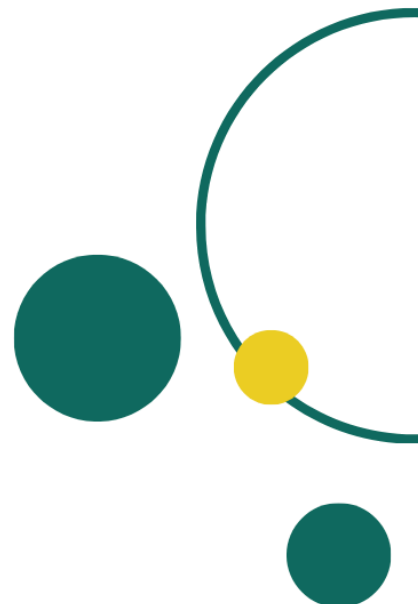


ProVol Learn

Mastering volunteer recruiting & onboarding
through accessible and self-paced eTraining



PROVOL LEARN QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT



Co-funded by
the European Union



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Impressum

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ProVol Learn Research Report

How Organisations Welcome and Train Volunteers

(Germany, Austria & Czech Republic – 2025)

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1. Introduction

This report summarizes the results of the NGO questionnaire carried out within the *ProVol Learn* project. The aim of the survey was to understand how NGOs in Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic currently onboard their volunteers, what challenges they face, what practices and tools have been working well for them, and what kind of support they would like to receive in the future.

The results will directly feed into the development of the ProVol Learn Onboarding Course — a practical training for volunteer coordinators that will help organizations build or improve their onboarding systems.

In total, 39 NGOs took part in the survey: 11 from the Czech Republic, 15 from Germany, and 13 from Austria. The respondents represent a wide range of organizations — from small community-based initiatives with only a few volunteers to large, professionalized NGOs coordinating hundreds of people. Their activities cover several fields, such as social services, education, environment, health, and youth engagement.

The questionnaire included both closed and open questions about key aspects of volunteer management, such as:

- How NGOs structure and deliver their onboarding;
- Who is responsible for coordinating volunteers;
- What kind of training and supervision is offered;
- What tools and materials are used; and
- What challenges and needs exist in daily practice.

By analyzing the responses, this report identifies:

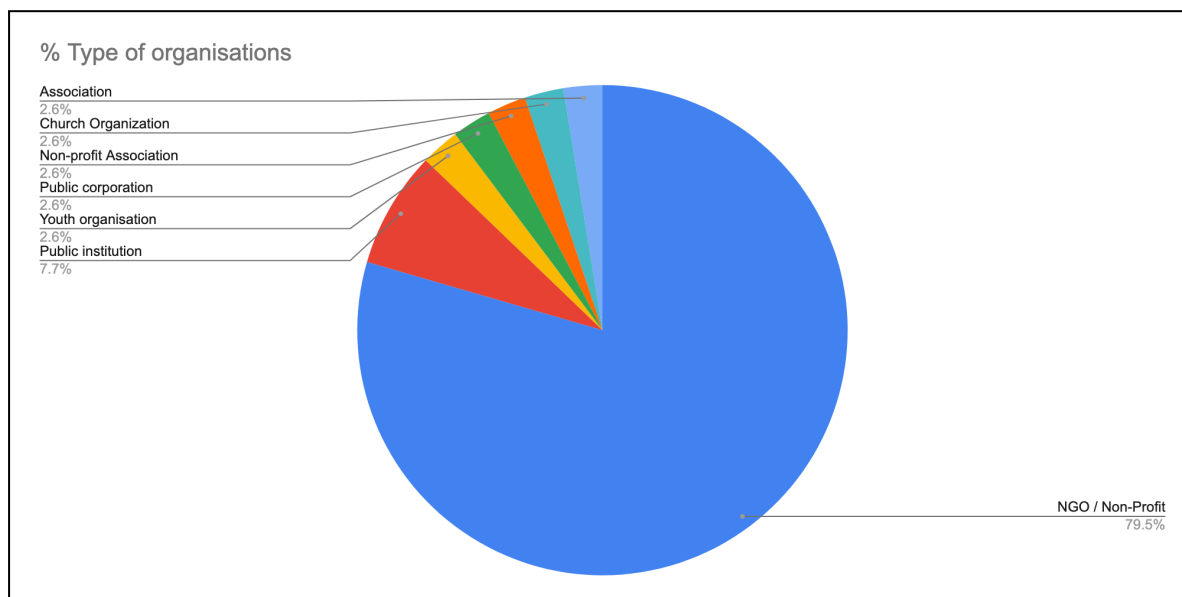
1. The most common problems NGOs face when onboarding volunteers;
2. The methods and tools that currently work best;
3. The topics and skills that NGOs find most important to include in a future training course; and
4. Correlations and patterns between different factors — such as how the size of an organization, type of volunteering, or staff availability influence the onboarding process.

The insights collected here form a clear picture of where NGOs stand today and what support they truly need. These findings will guide the design of the *ProVol Learn Onboarding Course*, ensuring it is based on real experiences, practical needs, and the everyday reality of volunteer coordinators.

