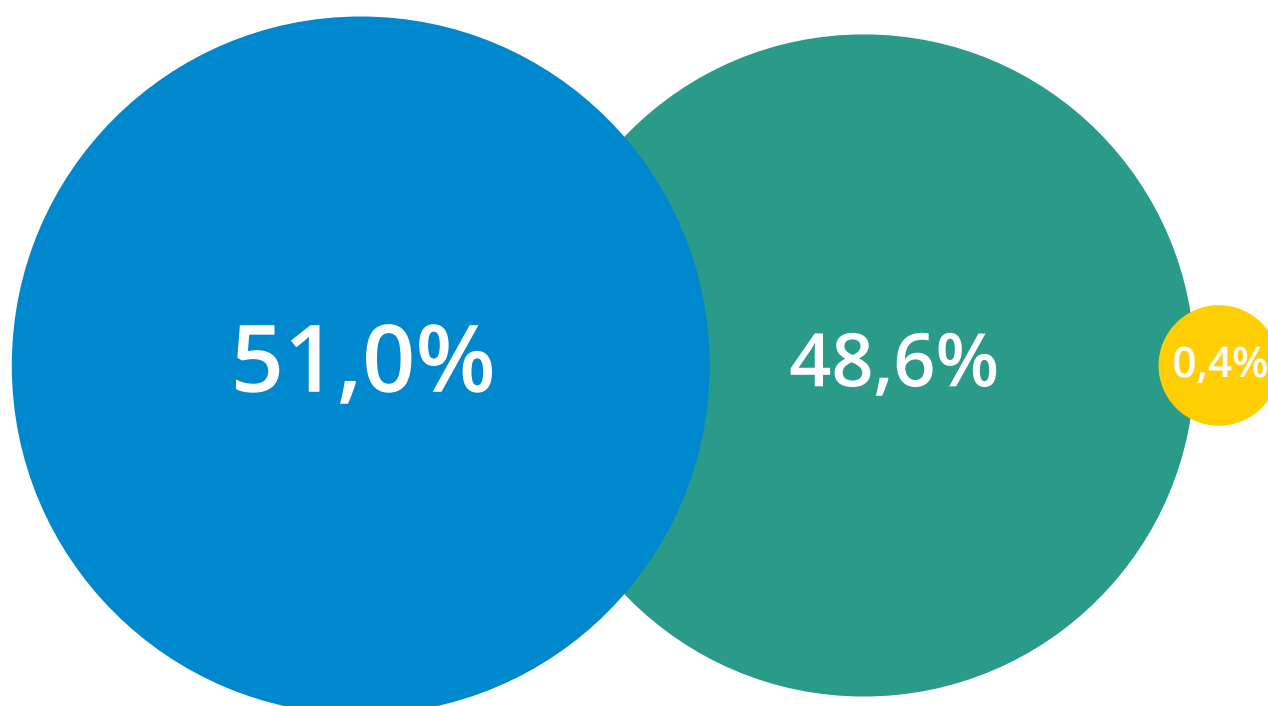
Basic Characteristics of ESC Participation Projects

Between 2021 and 2024, participation projects were distributed almost evenly between *solidarity projects* (51,0%) and *volunteering projects* (49,6%),

with only 0,4% belonging to the *volunteering in support of humanitarian aid operations* strand (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Types of ESC Participation Projects, 2021–2024

TYPES OF ESC PARTICIPATION PROJECTS 2021-2024



● Solidarity Projects

● Volunteering projects

● Volunteering in support of humanitarian aid operations



Between 2021 and 2024, there were 9.684 funded projects supporting the participation priority. The number of participation-related ESC projects increased by 663 between 2021 and 2022, and by a further 122 between 2022 and 2023, before stabilising at around 2600 projects per year in 2023 and 2024. It is likely these developments are linked to the uptake of the new programme period starting in 2021 (see Figure 2).

Across the three year period, the ratio of *solidarity projects* to *volunteering projects* remained close to 1:1 (see Figure 3). A slight increase can be observed in the shares of *volunteering in support of humanitarian aid operations projects*; however, these still accounted for 0,5% or less of all projects in each year.

Figure 2: Total Number of ESC Participation Projects by Year

NUMBERS OF ESC PARTICIPATION PROJECTS BY YEAR

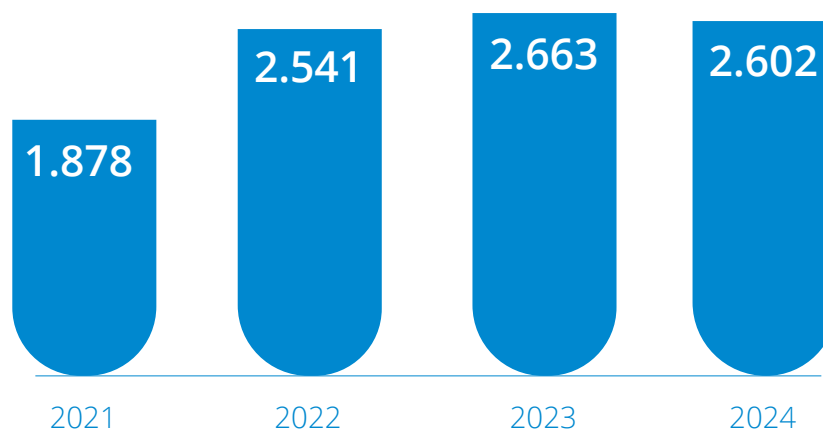
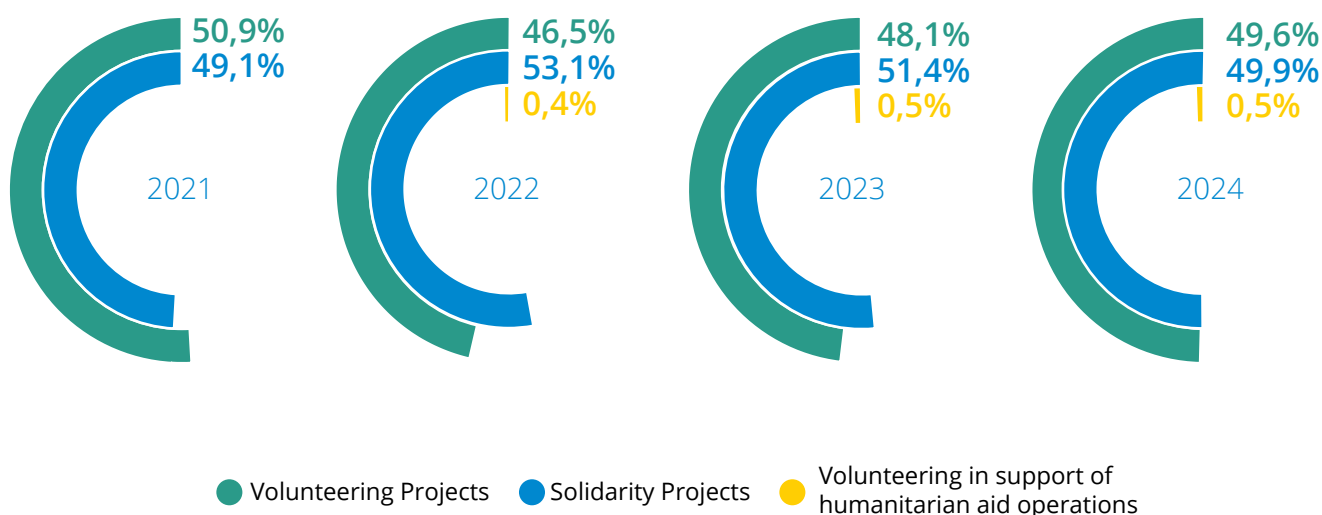


Figure 3: Types of ESC Participation Projects by Year

TYPES OF ESC PARTICIPATION PROJECTS BY YEAR



Geographic Spread of ESC Participation Projects

In terms of the geographic coverage of ESC project coordinators², Spain accounted for the largest share (11,2%), followed by Poland (8,5%), Germany and Italy (8,0% each), see Figure 4.

Looking specifically at the *Volunteering Projects*³ (see Figure 5), Spain again accounted for the largest share of project coordinators (13,0%), followed by Germany (9,5%) and France (8,9%). In the case of *solidarity projects*⁴ (see Figure 6), Poland accounted for the largest share of project coordinators (11,7%), Italy (9,7%), and Spain (8,3%). Romania and Germany also had relatively high shares of project coordinators (7,1% and 6,7%, respectively). Projects under the volunteering in *support of humanitarian aid operations* strand were coordinated predominantly by organisations in Spain (42,1%) and Italy (15,8%) (see Figure 7⁵).



2. For practical reasons, the following countries are not included in the graph: Türkiye (7,1%), Cyprus (1,3%), Aruba (0,1%), and Curacao (0,1%),

3. For practical reasons, the following countries are not included in the graph: Türkiye (6,5%), Cyprus (0,7%), Aruba (0,2%), and Curacao (0,1%),

4. For practical reasons, the following countries are not included in the graph: Türkiye (7,4%), Cyprus (1,8%),

5. For practical reasons, the following countries are not included in the graph: Türkiye (10,5%),

Figure 4: Geographical Spread of Project Coordinators for ESC Participation Projects, 2021–2024

