

**SUMMARY**

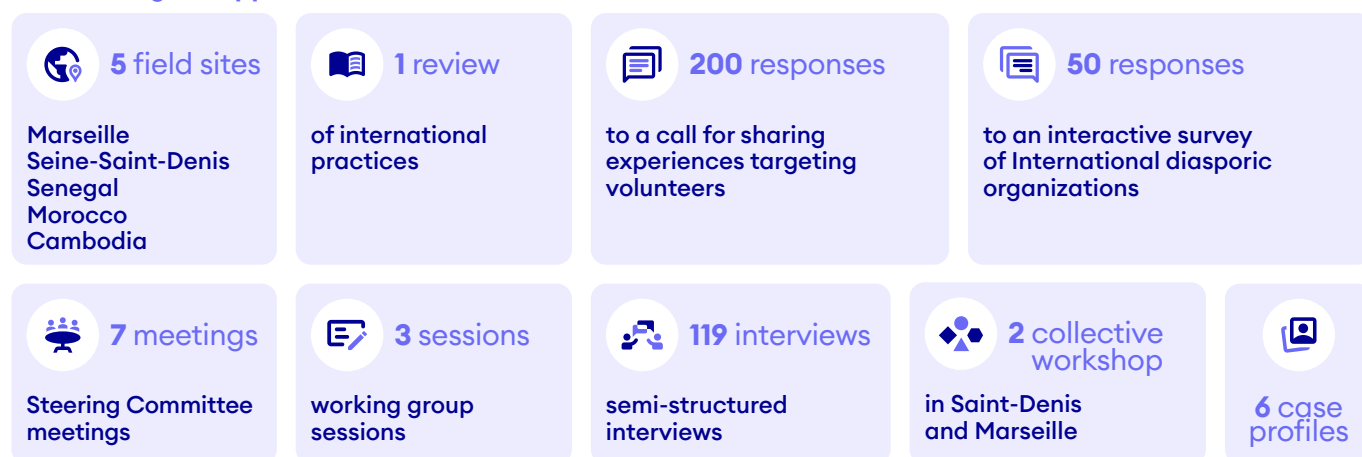
# **Volunteering and diasporas: challenges and contributions to international solidarity**

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# Volunteering and Diasporas: challenges and contributions to international solidarity

International exchange and solidarity volunteering (V.I.E.S) schemes and the diaspora-led initiatives share common objectives and areas of engagement yet remain insufficiently interconnected. Embedded within a shifting institutional landscape<sup>1</sup> and developed through the FORIM – France Volontaires partnership, with the support of F3E, the Department of Seine-Saint-Denis and the City of Marseille, this study explores the barriers, enabling factors, and potential for **strengthening coordination across these ecosystems**. This **qualitative and exploratory** research adopts a **trajectory-based approach grounded in lived experience**, while avoiding any erasure or essentialisation of diasporic identities. The analysis operates across three levels: the individual (volunteers' engagement), the collective (Diasporic organizations, sending and hosting structures, youth stakeholders) and the partnership level (territorial and transnational dynamics).

## Methodological approach



## REFERENCE

### Definition of Diasporas

In this study, diasporas refer to populations with a migratory background who are permanently settled in a host country while maintaining cultural, economic, social or political ties with their country of origin or that of their ancestors. They encompass individuals and communities with diverse profiles, involved in various ways in the development of their countries of origin through skills and knowledge transfer, investment, solidarity initiatives, as well as professional and voluntary mobility. This study is based on **self-identification** as its guiding principle.

### V.I.E.S Schemes

This study covers the full range of V.I.E.S schemes, which are structured into three main categories<sup>2</sup>: development cooperation, youth initiation and exchange, and skills and mobility exchange. A particular attention is paid to **youth-focused programmes (aged 18–30)**, as the interviews conducted highlighted specific links between youth, mobility, diasporic and multicultural identity, and international solidarity.