2. Overview of participant organisations

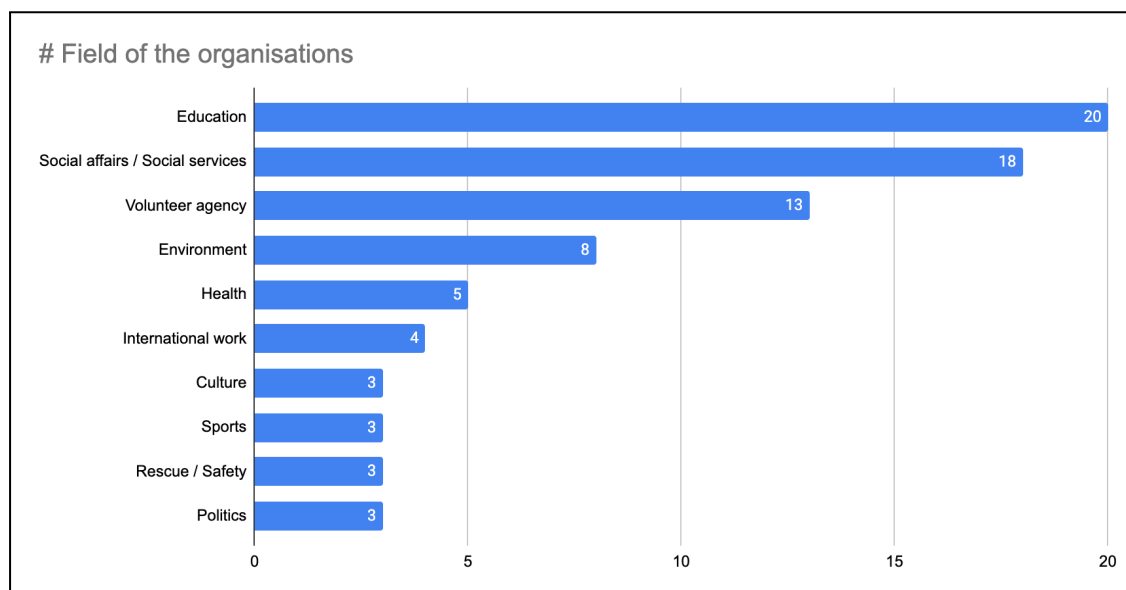
Question 1.1 – What type of organisation are you?

Most respondents (79.5%) represent NGOs or non-profit organisations, showing that the majority of participants work in the non-profit sector. Smaller groups include public institutions (7.7%), youth organisations (7.7%), and church or civic associations (2–3%).



Question 1.2 – In which field is your organisation mainly active?

Most organisations focus on education (20) and social services (18), followed by volunteer agencies (13) and environmental projects (8). A few work in health (5), international work (4), culture, sports, rescue/safety, or politics (3 each).

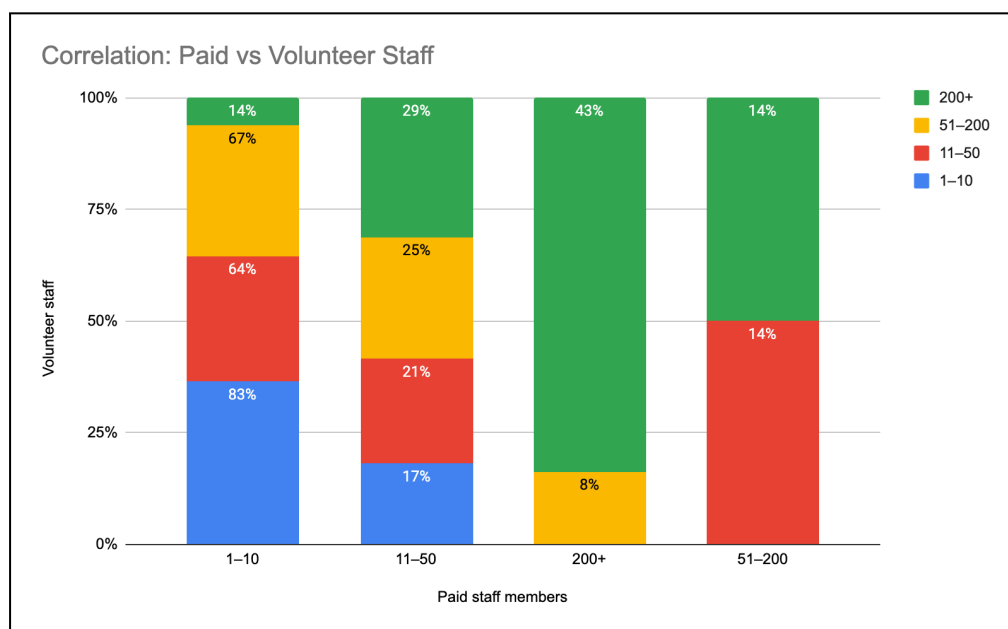


Insights:

- Most NGOs work directly with people — highlighting the need for emotional readiness and interpersonal training in onboarding.
- Because most organisations operate in education and social work, the onboarding course should include content directly relevant to these fields.
- In addition, volunteer agencies may need a separate track on managing multi-organisation relationships, coordination flows, and setting clear agreements between volunteers and host organisations.

Questions 1.3 and 1.4 – Correlation between paid staff and volunteer numbers

This analysis compares how the number of paid staff relates to the number of active volunteers within each organisation.



Small organisations with 1–10 paid staff mainly have fewer than 50 volunteers. As staff numbers increase to 11–50, there is more variation, with some organisations already engaging up to 200 volunteers. The largest organisations — especially those with more than 50 paid staff — are the ones managing the biggest volunteer bases (200+).

Insight:

The data suggests that having more paid staff makes it easier to manage larger volunteer teams. Small NGOs tend to rely on a few core staff and cannot scale their volunteer programmes easily. This highlights the need for support tools and training that help small organisations coordinate volunteers effectively, even with limited human resources.