PROJECT COORDINATORS FOR ESC PROJECTS

2021–2024

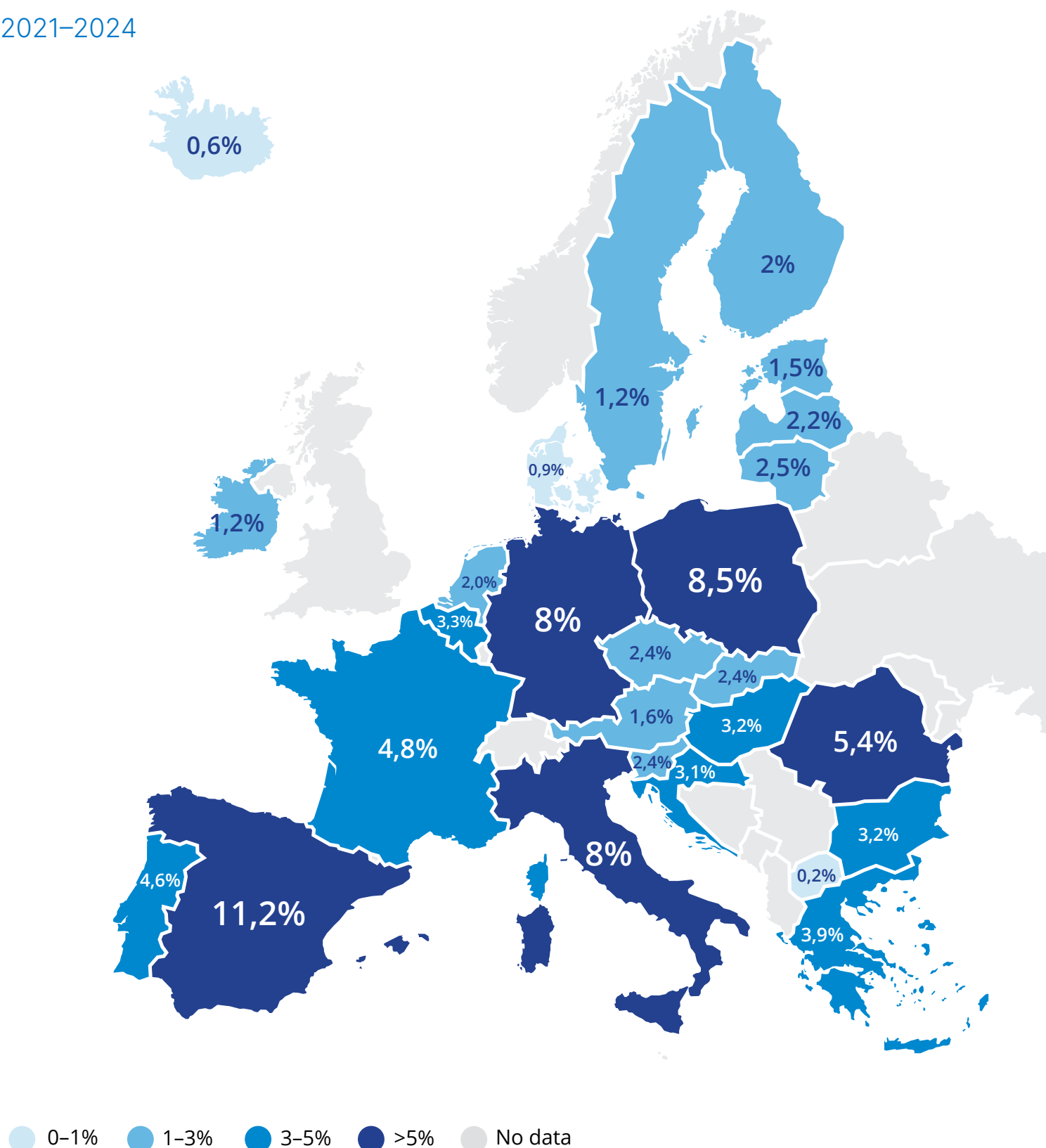


Figure 5: Geographical Spread of Project Coordinators of Volunteering Projects, 2021–2024

PROJECT COORDINATORS OF VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS

2021–2024

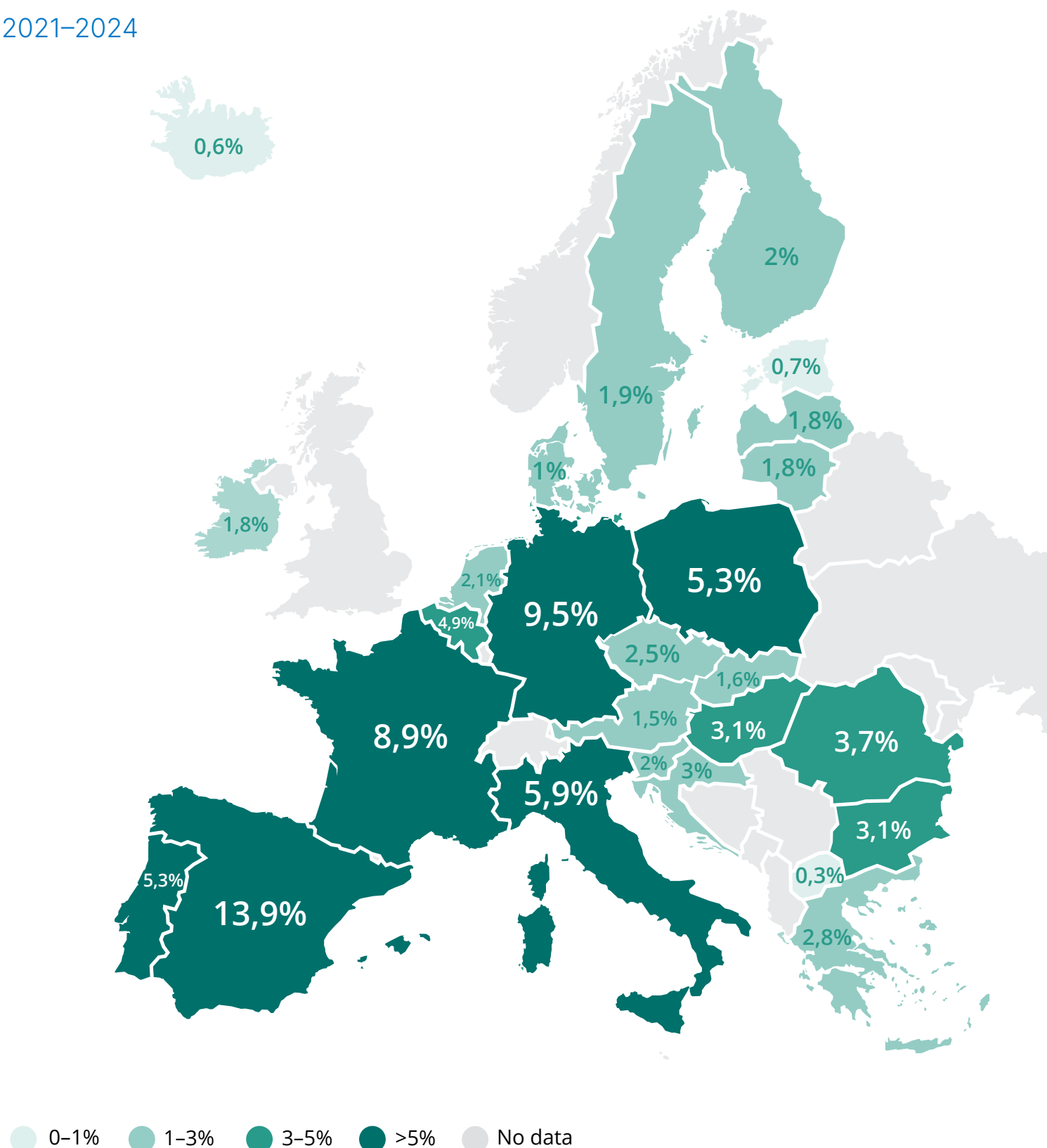


Figure 6: Geographical Spread of Project Coordinators of Solidarity "Participation" Projects, 2021–2024