- <sup>1</sup> This study is embedded within an institutional context where the V.I.E.S is recognised as a key tool for promoting solidarity-based development (Law of 4 August 2021), it is aligned with efforts to strengthen partnerships with diasporas (2023–2027 Civil Society and Citizen Engagement policy document) and with an emphasis on supporting transnational pathways (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs action plan on African diasporas). However, these goals face challenges due to budget cuts affecting official development assistance (ODA), which are weakening the resources allocated to V.I.E.S and diaspora communities.
- <sup>2</sup> The various volunteering schemes – France-Volontaires

# Getting involved in volunteering: trajectories and experiences of diaspora communities

## FINDING 1

### Multiple motivations, rarely solely diasporic

#### The wide range of attitudes towards diasporic identity

##### Strong diasporic affirmation and commitment

*Being a member of the diaspora goes beyond a sense of belonging: it implies both a responsibility and a way of taking concrete action to contribute to the country's development, while building human, cultural and solidarity-based bridges between our two worlds<sup>3</sup>.*

##### Hybrid and distant identities

*I have considered myself a global citizen since childhood, without feeling attached to any particular place or to multiple places.*

##### Non-identification with the term 'diaspora'

*The term "diaspora" is rarely used within our community. I do not identify with it as it does not, in my view, encompass either the younger generations born in France or the specific characteristics of mixed-heritage communities.*

#### The motivations of diaspora volunteers can be understood through shifting configurations of engagement<sup>4</sup>

| Configuration                            | Dominant logic  | The role of identity dimension | Verbatim quotes  |
|--|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Diaspora Reconnection                    | Volunteering as a return to origins and reactivation of diasporic ties                  | Central                        | <i>'I felt an intense urge to reconnect, during my early adulthood, with those roots.'</i>   |
| Personal and professional transition     | A crucial turning point (completing studies, career shift, and the search for purpose). | Emerging                       | <i>'I felt more at ease here, as if it aligned better with my identity.'</i><br><i>'There was something that resonated.'</i>                               |
| Transnational citizenship                | Multi-territorial civic engagement, solidarity 'here and there'                         | Structuring                    | <i>'For me, it is essential to convey an image of other countries that is not distorted. The way we interact, as equals, is of the utmost importance.'</i> |
| Collective and community-based grounding | Involvement in associative or community-led dynamics                                    | Variable                       | <i>'That's how I first got involved in the associative world.'</i><br><i>'The association teaches us how to organise, mobilise, and work together.'</i>    |

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the quotes come from volunteers who identify themselves as members of diaspora communities.

<sup>4</sup> In this context, a configuration of engagement refers to a dynamic arrangement of action frameworks, identity-based relationships and timeframes that are constantly being reshaped through lived experiences. This is not a static profile: the same individual may go through several different configurations over the course of their pathway.

## FINDING 2

# Becoming a volunteer: Challenges and Access Strategies

Barriers are evident across all groups, but appear particularly pronounced in the engagement pathways for diaspora communities

- Limited awareness and visibility of V.I.E.S. schemes,
- Sometimes vague or inaccurate perceptions of the access criteria and practical arrangements for volunteering schemes.
- Availability issues arising from personal and family situations (employment, training, associative engagement, etc.).
- Mission formats (duration, timeframe, location, etc.) that do not always match the needs and expectations of diaspora volunteers.

There are specific barriers faced by individuals from diaspora communities, in particular:

- The absence of French nationality and the administrative challenges that result from it. A recent study by the

Department of Seine-Saint-Denis<sup>5</sup> highlights ‘a fairly clear correlation between nationality and mobility: young people with French nationality report higher levels of participation than young people with foreign nationality’.

- Regulatory restrictions affecting dual nationals in accessing certain volunteering programmes<sup>6</sup>.

**A cumulative effect of racial and territorial inequalities is observed, particularly in priority urban areas (QPV), limiting access to mobility:**

- Psychological barriers related to experienced discrimination: self-censorship among young people, reluctance to engage with institutional support systems, etc.
- Pressure to take on paid work, which is particularly strong among men in precarious situations.
- Economic barriers: despite available support and assistance, volunteering can involve financial costs depending on the schemes.

The data collection process has enabled to identify, for each scheme, the access criteria and practical arrangements that facilitate or restrict individual participation.