3. Types of Volunteering

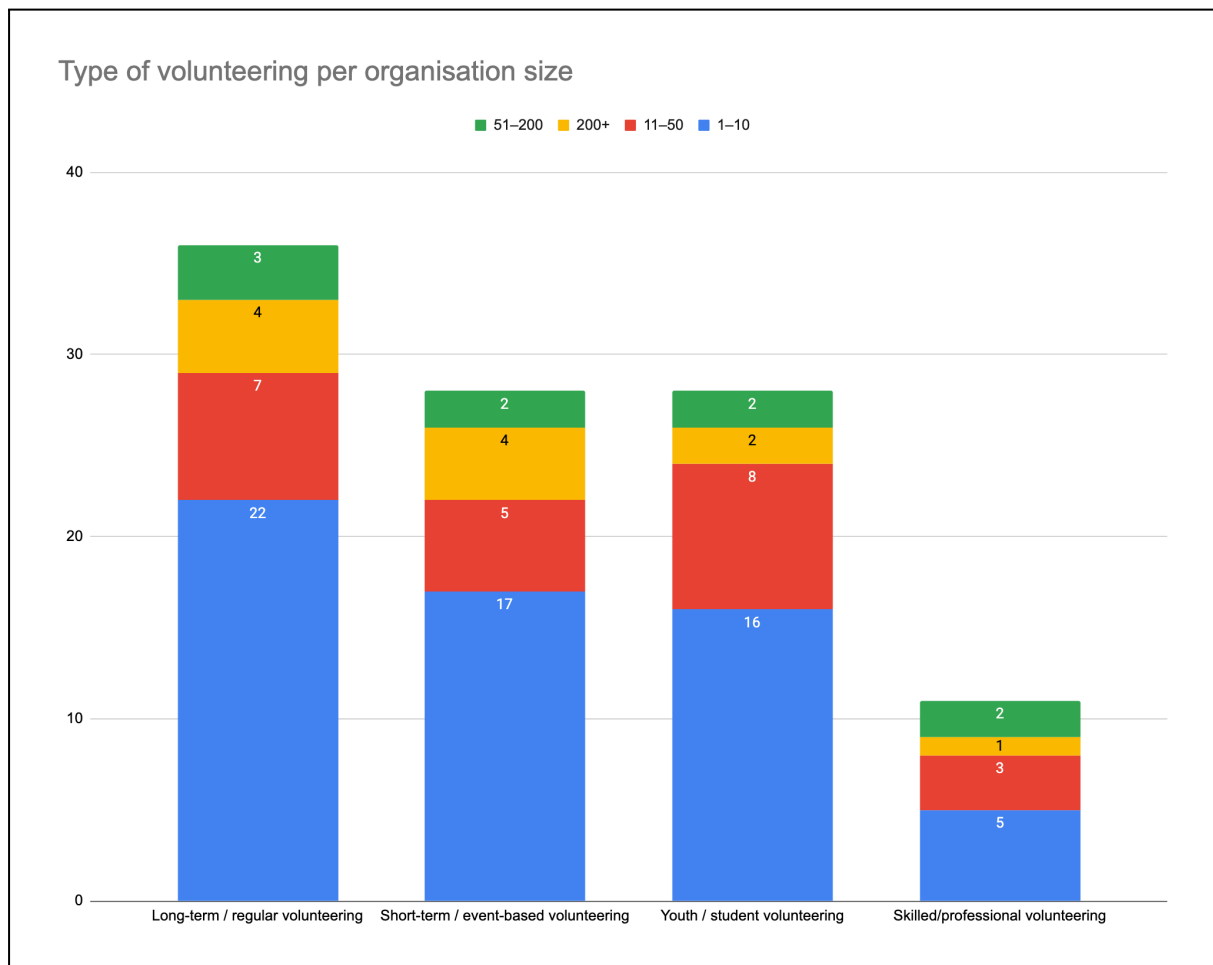
Across the 40 organisations, the most common forms of volunteering are:

- Long-term or regular volunteering
- Short-term or event-based volunteering
- Student and youth volunteering
- Qualified or professional volunteering

Questions 1.3 and 1.5 were analysed together to see how the number of paid staff relates to the types of volunteering offered.

The results show that small NGOs with 1–10 paid staff offer almost all types of volunteering — especially long-term (22) and short-term (17), followed by youth/student volunteering (16).

Larger organisations (200+ staff) are few in the sample, but they also tend to offer a mix of volunteer roles. Skilled or professional volunteering appears more often in medium-sized NGOs (11–50 staff), which suggests that having more staff helps manage specialised volunteers.