PROJECT COORDINATORS OF SOLIDARITY "PARTICIPATION" PROJECTS

2021–2024

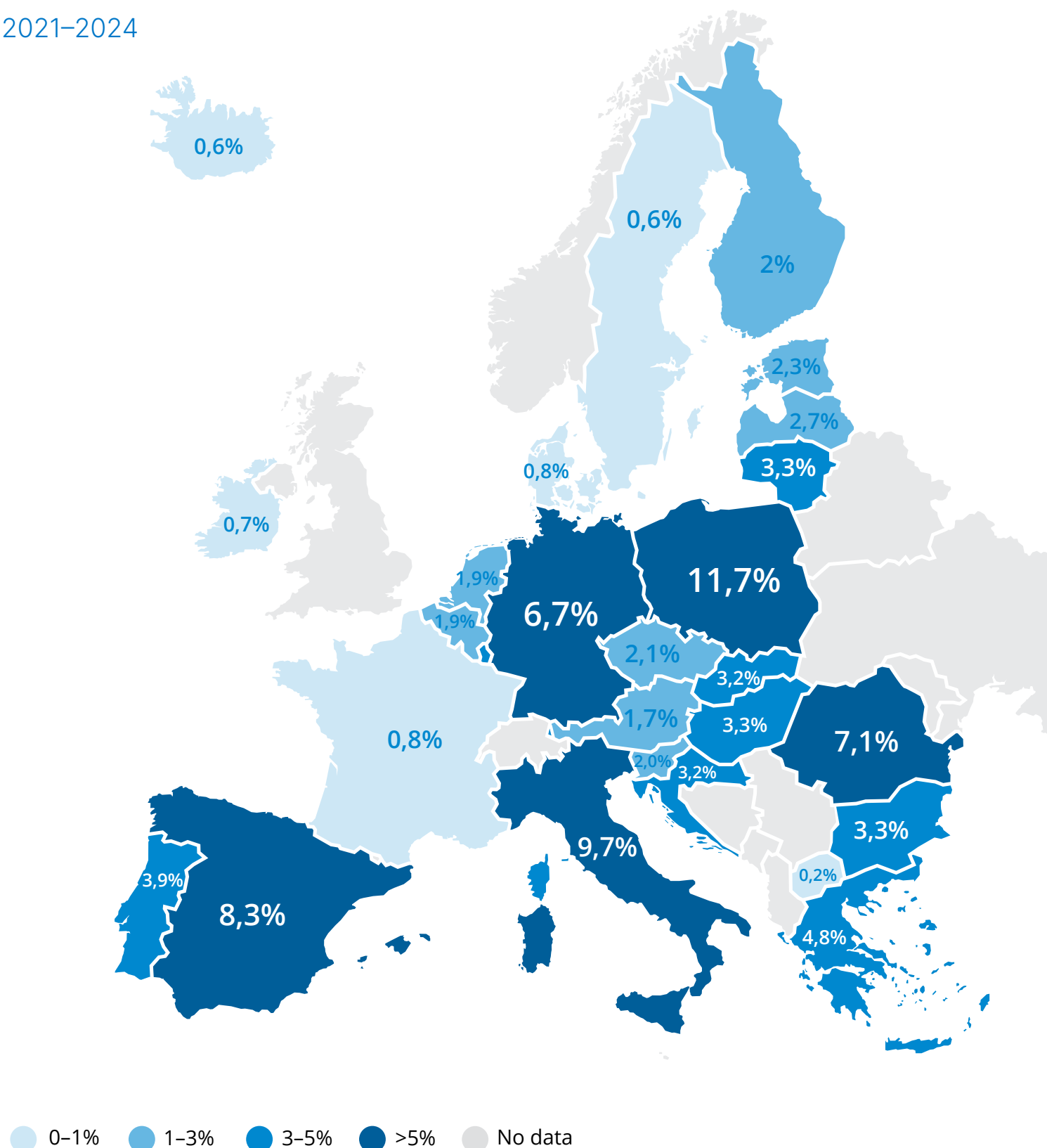
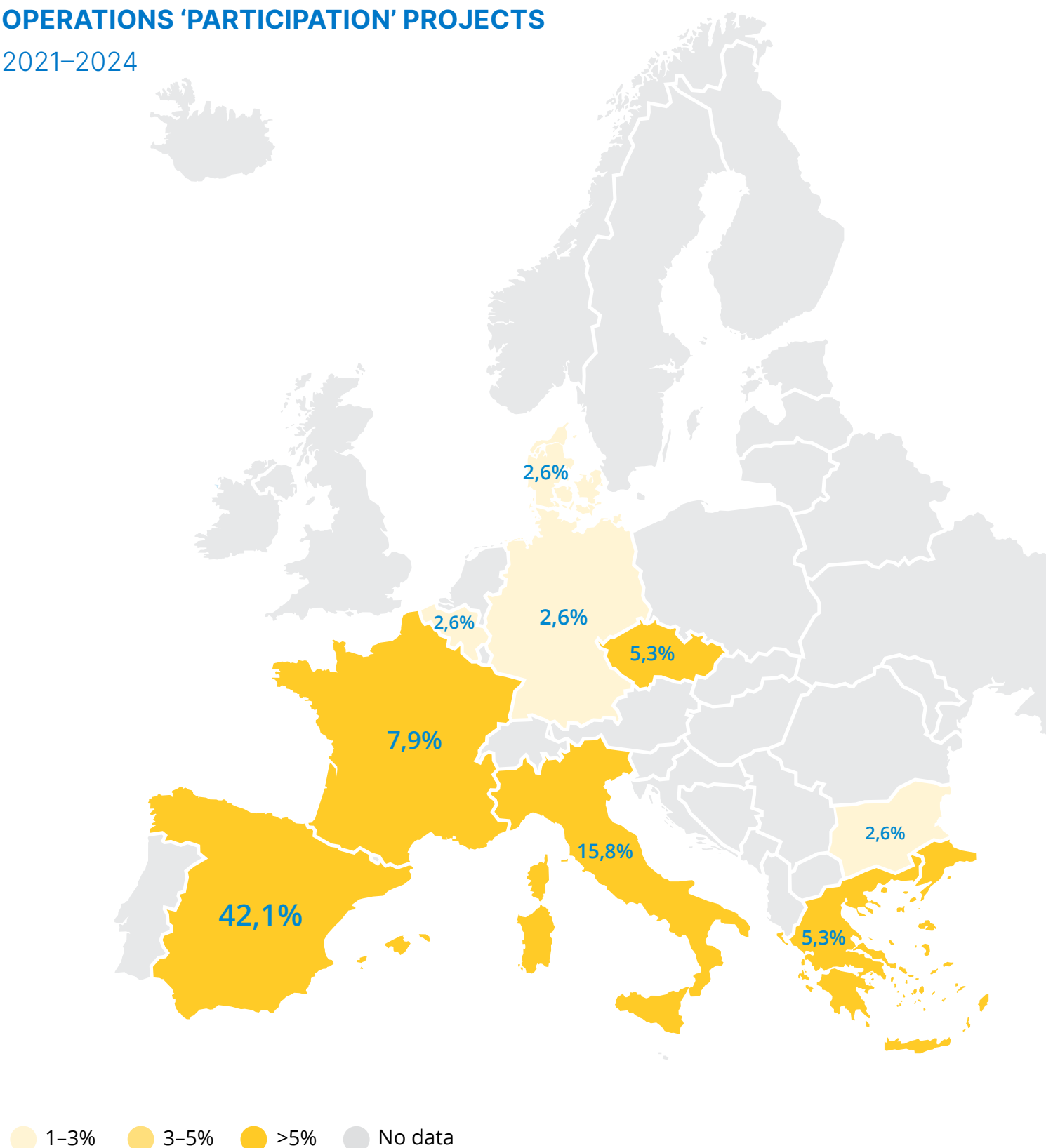


Figure 7: Geographical Spread of Project Coordinators of Volunteering
in support of humanitarian aid operations 'Participation' Projects, 2021–2024

PROJECT COORDINATORS OF VOLUNTEERING IN SUPPORT OF HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS 'PARTICIPATION' PROJECTS

2021–2024

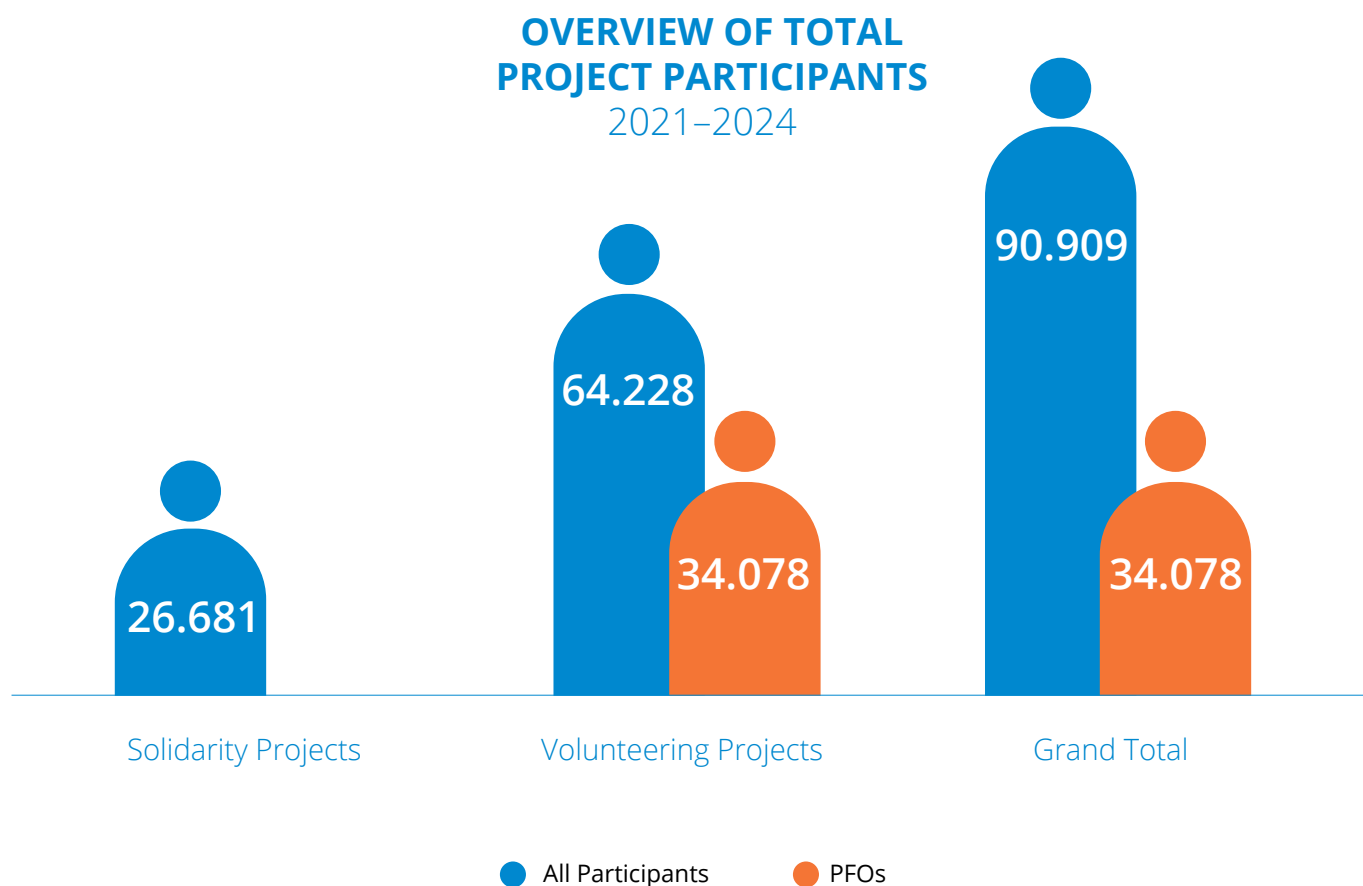


Participants in ESC Participation Projects

Between 2021 and 2024, ESC participation projects engaged a total of 90.909 participants (see Figure 8), of whom 34.078 (37,5%) were (young) people with fewer opportunities (PFOs). However, the data on PFOs in *solidarity projects* should be interpreted with caution. The original data source records no PFOs for *solidarity*

projects,⁶ which seems unlikely and suggests that these data on PFOs may not have been collected or recorded accurately for this type of project within the source data. In addition, participant data are not available for *volunteering in support of humanitarian aid operations projects*, although these account for less than 1,0 % of all projects.

Figure 8: Overview of 2021–2024 Total Project Participants



6. As distinct from a missing value / no entry.

The total number of participants in solidarity projects increased from around 5.000 in 2021 to around 7.000 in 2022, and then remained roughly at this level for the following two years (see Figure 9). Growth in participant numbers for *volunteering*

projects took longer, with clearly notable increases between 2021 and 2022 and again between 2022 and 2023, before eventually stabilising in 2023 and 2024. A similar general trend can be observed for PFOs in Volunteering Projects.