| Scheme  | Target group <sup>7</sup>   | Facilitators  | Inhibitors   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Youth and International Solidarity Programme (JSI) and International Workcamps</b> | Groups of young people, most often aged between 15 and 25.  | The first step into mobility through local organisations.<br><br>A short, collective experience among peers. A pre-established programme involving both young people and the local partner.   | Young people who are most disconnected from associative organisations remain underrepresented due to a combination of economic, family, psychological and social barriers.   |
| <b>International Civic Service (SCI) and European Solidarity Corps (ESC)</b>          | SCI: 16 to 25 years old, up to 30 for individuals with disabilities.<br><br>Although there are no formal requirements, graduates are more likely to participate in these programmes.<br><br>ESC: 18 to 30 years old | Structured support (preparation, monitoring, assessment)<br><br>An attractive duration for social and professional integration.<br><br>For ESC: a secure framework (travel and accommodation covered), with short-term missions available (from 2 weeks). | SCI: a minimum duration of 6 months may deter those who are not accustomed to mobility.<br><br>ESC: destinations are mainly within Europe.   |
| <b>Volunteering for international solidarity (VSI)</b>                                | Open to all. In practice, this typically includes individuals aged between 25 and 35, holding a degree, with a relevant experience and transferable skills.   | Acknowledging skills and technical expertise.<br><br>Long-term, repeatable missions sought sustained commitment.  | Compensation is not particularly attractive considering the skills required.<br><br>Prohibition on carrying out a mission in a volunteer's country of nationality.   |
| <b>Volunteering for Exchange and Skills (VEC<sup>8</sup>)</b>                         | Individuals with expertise, most often professionally active or retired.  | High flexibility<br><br>E- volunteering is possible.<br><br>This aligns with diasporic organizations practices involving short-term, targeted expert missions.  | In some VEC programmes, volunteering is not permitted in a country of which you are a national. Limited visibility regarding the available programmes.<br><br>Significant administrative and financial resources are required to succeed in calls for proposals. |

5 Access to international mobility for young people in Seine-Saint-Denis – Data, Studies and Knowledge Directorate (DDEC), Europe and International Directorate (DEI), and Youth and Associative Life Delegation (DJVA), Seine-Saint-Denis Department – 2025.

6 For example, the VSI regulations exclude missions in the volunteer's country of regular residence or in their home country

7 The Target group ' column outlines the access criteria, highlighting those aspects most relevant to the subject of the study.

8 Several schemes are available: Solidarity leave / Senior volunteering / International solidarity leave / Solidarity leave organised by Planète Urgence, etc. Most of these have been available since 2021 through an annual call for proposals (CFP) issued by the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) in partnership with FONJEP and France Volontaires. For 2026, the MEAE-FONJEP call for proposals for VEC has been suspended.

### 3 observed approaches to engaging diaspora communities in volunteering



#### Generalist approach *The most common*

Sending organisations do not explicitly target diaspora communities but recruit individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Diaspora Volunteers often become involved incidentally; while their connections to their country of origin may be one of their motivations, this dimension is not specifically addressed.



#### Social conditions approach

Targeting groups who are excluded from mobility (priority neighbourhoods and young people with limited access to engagement opportunities). Young people from diaspora communities are, in fact, among these groups. This is especially evident in youth exchanges (workcamps, VVSI) and partnerships between local employment agencies and sending organisations.



#### Explicit 'diaspora' approach *Very marginal*

A specific focus on nationals of the destination countries or their descendants.

### FINDING 3

## A transformative experience

#### DURING THE MISSION

##### A specific position, somewhere between an asset and an invisible burden

###### In-between position

*There's an additional 'racial' burden that other white people do not have to carry: at home with the other volunteers, I'm Senegalese, but at work I'm a toubab.*

###### Mediation role

*So, I kind of became a bridge between France and Peru; it was a role I took on very quickly.*

###### Local legitimacy

*People told me all about the problems; there was no language barrier, and they trusted me.*

#### AFTER THE MISSION

##### Restructuring and its impact on engagement and identities

###### Delayed awareness

*The topic of my dissertation when I got back was the shock of not having experienced any shock in India. Things I barely noticed, which had already become second nature.*

###### Re-defining identity

*Afterwards, regarding my identity in France, I found it very difficult to reintegrate. I struggled mentally for years, as I no longer really wanted to be in France anymore.*

###### Ongoing commitment

*It was particularly this experience [in Niger] that led us to set up the association afterwards. We had long wanted to build connections (...). We have tried to move towards better-structured projects with a more horizontal approach.*

### Diasporic organizations and V.I.E.S schemes: barriers, facilitators and structural effects

65% of the diasporic organizations surveyed<sup>9</sup> as part of the study have never made use of the V.I.E.S schemes.

- 1 Lack of information
- 2 Administrative complexity
- 3 Financial difficulties
- 4 A preference for other forms of engagement
- 5 Lack of human resources

A lack of information does not mean a complete ignorance: 'We have heard of it, but not as a tool we can actually use,' explains a member of the association. Administrative complexity is a burden for volunteer-driven organizations that operate in a flexible and informal manner. The mismatch is also structural: long-term missions offered through the V.I.E.S schemes contrast with the 'dual space' practices of diasporas (frequent travel back and forth mobility and fragmented commitments).