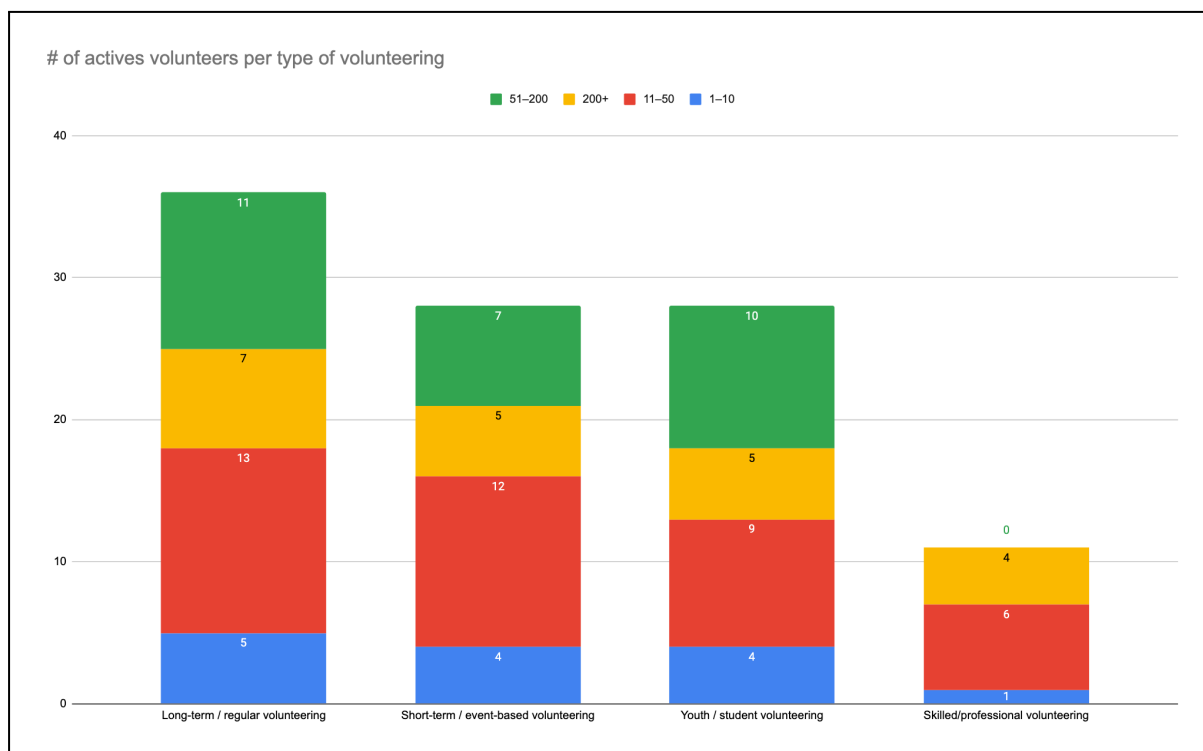
Insight:

Small NGOs depend strongly on volunteers and often manage many roles at once, even with very few paid employees. They would benefit most from simple and time-saving onboarding tools that help them organise volunteers better without losing the personal contact that motivates people.

Questions 1.4 and 1.5 were analysed together to see how the number of active volunteers relates to the types of volunteering offered.

The data shows that NGOs with 11–50 volunteers are the biggest group, offering the widest mix of roles — especially long-term (13) and short-term (12) volunteering.

Smaller NGOs (1–10 volunteers) focus mainly on youth and short-term roles, while larger ones (51–200 volunteers) work more with long-term volunteers. Skilled/professional volunteering appears mostly in organisations with more than 10 volunteers.



Insight:

The data shows that NGOs with 11–50 volunteers are the most active and manage the widest mix of roles. Smaller NGOs often lack capacity to host skilled volunteers, while larger ones don't expand much further. This means the real growth challenge happens in the middle.

4. How Onboarding is Organised

Questions 1.3, 2.1, and 3.4 were analysed together to understand how the size of an organisation relates to the structure of its onboarding process and the presence of formal documentation.

Among small organisations (1–10 staff), 18 out of 29 (62%) have informal or only partly structured onboarding, and nearly half (11) lack any documentation. Medium-sized NGOs (11–50 staff) show more structure — 6 out of 9 (67%) have partially or fully structured onboarding, with 5 already using documentation. Larger organisations (51–200+) are the most formalised: all 6 reported structured onboarding, and 5 (83%) combine it with written materials. Overall, the data shows a clear link between organisation size and onboarding maturity — as NGOs grow, structured and documented onboarding becomes the norm.

Size of the organisation	Do you have a structured onboarding process for new volunteers?	Do you have formal documentation for onboarding?	
		No	Yes
1–10	No, informal	6	
1–10	Partially structured	5	7
1–10	Yes, fully structured		5
11–50	No, informal		1
11–50	Partially structured	2	1
11–50	Yes, fully structured	1	4
51–200	Partially structured		1
51–200	Yes, fully structured		2
200+	Partially structured		3
200+	Yes, fully structured		1
Grand Total		14	25

Insight:

Larger organisations tend to have both structured onboarding and formal documentation, while smaller ones rely on informal or partially structured processes with limited written guidance. This shows a maturity gap — smaller NGOs need simple tools to formalise onboarding and reduce reliance on ad hoc communication.

5. Who Trains the Volunteers

Questions 1.3 and 2.7 were analysed together to understand how organisation size influences who is responsible for volunteer onboarding.

Small NGOs (1–10 staff) show the most mixed picture — some rely on part-time staff or volunteer coordinators, while 6 of them have no specific person in charge. Medium NGOs (11–50 staff) are more organised — most have part-time or volunteer coordinators handling onboarding. Large NGOs (51–200+ staff) have the most formal setup, usually with a paid or full-time coordinator or a facility manager responsible for the process.