Figure 9: Participants in Solidarity Projects by Year

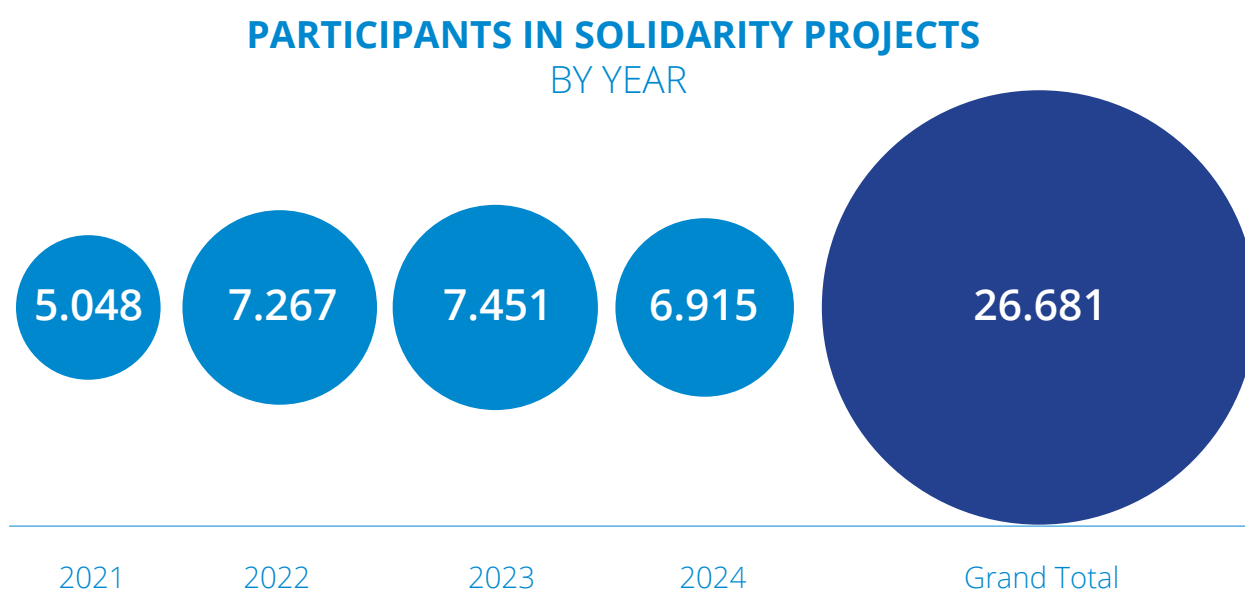
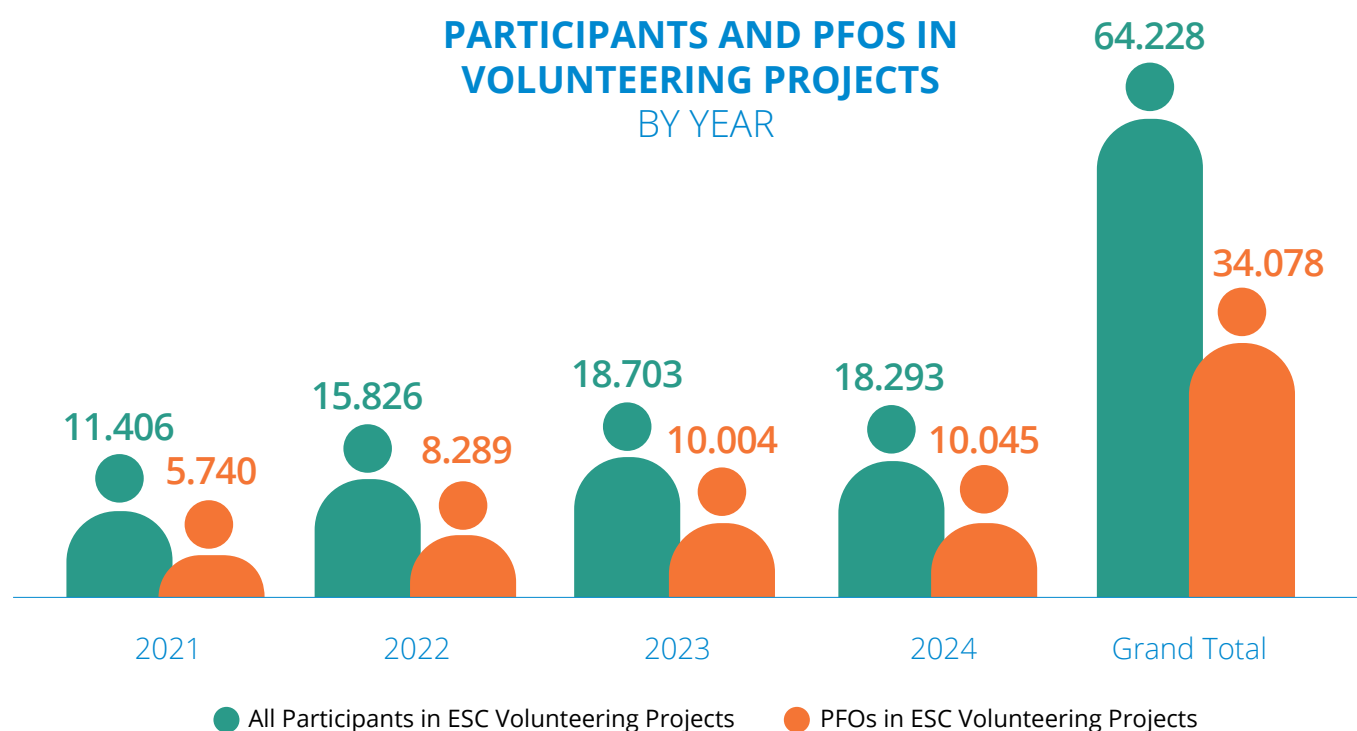


Figure 10: Participants in Volunteering Projects by Year



Overall, the mean number of all participants per project increased from about nine per project in 2021 and 2022 to almost about 10 per project in 2023 and 2024 (see Figure 11). The mean number of PFOs increased from around three per project in

2021 to about four per project in 2024 (see Figure 12). These findings suggest a modest increase in the inclusion of PFOs across ESC participation projects during the 2021–2024 period.

Figure 11: Mean Number of Participants in ESC Participation Projects by Year

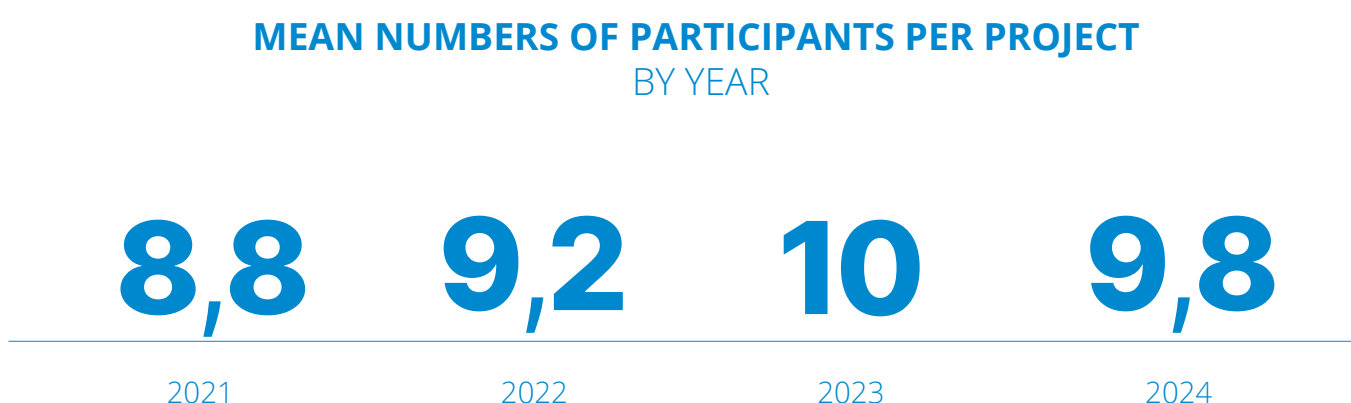
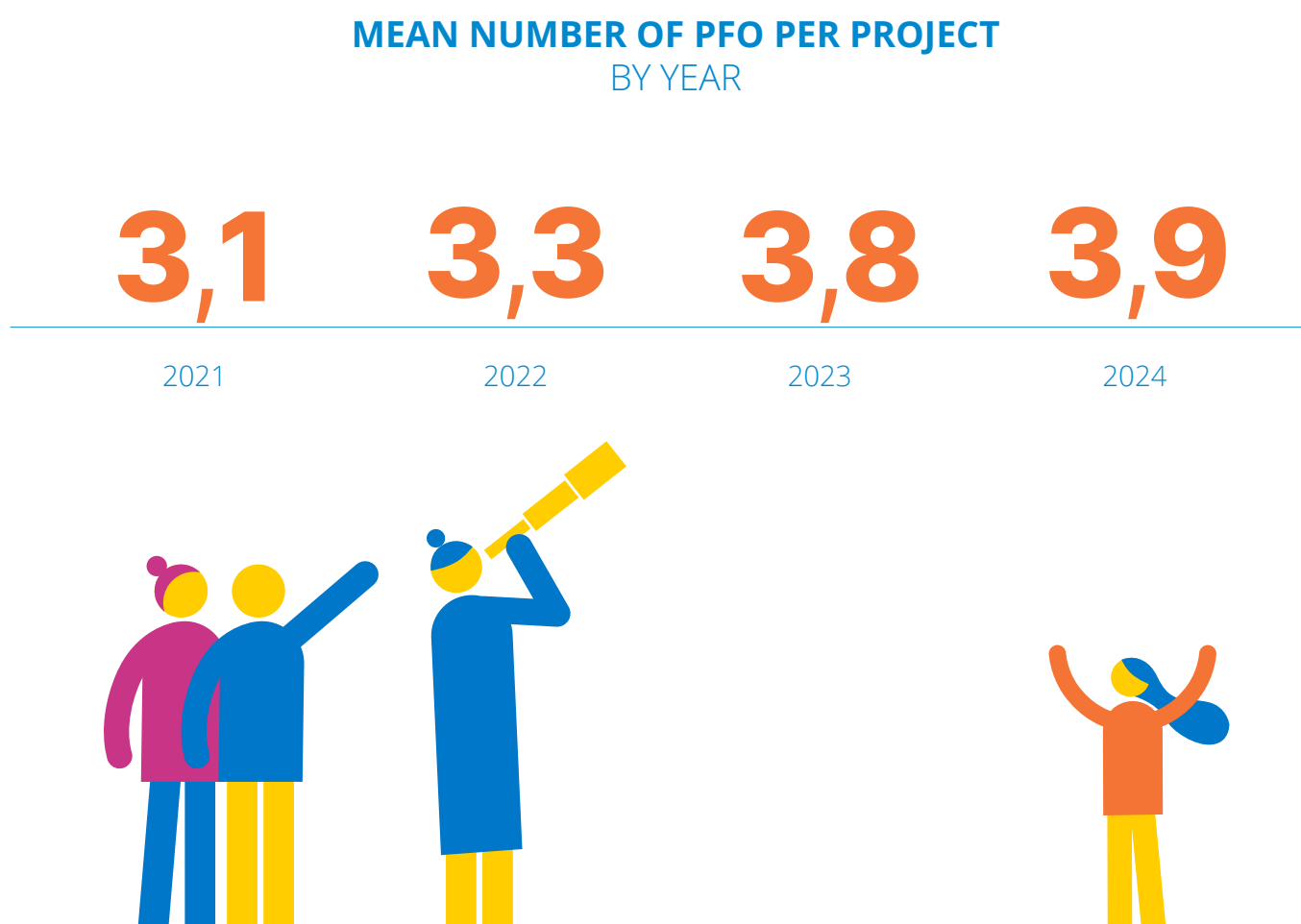