Finally, the prohibition on dual nationals to undertake VSI or certain VEC missions in their country of dual nationality constitutes a significant barrier. This restriction, which is particularly evident in the FONJEP's VEC call for proposals, creates a paradoxical impact: it specifically excludes those who would have cultural assets useful for the mission (language, cultural norms, networks).

<sup>9</sup> Results from the interactive survey conducted as part of the study.

## FINDING 4

### The potential pivotal role of diasporic organizations

The cooperation between diasporic organizations and volunteering stakeholders delivers three key areas of added value for the missions:

| Local grounding   | Mediation  | Opening  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the field</li> <li>• Existing networks</li> <li>• Trust among local stakeholders</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• France-partner country connections</li> <li>• Cultural translation/bridge</li> <li>• Operational support</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More horizontal exchanges</li> <li>• Discussions on colonial history, memory and North/South relations</li> </ul> |

→ According to 60% of the diasporic organizations surveyed, volunteering does indeed help to build stronger bonds, more lasting connections between 'here' and 'there'

#### Fonte Lima, a mediator between Saint-Denis and Cape Verde

In 2024, 10 young people from the Canal association (Saint-Denis) will spend two weeks in Cape Verde with Fonte Lima, which supports a project focused on empowering women potters (PRA/OSIM 2023). The chairperson handles logistics, cultural preparation (language, customs) and on-site support, and takes part in discussions on memorial issues (colonisation, slavery and identity). This example shows that territorial synergies are possible when youth organisations and diasporic organizations come together, as in this case during a

meeting organised by the Department of Seine-Saint-Denis and work together to develop projects. The involvement of diasporic organizations not only facilitates missions, but it also strengthens cooperation. However, this cooperation raises a tension: how can the voluntary and informal logics that structure diasporic organizations activities be reconciled with the need for formalisation required to sustain expertise and access funding?

## FINDING 5

### The added value of engaging with V.I.E.S schemes for diasporic organizations

Reported effects among diasporic organizations that have already implemented V.I.E.S schemes:



#### Key mechanisms:



#### What the diasporic organizations say:

The diasporic organizations are not calling for any fundamental changes to the programmes. They are seeking support to access them and for procedures to be simplified. 50% of respondents point to operational barriers to mobilisation that appear to be surmountable:

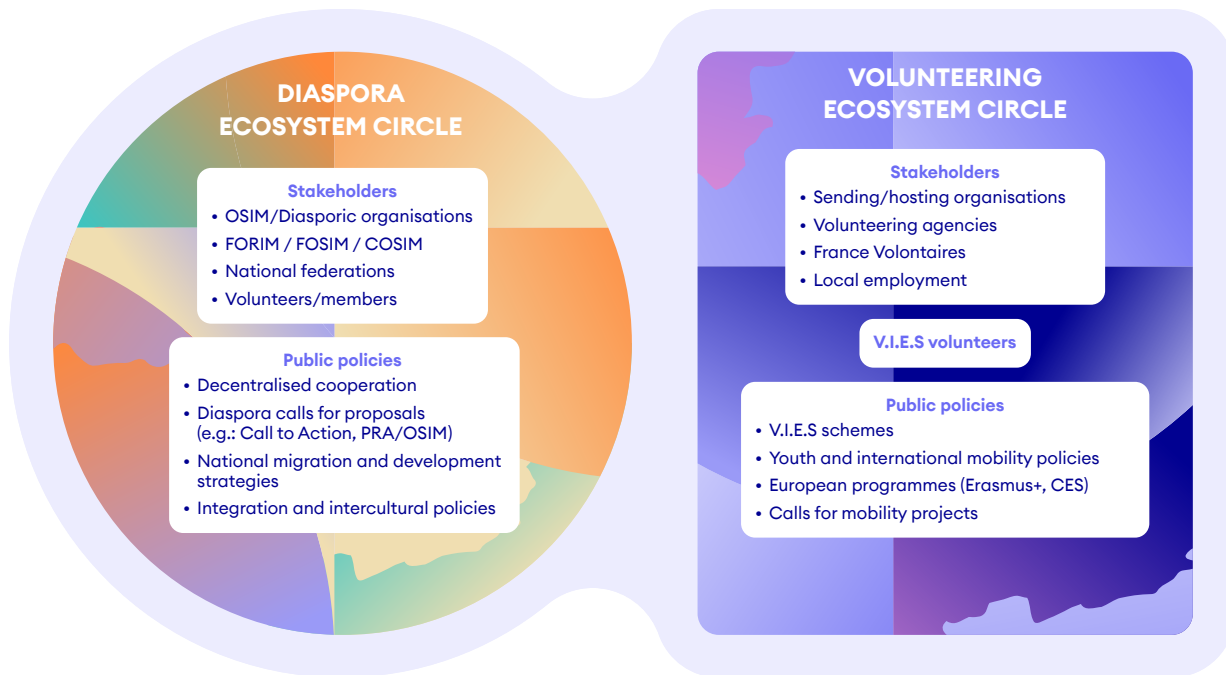
- **Enhanced and tailored support**
- **Administrative simplification**
- **Greater flexibility in criteria and timeframes**
- **Targeted information and financial support**