#	2.7. Is there a designated person responsible for volunteer onboarding?										
NGO size	It cannot be said in general terms; in some sections it is done by full-time staff, manager and responsible employee Partly by the full-time volunteer coordinator, partly by other volunteers Structure of learning from another There are designated persons in charge at all facilities, who are listed in the welcome booklet. Volunteer coordinator paid Yes, full-time staff/volunteer coordinator Yes, part-time staff Yes, volunteer coordinator										
	Yes, volunteer coordinator	Yes, part-time staff	Yes, full-time staff/volunteer coordinator	Volunteer coordinator paid	There are designated persons in charge at all facilities, who are listed in the welcome booklet.	Structure of learning from another	Partly by the full-time volunteer coordinator, partly by other volunteers	No specific person	Others by volunteers	Facility manager and responsible employee	Grand Total
1–10	5	5	4			1	1	6		1	23
11–50		7	1					1			9
200+				1	1			1	1		4
51–200		2	1								3
Grand Total	5	14	6	1	1	1	1	8	1	1	39

Insights:

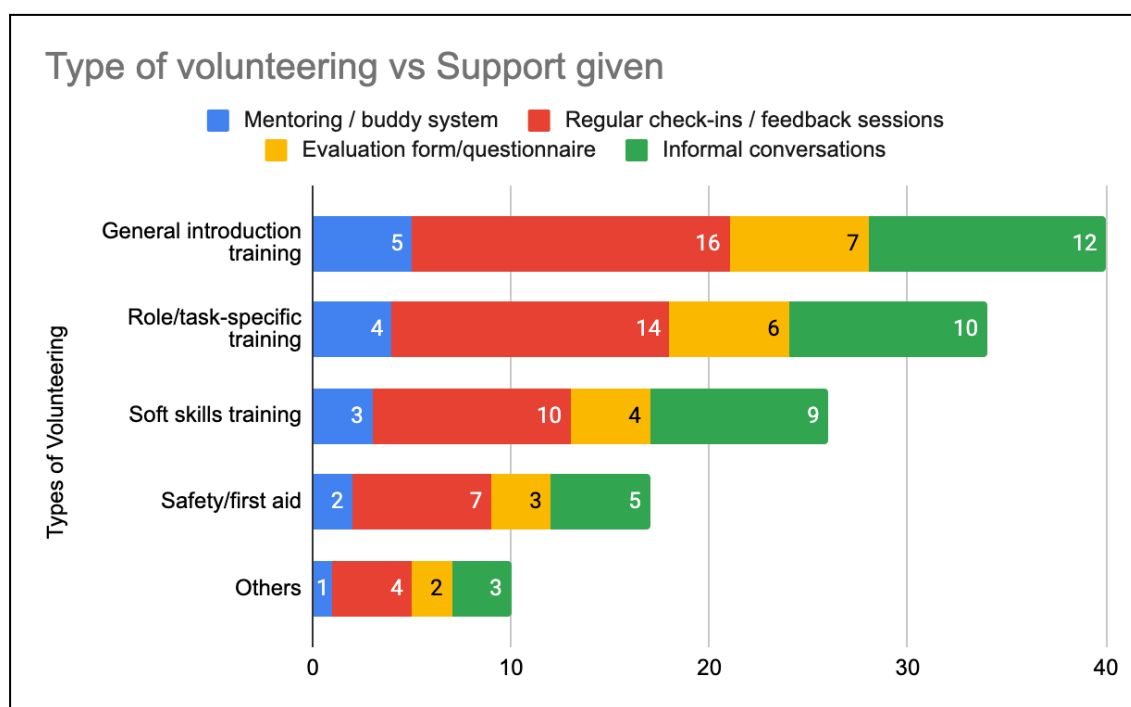
As organisations grow, onboarding becomes more organised and professional. Our course should help small NGOs set clear onboarding roles, even without full-time staff — for example, through simple templates, shared responsibility models, and role descriptions.

6. Training and Support

Questions 3.1 to 3.3 were analysed together to identify both the types of training NGOs provide to volunteers and the methods they use to monitor and support them during onboarding and integration.

- 17 NGOs offer comprehensive training combining both introductory and ongoing components.
- 15 NGOs provide general introduction or orientation sessions covering mission, values, and basic procedures.
- 12 NGOs deliver role- or task-specific training to ensure operational readiness and quality standards.
- 10 NGOs include soft skills development (e.g. teamwork, communication), while 8 NGOs integrate safety or first-aid training as part of initial preparation.
- 14 NGOs continue offering advanced or ongoing training after onboarding to maintain engagement and performance.

In terms of support and supervision, mentoring or buddy systems are used by 9 NGOs, helping new volunteers adapt through peer guidance. Regular feedback or check-ins are implemented by 13 NGOs, often complemented by informal conversations (reported by 16 NGOs) to maintain trust and openness. Only 7 NGOs systematically use evaluation forms or structured feedback tools.



Insights:

“Most organisations rely on human connection rather than formal systems — personal interaction and ongoing conversations are their strongest tools for training and retaining volunteers.”

7. Digital Tools and Documentation

Questions 4.2 and 4.3 were analysed together to identify both the solutions NGOs have developed to address onboarding challenges and the tools or platforms they currently use for onboarding and training.