Figure 12: Mean Number of Young People with Fewer Opportunities in ESC Participation Projects by Year



A comparison of the mean number of participants per project shows a clear difference between *solidarity projects* and *volunteering projects* (see Figure 13). Across the 2021–2024 period, the mean number of participants per *solidarity project* was less than half that of Volunteering projects. While the mean number of participants per solidarity project remained relatively stable over the study period (see Figure 14), the corresponding figure for *volunteering projects* increased from around 12 participants per project in 2021 to around 14 in 2024. This trend is mirrored by the increase in PFOs

in Volunteering Projects: from a mean of six PFOs per project in 2021 (50,3% of all participants) to almost eight in 2024 (54,9% of all participants). Between 2021 and 2024, the mean number of participants per volunteering project increased by 18,7%, while the mean number of PFOs increased by 29,6%. This indicates that the mean number of PFOs per project grew faster than the mean number of overall participants, suggesting that *volunteering projects* became modestly more inclusive over the period.

Figure 13: Mean Number of Participants in ESC Participation Projects by Project Type, 2021–2024

MEAN NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY ESC PROJECT TYPES 2021–2024

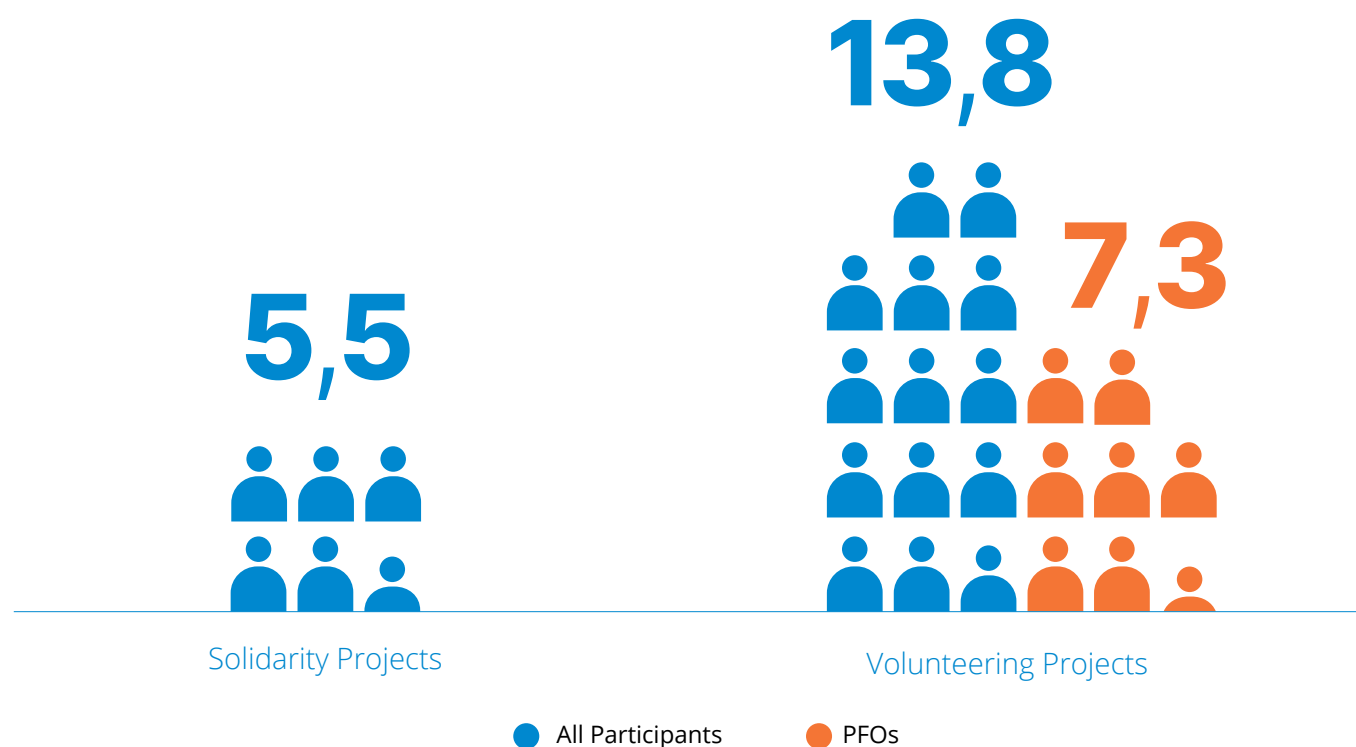


Figure 14: Mean Number of Participants in ESC Participation Projects by Project Type and Year

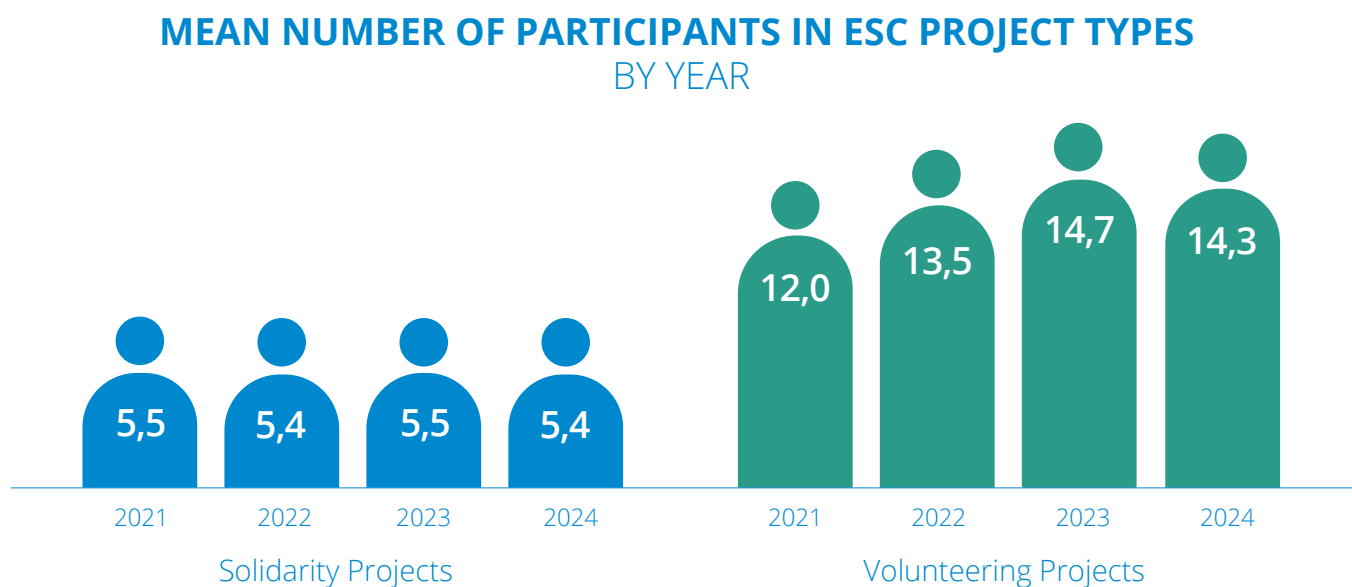
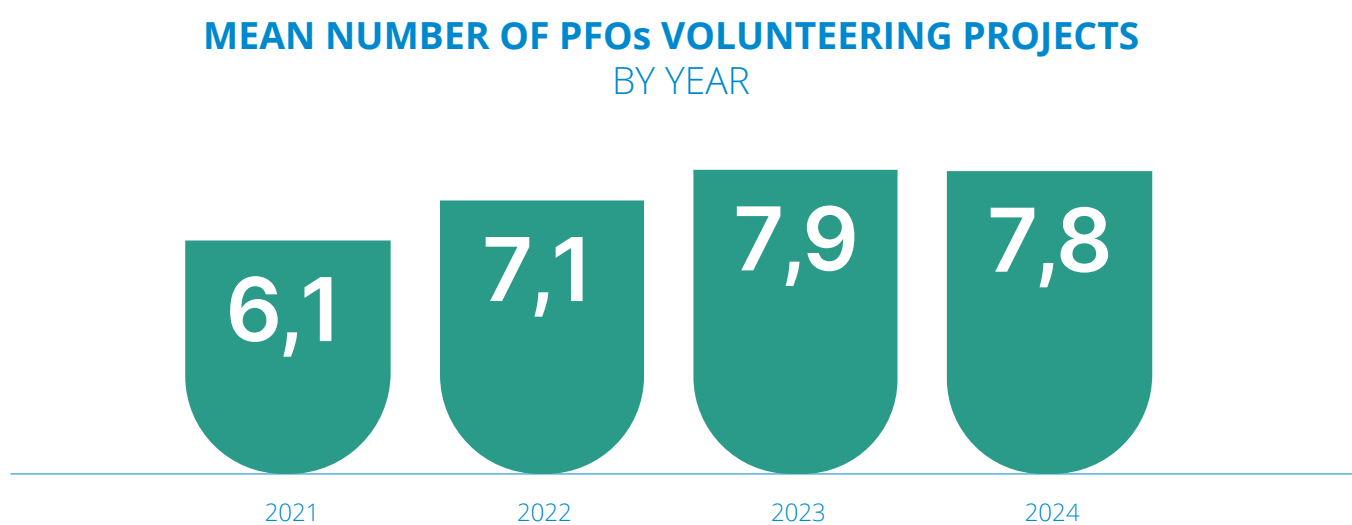


Figure 15: Mean Number of Young People with Fewer Opportunities in Volunteering Projects by Year



Organisations Coordinating ESC Participation Projects

Between 2021–2024, ESC Participation Projects were coordinated primarily by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (44,7%), followed by other types of organisations (23,1%), and groups of young people (11,1%) (see Table 1). The full list of coordinating organisation types illustrates the wide range of actors involved in the programme beyond these most common categories.