The Cultural Association of French People of Armenian Origin in Septèmes-les-Vallons and the surrounding area (**ACFOA**) founded in 2005 near Marseille, initially relied on donations and core funding (supporting work camps, small-scale projects and the promotion of Armenian culture). It now responds to calls for proposals (FONJEP, PRA/OSIM, local authorities) thanks to the organisational structure developed through its mobility projects, illustrating the capacity-building effects of volunteering programmes.

# Links within territories between diaspora ecosystems and volunteering

## FINDING 6

### Two ecosystems shaped by distinct public policies



This first finding highlights a siloed structure: volunteering and diaspora communities form two strong and dynamic ecosystems, but they are primarily shaped by distinct frameworks for action and public policies, which operate in parallel without any systematic coordination.

#### FIELD REFERENCE SEINE-SAINT-DENIS

### A territory conducive to synergies

Seine-Saint-Denis is the youngest territory in mainland France (42% of the population are under 30, with 130 nationalities represented). The Department actively supports young people's international mobility (through funding, the Mobility Steering Committee and an annual forum) and develops initiatives targeting diaspora communities (decentralised cooperation, the Call to Action). Volunteering is used as a tool for popular education, particularly through short-term collective formats (JSI) aimed at young people with limited access to mobility opportunities. Diaspora communities are numerous and well organised, particularly within national federations (FOSIM), but they face challenges related to generational continuity and the renewal of their leadership teams. The main challenge identified is to better align territorial mobility policies with diaspora dynamics, by encouraging diasporic organizations play a more active role in the design of volunteering schemes.



PHOTO CREDIT – France Volontaires

## FINDING 7

### Links emerge in an ad hoc, practice-based way

Connections between diaspora and volunteering ecosystems arise actor-driven dynamics rooted in local practices, interpersonal relationships and concrete projects.



## FIELD REFERENCE

## MARSEILLE

### Interconnections built through practice

The links observed between the diaspora communities and volunteering are primarily built and developed at a local level, through concrete situations and interpersonal relationships.

1. **Ad hoc mobilisation.** Individuals from diaspora communities are informally involved in preparing young people for their departure.
2. **Connections through diaspora networks.** Local stakeholders, particularly community centres, rely on diaspora networks to identify partners and develop projects.

→ Word-of-mouth processes

→ Diaspora stakeholders act as context-specific experts in identifying needs

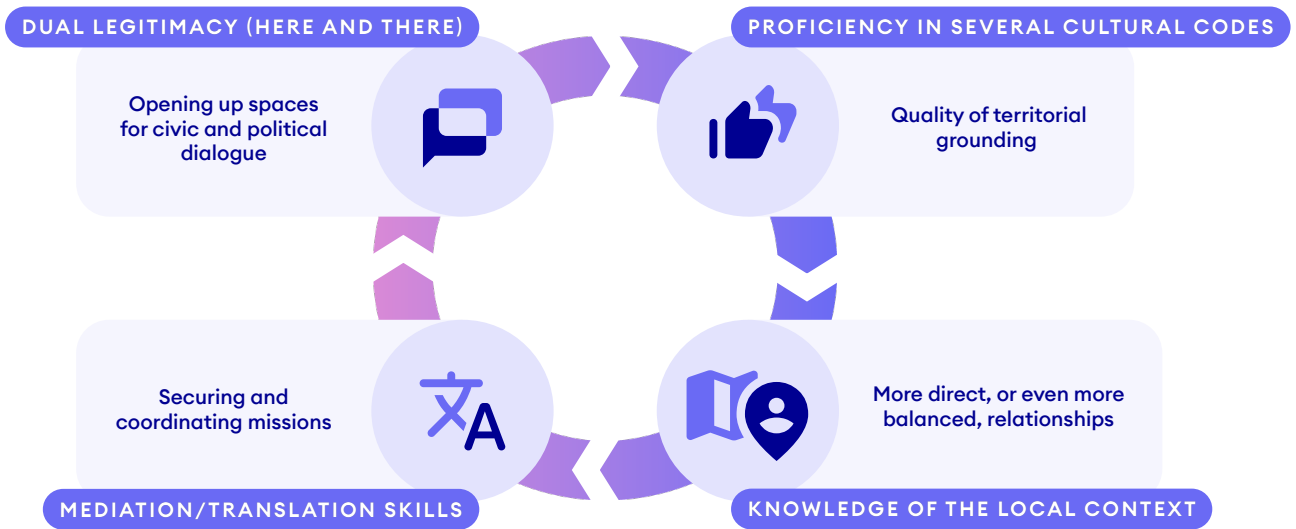
3. **Direct project leadership by diasporic organizations.** Some diaspora associations directly design and implement solidarity projects and youth exchanges.