Questions 4.2 and 4.3		Digital Tools used for Onboardings								
Organisati on size	Onboarding solutions	Cloud & File Manag ement	Comm unicati on Tools	E-Lear ning & Trainin g Platfor ms	In-Pers on Training / Non-Di gital	Mana geme nt / HR & Intern al Syste ms	No Tools/ Not Yet Devel oped	Office & Colla borati on Tools	Prese ntatio n & Instru ction Tools	Gran d Total
1–10	Clear Communication	1			1		1			3
	Documentation & Tools		1					1		2
	No Solutions / Not Yet Developed		1			1	2	2	1	7
	Personal Support & Check-ins		1	1	1		1	1		5
	Process Improvements		1							1
	Training & Education	1		1	2		1			5
1–10 Total		2	4	2	4	1	5	4	1	23
11–50	Advertising & Outreach								1	1
	Documentation & Tools		1							1
	Motivation & Engagement								1	1
	No Solutions / Not Yet Developed					1		1	1	3
	Personal Support & Check-ins				1					1
	Training & Education		1						1	2
11–50 Total			2		1	1		1	4	9
200+	Clear Communication	1								1

	No Solutions / Not Yet Developed							1	1
	Personal Support & Check-ins			1	1				2
200+ Total		1		1	1			1	4
51–200	Advertising & Outreach, Training & Education							1	1
	No Solutions / Not Yet Developed				1				1
	Process Improvements, Training & Education			1					1
51–200 Total		1			1			1	3
Grand Total		3	7	3	7	2	5	6	39

Insights:

The results show that NGOs of all sizes rely mainly on human-centred onboarding, using clear communication, personal support, check-ins, and in-person training as their core methods. Smaller organisations show the most “No Solutions / Not Yet Developed”, indicating limited structure. As organisations grow, they introduce more documented processes, clearer role distribution, and structured training, reflecting higher capacity and formalisation.

The use of digital tools also follows a size-based pattern. Smaller NGOs rely mostly on basic tools like email or WhatsApp and report the most “No Tools” responses. Medium-sized NGOs begin using collaboration platforms, cloud systems, and occasional e-learning. Larger NGOs use the widest mix of tools, including e-learning platforms, internal systems, and cloud-based documentation. Despite these differences, in-person training remains central across all organisations, showing that digital tools support onboarding but do not replace personal interaction.

- 18 NGOs mentioned using digital tools in some form — from communication apps to management systems.
- 13 NGOs rely primarily on simple communication channels such as WhatsApp, email, or Messenger to organise volunteer activities and share updates.
- 10 NGOs use cloud-based collaboration tools like Google Workspace, MS Teams, SharePoint, or OneNote to coordinate tasks and store onboarding materials.
- 7 NGOs integrate presentation and documentation tools such as PowerPoint, Padlet, or Trello boards to support training and guide volunteers visually.
- 5 NGOs are experimenting with e-learning platforms, including Moodle, Tafel Academy, Personio, and online seminars via Zoom or Teams.
- 8 NGOs reported having no digital tools or formal systems, relying instead on personal contact, printed materials, or in-person meetings.

Country trends

- Germany: The strongest digital adoption — many NGOs use MS Teams, SharePoint, or internal databases.
- Austria: Emphasis on direct communication and hybrid setups, often combining in-person meetings with Zoom or Google Workspace.
- Czech Republic: Increasing experimentation with Moodle, Padlet, and blended training formats.

8. Motivation and Recognition

Non-financial incentives are common and valued. Organisations use:

- Certificates or letters of reference
- Social events and team gatherings
- Public recognition or awards
- Reimbursement of expenses

Questions 1.3, 1.4, and 5.1 were analysed together to understand how the size of paid staff and volunteers relate to the types of motivation and recognition practices used.

1.3. How many active paid staff members does your organisation currently employ?	1.4. How many active volunteers does your organisation currently engage?	Certificates / letters of reference	Training opportunities	Social activities / community events	Reimbursement of expenses	Recognition
1–10	1–10	3	1	1	1	1
	11–50	5	4	6	3	7
	200+	0	0	1	0	0
	51–200	4	2	4	2	2
1–10 Total		12	7	12	6	10
11–50	1–10	1	0	1	0	1
	11–50	3	1	2	1	2
	200+	2	1	2	0	2
	51–200	3	3	2	2	3
11–50 Total		9	5	7	3	8
200+	200+	2	0	2	0	1
	51–200	1	0	0	1	0
200+ Total		3	0	2	1	1
51–200	11–50	1	1	1	0	1
	200+	1	1	1	1	1
51–200 Total		2	2	2	1	2
Grand Total		26	14	23	11	21