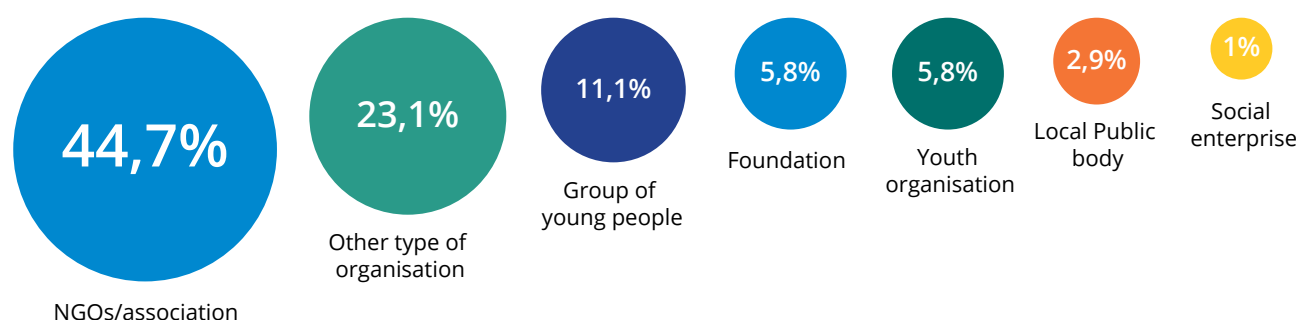
To simplify the analysis and facilitate comparison, organisation types were grouped into broader categories (see Figure 16). Overall, civil society organisations (NGOs, foundations and associations) accounted almost half of all coordinating organisations. Other organisations represented around one quarter of coordinating organisations, while groups of young people accounted for one tenth. Youth Organisations (5,8%), and public bodies (4,3%) were less common as project coordinators. Education and training sector organisations (1,9%),

sports organisations (1,0%) and private companies (0,6%) accounted for only a small proportion of coordinating organisations.

Figure 16 illustrates changes in the classification of coordinating organisations used by the European Commission (DG EAC). Between 2021 and 2023, the distribution of all organisation types remained broadly consistent. However, in 2024, a marked change can be observed in two categories: the proportion of NGOs decreased substantially, while the proportion of organisations classified as “Other Organisations” increased substantially. This suggests that some organisations previously classified as NGOs may have been recorded under “Other Organisations” in 2024. As a result of this apparent change in classification, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about changes in the composition of coordinating organisations of ESC projects over time.

Table 1: Types of Coordinating Organisations in ESC Participation Projects, 2021–2024

TYPES OF COORDINATING ORGANISATIONS IN ESC PARTICIPATION PROJECTS 2021–2024



0,7% each: Regional Public Body, Sport club; **0,6% each:** Higher education institution (tertiary level), Small and medium-sized enterprises; **0,4%:** National Public body; **0,3% each:** Accreditation, certification or qualification body, Organisation or association representing (parts of) the sport sector, Public service provider, School/Institute/Educational centre – Adult education, – General education (primary level), – General education (secondary level), – Vocational Training (secondary level); **0,1% each:** Counselling body, European grouping of territorial cooperation, European or international public body, National Youth Council, Research Institute/Centre, School/Institute/Educational centre – General education (pre-primary level), – Vocational Training (tertiary level), **0,0% each:** Large enterprise, Sport federation, Sport league.

Figure 16: Simplified Types of Coordinating Organisations in ESC Participation Projects, 2021–2024

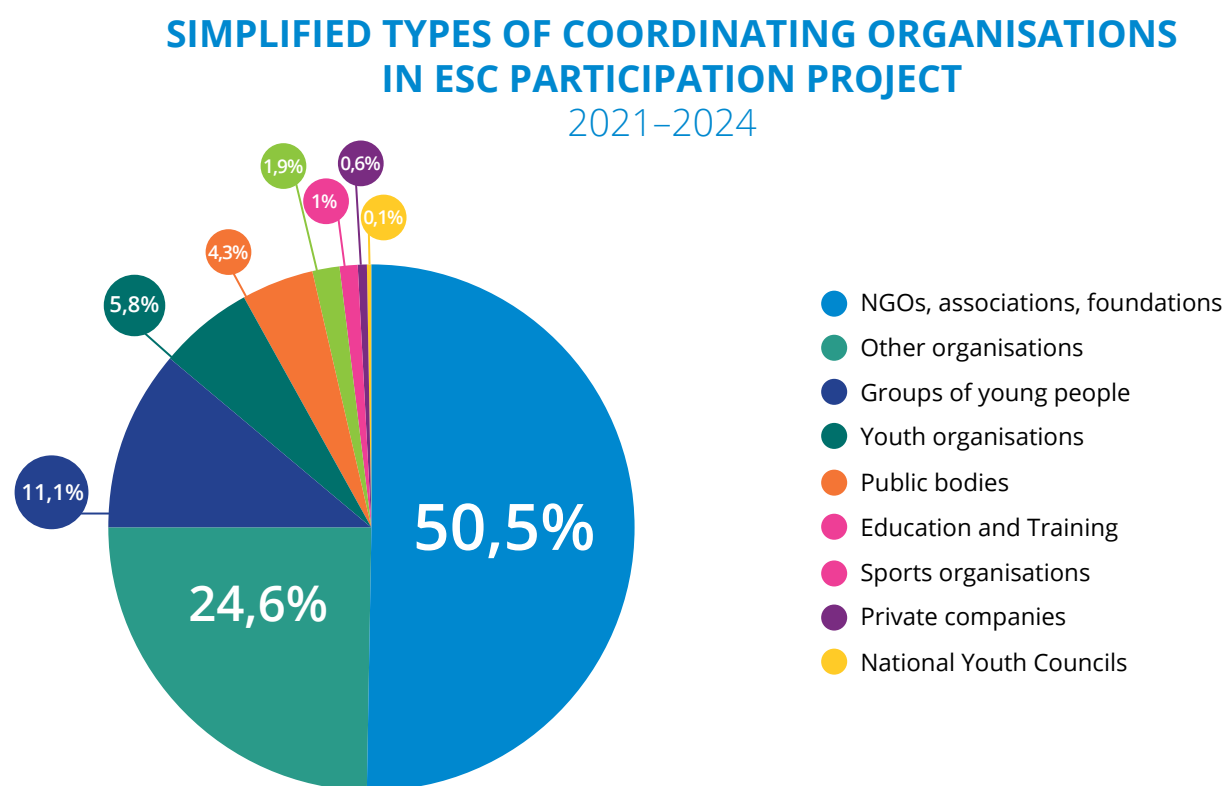
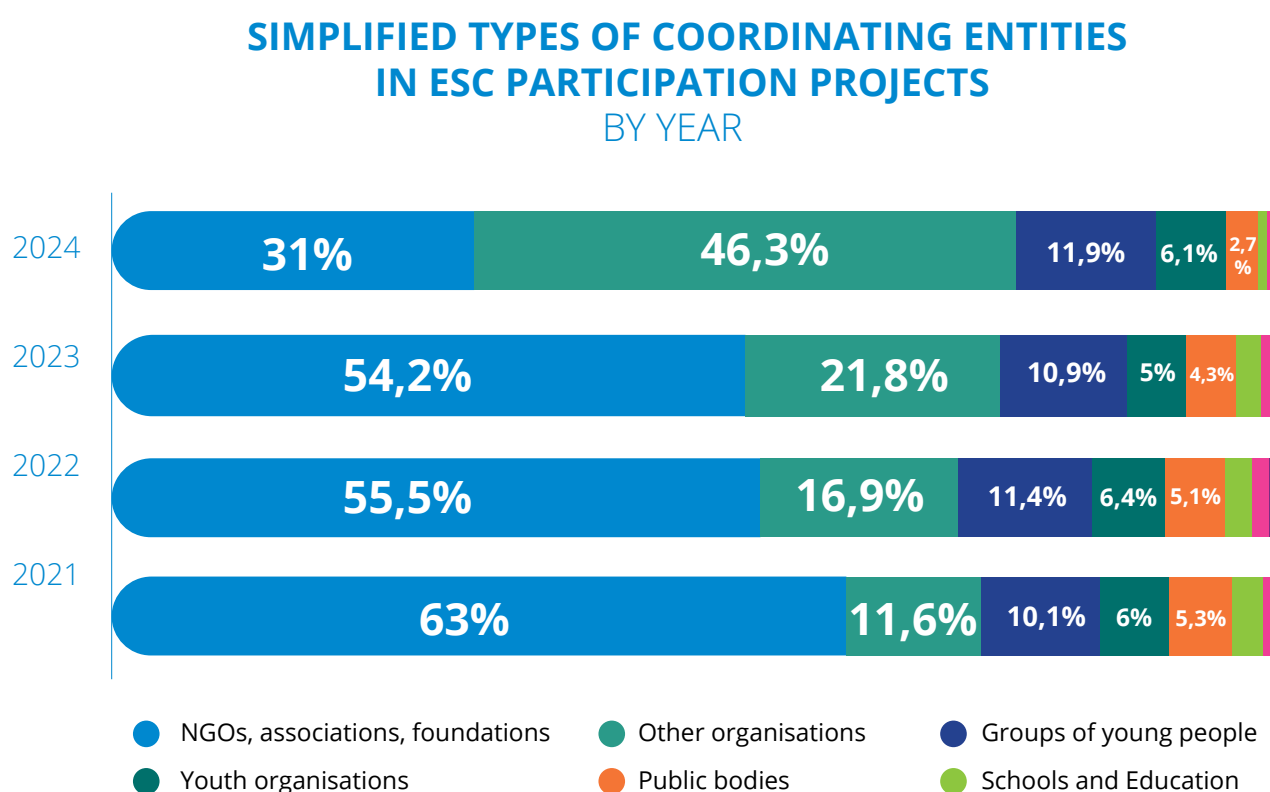