PHOTO CREDIT – France Volontaires

## FINDING 8

# Intermediary stakeholders at the heart of the coordination



## FIELD REFERENCE MOROCCO

### Migrations & Développement, a historic intermediary actor

Migrations & Développement (M&D), a French Moroccan association founded in 1986 by Moroccan migrants, illustrates the role of an intermediary actor at the intersection of both ecosystems.

*“As a co-founder recalls ‘volunteering has historically been at the origin of collective engagement.’”* Today, M&D engages international volunteers (VSI and Civic Service), placing them available to local partner associations in Morocco. It thereby acts as a bridge between volunteering schemes and local stakeholders, while also leading solidarity projects and supporting decentralised cooperation.

## FIELD REFERENCE CAMBODGE

### Yuvachun, a transnational organisation

Yuvachun is a transnational, network-based organisation (France, Cambodia, and other diaspora communities). Led by diaspora stakeholders, it fosters reciprocal links between territories and is particularly involved in preparing Cambodian volunteers ahead of their departure to France.

⚠️ These links between the two ecosystems remain largely informal, driven by voluntary commitment, without any specific recognition or funding.





# Recommendations for the synthesis

The recommendations below provide a cross-cutting and prioritised reading of the proposals set out in the full report, without altering their content. These exploratory guidelines were gathered from stakeholders interviewed throughout the study and subsequently discussed and refined collectively during a dedicated working group. They notably highlight the need to strengthen cooperation between volunteering and diaspora stakeholders across different levels, between FORIM and France Volontaires.

## Evolution of volunteering practices

- 1** Facilitate the engagement of diaspora communities in volunteering by strengthening information, guidance and outreach through existing diaspora networks, in connection with Education for Citizenship and International Solidarity (ECSI), at the pre-engagement stage.
- 2** Strengthen intercultural training throughout volunteering pathways, integrating the specific challenges faced by diaspora volunteers.
- 3** Improve support for volunteers residing in France undertaking international mobility, regardless of nationality, by removing administrative and legal barriers.

## Strengthening the role of diaspora communities in volunteering dynamics

- 4** Build existing networks and tools (PRA/OSIM) to share information on volunteering opportunities and provide ongoing, structured support to diasporic organizations seeking to engage with volunteering schemes.
- 5** Simplify and secure access to volunteering through pooled approaches, by testing collective hosting arrangements (such as umbrella accreditation programmes).
- 6** Recognise and value the informal and transnational forms of engagement already developed by diaspora stakeholders and build bridges between informal and formal types of engagement.

## Developing cooperation between stakeholders

- 7** Broaden access and diversify formats to reach new audiences, particularly in priority neighbourhoods, by strengthening partnerships with local youth employment services, community centres and local organisations.
- 8** Recognise and build on the skills gained, while ensuring continuity in the engagement pathways of diaspora volunteers, in line with existing diaspora practices.
- 9** Incorporate and highlight diaspora volunteers' stories in communication activities, to make these pathways more visible and encourage further engagement.

## Institutional and policy dialogue

- 10** Establish the link between volunteering and diaspora engagement more firmly and sustainably within territorial policies and governance frameworks, by creating structured spaces for cooperation at local level and making use of decentralised cooperation mechanisms.
- 11** Further develop and adapt existing arrangements and programmes by exploring adjustments to VSI and VEC frameworks to better enable dual nationals to engage in their country of origin.