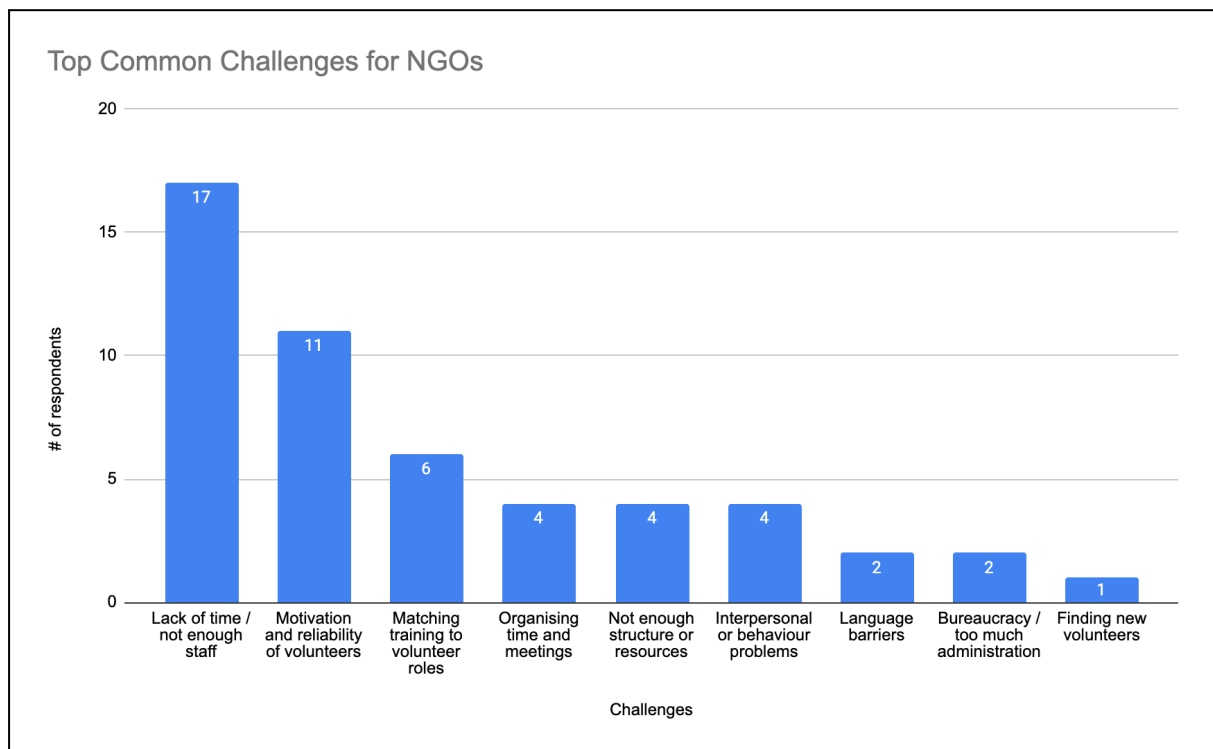
Smaller organisations (1–10 paid staff) show the highest variety of recognition efforts: they account for nearly half of all mentions of certificates (12 out of 26), social activities (12 out of 23), and public recognition (10 out of 21). This suggests that smaller NGOs rely strongly on personal, non-financial incentives to maintain engagement. Medium-sized organisations (11–50 staff) also use these methods but slightly less frequently — they contribute 9 certificates and 7 social events. Larger NGOs (51–200 and 200+ staff) show fewer mentions overall, likely because formal HR systems and intrinsic mission motivation play a larger role.

Insight:

- Smaller NGOs rely on personal, community-based motivation, while larger ones use more formal but less personal recognition.
- The course should help NGOs build scalable motivation systems that keep the human, personal touch even as structures become more formal.

9. Common Challenges

Question 4.1 asked: “What are the most common challenges to overcome when training volunteers?”



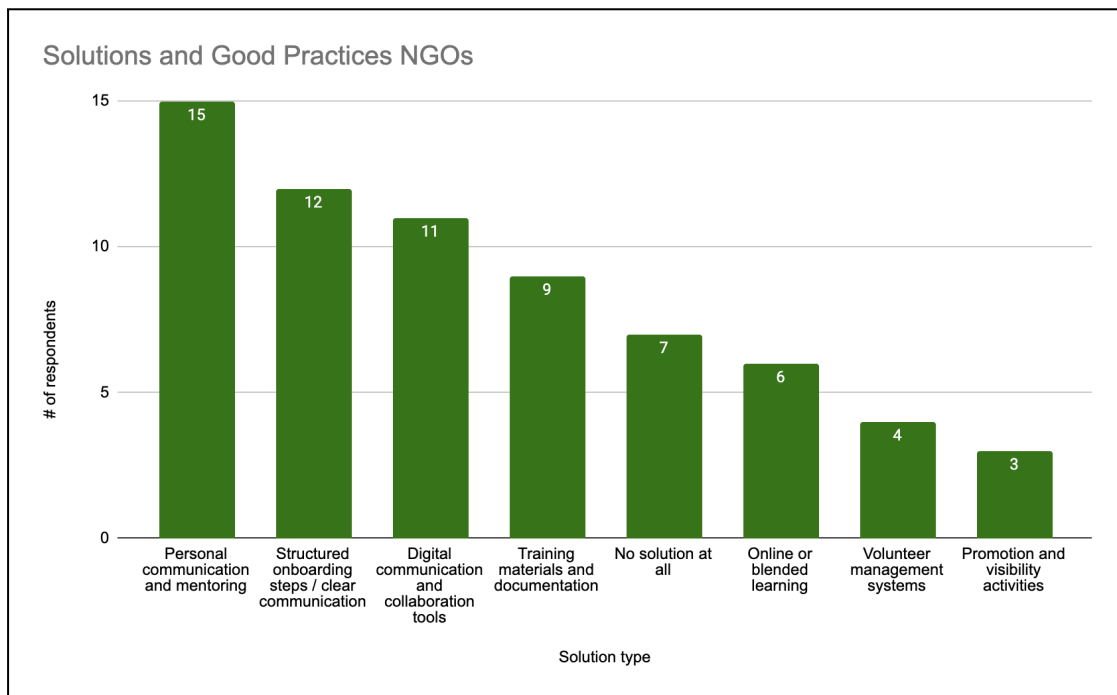
- The most frequent challenge is lack of time and limited staff, reported by 17 NGOs.
- Problems with volunteer motivation and reliability were mentioned by 11 organisations.
- Other recurring issues include matching training to volunteer roles (6) and organising time and meetings (4). A smaller number pointed to limited structure or resources (4), interpersonal or behavioural problems (4), language barriers (2), bureaucracy (2), and difficulty finding new volunteers (1).

Insight:

Most NGOs face time constraints, staff shortages, and motivation issues, which weaken onboarding consistency and volunteer retention.

