Volunteering Strategy 2026–2030

Executive summary based on **'Önkéntes Stratégia 2026 – 2030'** prepared by **Volunteering Hungary (ÖKA)** in 2025 within the framework of the following project: Centre for European Volunteering Volunteering, Equality, Rights, Action - VERA project nr. 2025 101194233. co-funded by the European Union.

Centre for European Volunteering

Volunteering Equality Rights Action VERA 2025

Co-funded by the European Union

Project Number: 101194233
(Revealing European Values in Volunteering in Europe - REVIVE Project No. 101051131)

Core Mission:

To shift the Hungarian volunteering sector from quantitative growth to qualitative consolidation, ensuring sustainable infrastructure and professional management with special focus on new digital technologies and AI.

1. Executive Summary & Vision

The strategy sets the roadmap for the next five years, coinciding with the UN's International Year of Volunteers in 2026.

- **The Core Problem:** A "structural discrepancy" exists between the willingness of the population to volunteer and the capacity of organizations to receive them. While individual willingness has grown (approx. 30% participation), the infrastructure to manage these volunteers professionally has lagged behind.
- **The Solution:** The strategy focuses on correcting this asymmetry by professionalizing volunteer management, creating stable financing, and integrating digital solutions.
- **AI & Digital Potential:** The document explicitly highlights the potential of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and digital technologies. It envisions that civil organizations will integrate AI into their daily operations to improve efficiency. The strategy proposes creating the necessary structural and regulatory conditions to support this digital transition..

2. Situation Analysis

The strategy document analyzes the evolution of volunteering in Hungary since the regime change:

- **Historical Context:** The sector professionalized after the 2005 Act on Public Interest Volunteer Activities. The 2010s saw increased visibility due to government initiatives like the School Community Service (IKSZ).
- **Current State:**
    - **High Latency:** There is high informal participation (helping neighbors, etc.) but low formal organizational volunteering compared to Western Europe.
    - **Sectoral Gaps:** While culture and museums have successfully integrated volunteers, the **social and healthcare sectors** face critical backlogs due to a lack of integration protocols and funding.
    - **Crisis Response:** The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the speed and importance of informal volunteer groups but also the fragility of the formal system.

3. Strategic Objectives (The 7 Pillars)

The strategy outlines seven key intervention areas to achieve a "quality leap" by 2030:

1. **Lifelong Volunteering:** Moving beyond youth-centric programs to ensure people can volunteer at any life stage, including active aging for seniors.
2. **Diversified Funding Systems:** Moving away from ad-hoc project-based funding to normative, predictable financing models for NGOs and institutions.
3. **Professionalization of Coordination:** Establishing "Volunteer Coordinator" as a recognized profession, creating a professional association, and launching university-level (MSc) accreditation.
4. **Sector-Specific Protocols:** Developing specific methodologies for the social and healthcare systems to better integrate volunteers.
5. **Reform of School Community Service (IKSZ):** Transforming the mandatory 50-hour service from an administrative burden into a genuine pedagogical tool that fosters long-term commitment.
6. **Institutionalizing National Programs:** Launching a "Long-term Voluntary Service" (HÖSZ) acting as a structured **Gap Year** program with scholarships for youth.
7. **Corporate Volunteering Incentives:** Creating a regulatory environment (tax breaks) that encourages companies to integrate volunteering into their HR and CSR strategies.

4. Detailed Action Plan & Reforms

A. Infrastructure and Digital Ecosystem

- **Methodological Centers (ÖMFK):** Creation of a network of "Volunteer Methodological and Development Centers" at the county level to provide mentoring and quality assurance to local organizations.
- **Digital Platform:** Development of a unified national digital platform to optimize "matching" (connecting volunteers with opportunities) and support e-volunteering.

B. Youth and Education

- **Trendiness:** The strategy aims to make volunteering "trendy" for Gen Z using influencers and digital channels.
- **Gap Year (HÖSZ):** A state-supported scholarship system for young people (post-high school or pre-degree) to undertake long-term service, similar to international models.

C. Corporate Volunteering (CSR/ESG)

- **Pro Bono:** Encouraging "skill-based" volunteering where experts donate their professional time (e.g., legal, IT) rather than just physical labor.
- **Tax Incentives:** The strategy proposes specific fiscal changes:
    - **TAO:** Recognizing volunteering costs as deductible from the corporate tax base.

    - **SZOCHO:** Exemption from social contribution taxes for employees volunteering during work hours (2-6 days/year).

D. Social Inclusion

- **Integration:** Programs targeted at the Roma community, people with disabilities ("from helped to helper"), and the long-term unemployed to aid labor market reintegration.
- **Seniors:** recognizing volunteer work in pension calculations for those over 60 to encourage active aging.

5. Expected Impacts (2026–2030)

The strategy adopts a holistic view, measuring impact across three pillars:

- **Social:** Increasing social cohesion and individual well-being.
- **Economic:** Enhancing employability through soft-skill development (leadership, cooperation) gained during volunteering.
- **Environmental:** Positioning volunteering as a tool for climate action and sustainability.

6. Targets for 2030

- **Participation:** Over 50% of the adult population involved in volunteering regularly.
- **Corporate:** Increasing companies offering volunteer opportunities from 8% to 15%.
- **Quality:** At least 30% of receiving organizations should have a quality-assured volunteer program.