Figure 17: Simplified Types of Coordinating Organisations in ESC Participation Projects by Year

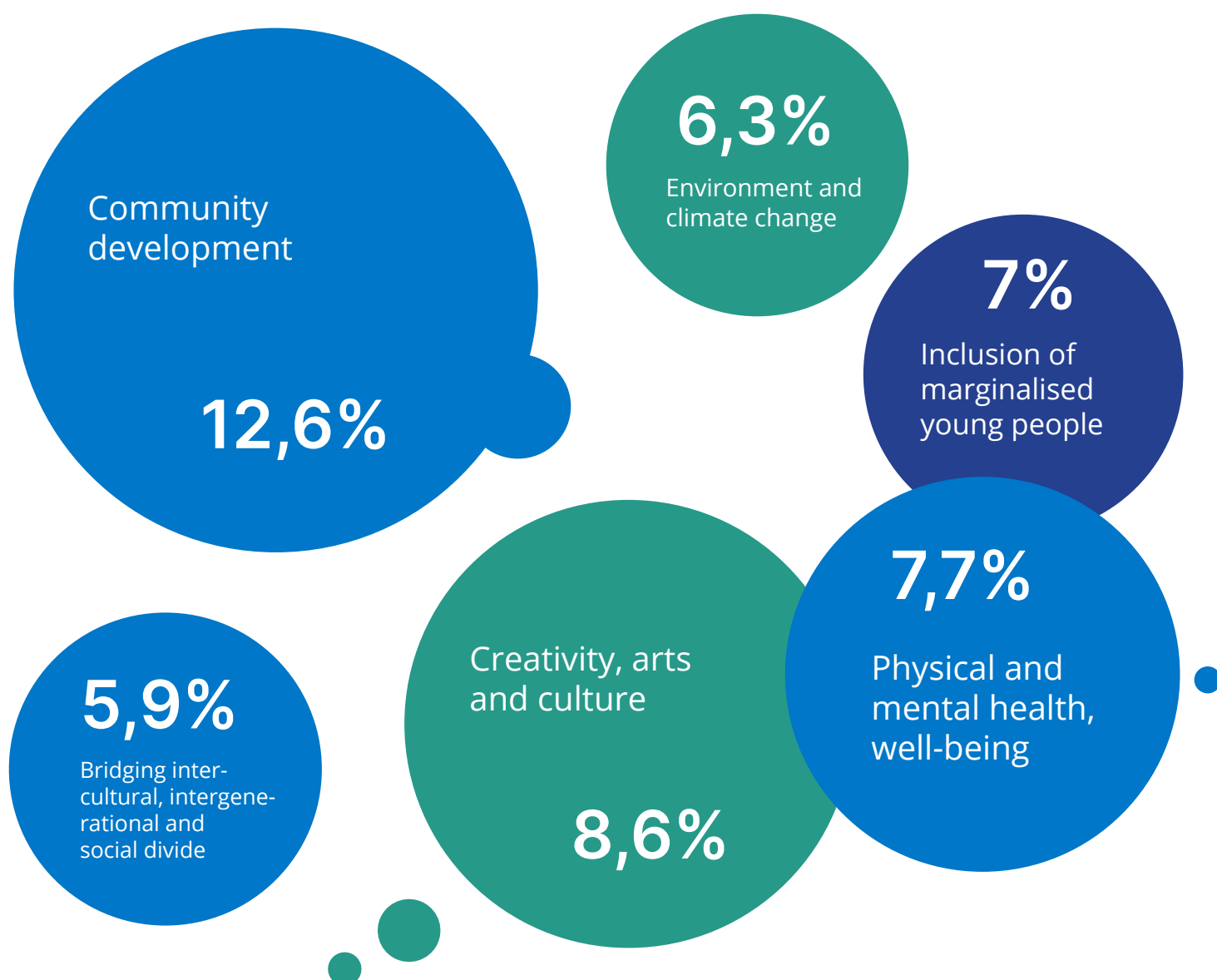


Topics of Solidarity Participation Projects

The most prevalent topics in *solidarity projects* were community development (12,6% of projects); creativity, arts and culture (8,6%); physical

and mental health, wellbeing (7,7%); and inclusion of marginalised young people (7,0%) (see Figure 19).

Table 2: Topics of ESC Solidarity Participation Projects, 2021-2024



More topics on the next page...

Table 2: Topics of ESC Solidarity Participation Projects, 2021-2024

Green skills	4,4%
Democracy and inclusive democratic participation	3,5%
Digital literacy skills and competences	3,5%
Basic skills and key competences	3,5%
Promotion of alternative forms of participation	2,8%
European identity, citizenship and values	2,5%
Development of disadvantaged rural and urban areas	2,3%
Disabilities	2,2%
Quality and innovation of youth work	2,2%
Reception and integration of refugees and migrants	2,0%
Preventing racism and discrimination	1,7%
Cultural heritage	1,6%
Youth employability	1,5%
Tackling geographical remoteness and involving rural areas	1,4%
Entrepreneurial learning - entrepreneurship education	1,3%
Promoting gender equality	1,3%
Active ageing	1,2%
Human rights and rule of law	1,1%
Digital youth work	1,1%
Preventing early school leaving and failure in education	0,9%
Awareness about the European Union	0,9%
Media literacy and tackling disinformation	0,9%
Promoting LGBT+ equality	0,8%
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	0,7%
Employability	0,7%
Youth policy development	0,6%
Information and communication technologies (ICT)	0,6%
Equal access and transition to the labour market	0,6%
Research and innovation	0,6%
Green transport and mobility	0,6%
Roma and/or other minorities	0,5%
Digital safety and data protection	0,5%
Prevention of bullying	0,5%
Disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery	0,5%
Prevention of conflicts, post-conflict rehabilitation	0,2%
Inter-regional cooperation	0,2%
International relations and development cooperation	0,2%
Preventing radicalisation	0,2%
Recognition, transparency, certification	0,1%

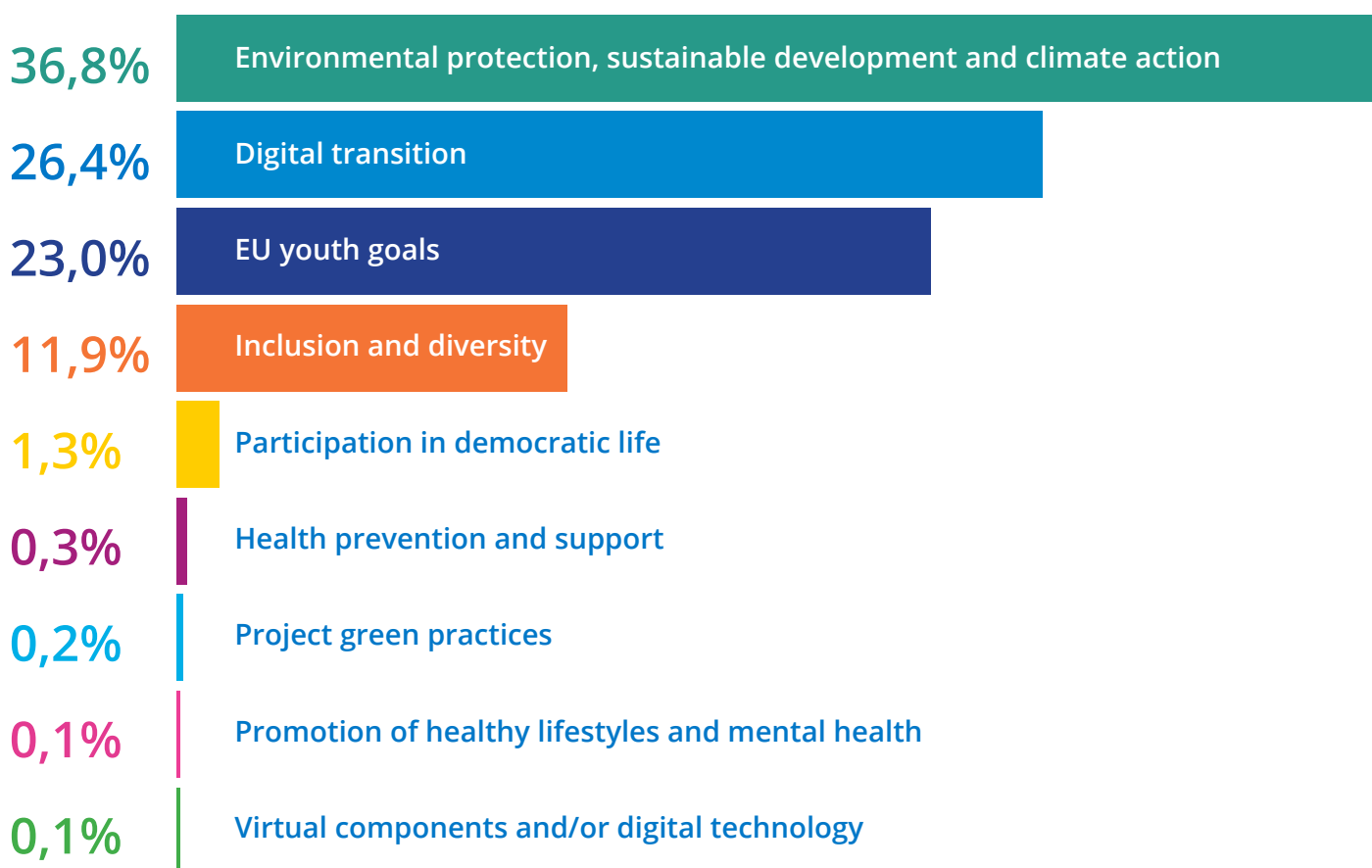
Note: The topic of Citizenship and Democratic participation is a category present in ESC results database, but is only used in the application system prior to the call years studied, and so no projects in the projects studied matched this topic.