10. Solutions and Good Practices

Questions 4.2 and 4.3 were analysed together to identify both the solutions NGOs have developed to address their challenges and the tools or platforms they currently use for onboarding and training.



- 15 NGOs rely mainly on personal communication and mentoring, using 1:1 meetings, regular supervision, and in-person workshops to maintain engagement and motivation.
- 12 NGOs have developed structured onboarding systems with clear communication steps, such as introductory emails, presentations, and onboarding guides.
- 11 NGOs use digital tools for coordination — the most common being MS Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Workspace, Asana, and Trello.
- 6 NGOs have implemented e-learning or blended training approaches, using tools such as Moodle, Tafel Academy, or online video platforms.
- 4 NGOs use dedicated management systems, including Personio, Evidio, FireManager, and internal databases.
- 7 NGOs reported having no structured solutions yet, showing a clear need for foundational onboarding tools and guidance.

Insight:

While many NGOs rely on personal communication and mentoring to onboard volunteers, few have access to structured digital systems or e-learning tools. This gap shows a strong

need for simple, adaptable digital onboarding frameworks that preserve the personal, human-centered approach most organisations value, but help them save time and manage volunteers more efficiently.

11. Our Common Ground (Partners & NGOs)

The following exact terms appeared in both sources:

training, responsible person(s), communication, Social media, newsletter, data protection, objectives, duration, resources, supervisor, staff members, documentation, software and digital tools used, values, projects & activities, legal issues, structure of organisation

Topic	NGOs	Partners
Training	Regular and online training for volunteers and coordinators	Documentation, work sheets, and knowledge management
Roles & Responsibilities	Clear definition of tasks, responsible persons, and supervisors	“Me as a volunteer” (duties, contract, schedule) and structure of organisation
Communication	Use of Teams, WhatsApp, Zoom, and presentations	Internal and international communication channels (WhatsApp group, phone lists)
Digital Tools	Use of Moodle, MS Teams, e-learning materials	Software and digital tools used
Staff & Coordination Support	More support and training for coordinators	Head office and staff member involvement
Legal & Safety Aspects	Data protection, volunteer regulations, and work safety	Legal issues and data protection
Duration & Monitoring	Need for clarity about duration and time schedules	Duration, objectives, and resources for each project
External Communication	Use of social media, newsletters, and public visibility	Social media, newsletter, and press work

Both partners and NGOs agree that the onboarding course should:

1. Include structured training for volunteers and coordinators.
2. Clarify roles, responsibilities, and organisational structure.
3. Strengthen internal and external communication, using digital tools.
4. Integrate motivation and non-financial recognition elements.
5. Cover data protection, legal issues, and safety.

12. Final Recommendations for the ProVol Learn eBook

12.1. Make Onboarding Human and Personal

The report shows that many organizations rely strongly on personal contact, informal conversations, and relationship-building to integrate volunteers—these elements work extremely well. For this reason, the course should encourage friendly welcomes, short check-ins, and buddy systems, keeping the human aspect at the center of the onboarding process.

12.2. Create a Simple Onboarding Path

Many organizations do not have a clear or complete onboarding process, and staff often mention lack of time and structure. Therefore, the course should present a short, easy-to-follow onboarding path that any organization can adopt. A simple structure helps reduce stress, save time, and avoid confusion.

12.3. Provide Ready-Made Templates

The findings show that several organizations have little documentation or none at all, and creating materials is time-consuming for them. Because of this, the course should include ready-made templates—such as checklists, welcome guides, emails, and role descriptions—to help organizations start quickly and reduce workload.

12.4. Keep the Digital Tools Basic

Most organizations use only simple digital tools like email, WhatsApp, shared folders, or basic task boards. More advanced systems are uncommon because they require skills or resources that many NGOs do not have. For this reason, the course should recommend a small set of easy digital tools that support onboarding without overwhelming staff.

12.5. Make the Course Scalable for Small and Large Organizations

The report shows a wide variety of organizational sizes, from very small NGOs with no dedicated staff to large organizations with structured systems. To remain relevant for all, the course should offer a basic version for smaller organizations and optional additional steps for larger ones. This ensures accessibility and adaptability.

12.6. Explain Who Does What

Many organizations do not have a clearly defined person responsible for onboarding; responsibilities are often shared or unclear. This creates uncertainty for volunteers and increases workload for staff. The course should therefore include simple guidance on assigning roles, helping organizations clarify who is responsible for each onboarding step.

12.7. Focus on What Volunteers Need in the First 30 Days

The report highlights differences in what volunteers receive during onboarding—some get mission and values, others get role training or safety information, but not consistently. To ensure volunteers feel prepared, the course should identify the essential information and tasks for the first 30 days. This creates a consistent baseline for all organizations.

12.8. Include Motivation and Appreciation Ideas

The findings show that motivation and appreciation are key challenges, with most organizations relying on informal thanks, certificates, or social activities. Because volunteers stay engaged when they feel valued, the course should help organizations include simple recognition practices as part of the onboarding experience.

12.9. Offer Simple Tracking Tools

Several organizations struggle to follow up with volunteers or track their progress, especially when staff capacity is limited. For this reason, the course should recommend simple tracking tools—such as checklists or basic boards—to help organizations stay organized with minimal effort.

12.10. Promote Easy Feedback and Continuous Improvement

The report shows that feedback is often informal, and structured improvement processes are rare. Since improving onboarding is important for volunteer satisfaction, the course should suggest short surveys or brief check-ins that allow organizations to understand what works and what needs adjustment, without adding extra workload.