Priorities of Volunteering Projects

Among *volunteering projects* in the ESC, the most frequently addressed priorities were environmental protection, the digital transition, the EU Youth Goals, and inclusion and diversity (see Figure 20). By contrast, several priorities were addressed by

very few projects, including health prevention and support; green project practices; the promotion of healthy lifestyles and mental health; and virtual components and/or digital technology.

Figure 19: Priorities of the ESC Volunteering Projects, 2021–2024



Summary and Discussion

As most, and potentially almost all, ESC projects contribute to the participation priority, the patterns and trends for participation projects are likely to mirror the patterns and trends within the programme projects overall. For participation projects specifically:

- In total there were **9.684 ESC projects** supporting the participation priority between 2021 and 2024.
- The number of participation-related ESC projects increased substantially between 2021 and 2022, and then more modestly between 2022 and 2023 before stabilising at **around 2.600 projects per year** in both 2023 and 2024. This trend should be considered in the context of data from the programme as a whole, and it should be noted that there was a steady annual budget increase between 2021 and 2024⁸ leading to an increase in the number of projects that could be supported.
- Across 2021–2024 the **Participation Projects were distributed almost evenly** between *solidarity projects* (**51,0%**) and *volunteering projects* (**49,6%**). Over time, the ratio of participation-related *solidarity* and *volunteering projects* has been stable at about 1:1.
- Overall, participation-related ESC projects in 2021–2024 engaged **at least 90.909 participants**, of which 34.078 (37,5%) were (young) people with fewer opportunities (PFOs). However, the data on PFOs in *solidarity projects* are unavailable, and therefore, the actual figure may be higher. Over time, the number of PFOs in *volunteering projects* increased.
- **Coordinating organisations** of the ESC Participation Projects in 2021–2024 were primarily NGOs (44,7%); followed by other types of organisations (23,1%); and groups of young people (11,1%).
- Excluding topics related to the participation priority, the **most prevalent topics** in *solidarity projects* were *community development* (12,6% of projects); *creativity, arts and culture* (8,6%); *physical and mental health, wellbeing* (7,7%); and *inclusion of marginalised young people* (7,0%).
- **Priorities** of *volunteering projects* within the ESC were dominated by environmental protection, digital transition, EU youth goals, and inclusion and diversity.

Considering these results, it can be concluded that the ESC makes a major contribution to the participation priority. With the exception of *jobs and traineeships*, almost all ESC-funded projects contribute to the participation priority, due to the programme's focus on civic volunteering. Furthermore, while the ESC is a smaller programme in budgetary terms than the E+, both programmes still support a somewhat similar number of projects linked to the participation priority (9.684 projects within ESC between 2021–2024 compared to 11.326 projects within E+ (see the accompanying E+ report). The number of ESC projects per year has also increased over time (corresponding with increases in the programme budget).



8. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/european-solidarity-corps-performance_en, data access Jan 2026

These findings suggests that, in their work to support the participation priority, National Agencies and the SALTO network should consider increasing the focus on ESC-funded projects. Rather than developing participation-themed support and resources separately for E+ and ESC, it may make sense to consider combined approaches and tools. This could, for example, mean:

- ensuring that any participation-themed toolkits are equally relevant to both E+ and ESC programme beneficiaries,
- ensuring participation training offers address the needs of ESC beneficiaries and E+ beneficiaries and equally target both groups,
- ensuring that participation contact points within National Agencies are working closely with their counterparts supporting ESC.

In these developments, an equal consideration of supporting both *solidarity* and *volunteering projects* will be needed. Greater coordination between SALTO ESC and SALTO PI may also be beneficial in supporting these measures.

At the same time, although the number of participation projects funded through E+ and ESC is broadly similar, E+ participation projects engaged more than six times as many participants between 2021 and 2024 (583.401 compared with 90.909; see the accompanying E+ report). In each year of the 2021–2024 period, ESC participation projects engaged, on average, no more than 10 participants per project. Consequently, despite supporting a comparable number of projects, the overall participant reach of ESC is substantially lower than that of E+. National Agencies and the SALTO Network should therefore recognise that efforts to strengthen the participation priority through the ESC are likely to reach fewer participants than equivalent efforts within E+. Ultimate-

ly, each National Agency will need to consider whether its strategic emphasis should be guided primarily by the number of projects supported or by the number of participants reached.

When supporting the participation priority through the ESC, National Agencies and the SALTO Network should also recognise that the programme is not equally represented across the *youth, education and training*, and *sport fields*. Education and training organisations and sports organisations account for only 1,9% and 1,0% of co-ordinating organisations, respectively. However, identifying the sectors represented by ESC co-ordinating organisations is not straightforward. The organisational classification used in the source data is relatively limited. Nearly one quarter of organisations are simply classified as “Other organisations”, while several categories overlap (for example, “youth organisation”, “NGO” and “National Youth Council”). Furthermore, unlike E+, the ESC does not classify actions according to programme fields or sectors, making direct comparisons between the two programmes difficult.

Although it is clear that the *education and training* and *sport fields* are only minimally represented in the ESC, it cannot be assumed that all remaining coordinating organisations belong to the youth sector. The EU Youth Programme does not provide a formal organisational definition of the youth sector, meaning that the classification of ESC coordinating organisations depends on the definition adopted. The data shows that NGOs and similar civil society organisations are the largest category of coordinating organisations, accounting for 44,7% of projects. Informal groups of young people account for a further 11,1%, while youth organisations represent 5,8% and National Youth Councils 0,1%. Using a broad definition, these four categories together would account for almost two thirds of coordinating organisations. However, a narrower definition might exclude NGOs whose primary focus is not young people, or informal groups of young people because they are not formal organisations. Depending on the definition adopted, organisations considered part of the youth sector could therefore account for anywhere between 5,9% and almost two-thirds of all ESC co-ordinating organisations.

The current distribution of coordinating organisations across sectors has several implications for National Agencies, the SALTO Network and DG EAC when supporting the participation priority through the ESC.

- **Firstly**, there is a need to improve the monitoring and classification of coordinating organisations across the ESC programme as a whole, to allow for more accurate insight into which sectors and fields are active within ESC.
- **Secondly**, there is a need for principled policy discussion on whether the relatively low representation of the *education and training field* (and to a lesser extent the *sport field*) within the ESC, compared to the E+, is desirable.
- **Thirdly**, there is a need to consider the extent to which youth civil society organisations, as distinct from civil society organisations more broadly, should be prioritised as project coordinators within ESC. Involvement in both civil society and youth civil society is a key part of democratic participation and the participation priority, and arguments can be made about the relative value of both.

Ultimately, these questions are matters of political priority and depend on the extent to which the ESC is intended to support specific types of organisations as part of the volunteering infrastructure, or simply to provide volunteering opportunities regardless of the sector. If more cross-sector representation is desired, there is a need to increase the number of Education and Training Organisations involved in ESC. Alternatively, it could be argued that to promote civic participation, there is a need to continue either implicitly or explicitly, to prioritise civil society, or even youth civil society, as an appropriate sector for youth volun-

teering. This links to concerns about the shrinking space for youth civil society within the EU Youth Programmes.⁹ In the immediate term, National Agencies and SALTO PI (which has an explicit cross-sectoral focus) should recognise that any resources and support related to ESC volunteering may have limited uptake when targeted at, or developed for, the Education and Training Sector.

With regard to the inclusiveness of participation projects, the positive trend towards more inclusive *volunteering projects* from 2021 to 2024 is promising as is the overall proportion of young people with fewer opportunities within these type of projects. However, there are gaps in data relating to young people with fewer opportunities within *solidarity projects* which suggest an issue within the source database. The 'young people with fewer opportunities' classification used within E+ and ESC does not allow for a reliable benchmark against which to assess if ESC *volunteering projects* are representative of all social groups.¹⁰ As a result, it is not possible to identify if participants in ESC projects are representative of the general youth population and, therefore, if ESC might be regarded as sufficiently inclusive. Other research and stakeholder consultation suggest that the long-term volunteering formats used within ESC may not be fully accessible¹¹, by contrast it is also identified that *solidarity projects* can be used successfully as a tool to enable young people with fewer opportunities to develop and implement their own ideas, contributing to the participation priority when doing so¹². Meaningful participation in democratic life is fundamentally linked to inclusion and diversity, and therefore continued attention to the inclusiveness of participation projects is necessary to promote the participation priority effectively. SALTO PI should liaise with DG EAC and SALTO ESC to explore the reasons for data gaps within *solidarity projects*.

9. European Youth Forum (2019), Resolution on Combating shrinking space with expanding opportunities for youth organisations, national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations, available at: https://www.youthforum.org/files/0120-19-COMEMII-19_Resolution_combatting_shrinking_space_FINAL.pdf, accessed May 2025

10. Moxon and Barta (2023), Evaluation of participant inclusion levels within the EU Youth Dialogue, EU-CoE Youth Partnership, Strasbourg

11. European Youth Forum (2024), EU Youth Programmes Unpacked, available at <https://www.youthforum.org/files/EU-Youth-Programmes-Unpacked-How-Erasmus-and-European-Solidarity-Corps-Enable-Youth-Civic-Space-2025.pdf>, accessed May 2025

12. Moxon and Serban (2021), Showing Solidarity For, SALTO ESC, Vienna



Finally,

considering the prevalent topics linked to participation projects within ESC, it is evident that community development and environmental issues are among the most commonly addressed topics. This suggests potential for specific resources and support exploring the links between these topics and the participation priority, such as themed webinars or trainings.

Overall,

the contribution of the ESC to the participation priority should be recognised and reflected in the resources and support provided by National Agencies and the SALTO Network. At the same time, it should be recognised that the potential impact of ESC on the participation priority is likely to be lower than E+ because the programme reaches substantially fewer participants. Although there are limitations in the monitoring data, it is clear that participation-related projects in ESC are only rarely coordinated by organisations in the Education and Training Field.

