IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT 2024

Service Civil International

IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT 2024

Francesco Volpini
Research and analysis

Claudia Strambini
Editing

JavierLarios.com
Design and layout

Pexels / Rebeca Medeiros & Jesus Rivera
Pictures

Available online at **sci.ngo**

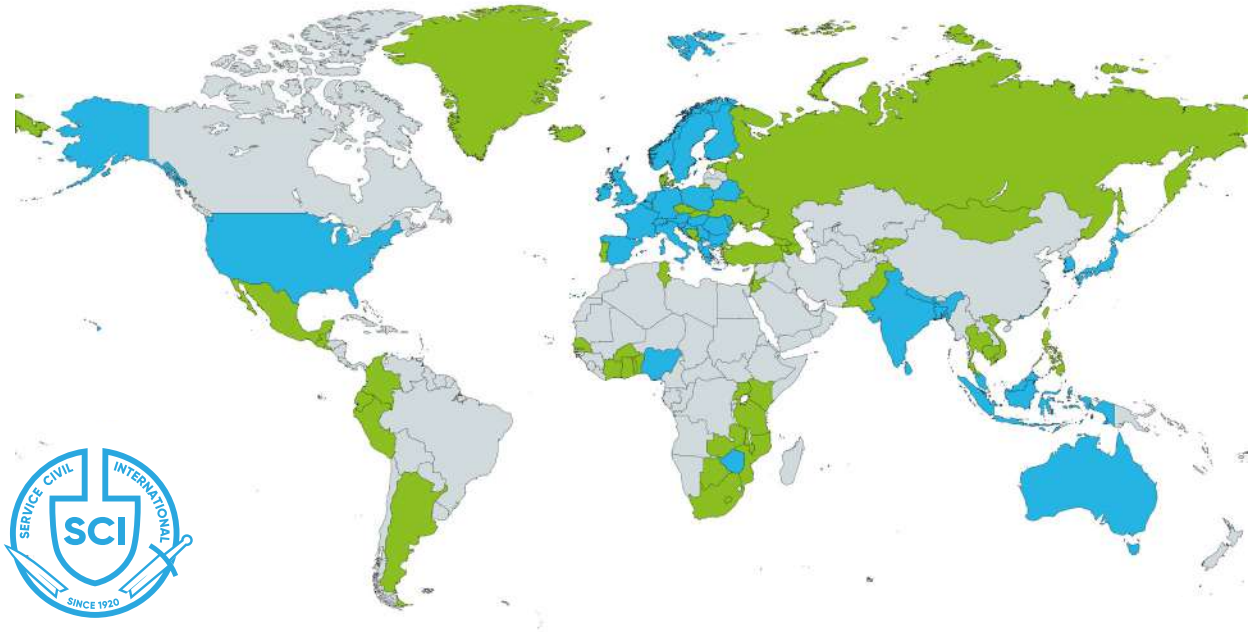
Co-funded by the European Union

This project has been co-funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Introduction

This report presents the findings from Service Civil International's 2024 impact assessment, examining how international voluntary service contributes to peace, social justice, and sustainable development. Through surveys and interviews with volunteers and communities, we've measured significant positive changes in attitudes, behaviours, and well-being.

SCI organises volunteering projects with international volunteers and local communities, as well as events and training courses, touching the lives of thousands of people every year, so it is important for us to measure the impact of our activities.



Service Civil International (SCI) is an international voluntary service organisation established in 1920.

- **40 BRANCHES** and groups in every continent
- **+90 PARTNERS** all around the world.

Our vision is a world of peace, social justice, and sustainable development, where all people live together with mutual respect and without recourse to any form of violence to solve conflicts. With the mission to promote a culture of peace by organising international volunteering projects with local and global impact, SCI adheres to the values of volunteering, non-violence, respect for human rights, solidarity, respect for the environment, inclusion, empowerment and cooperation.

Values

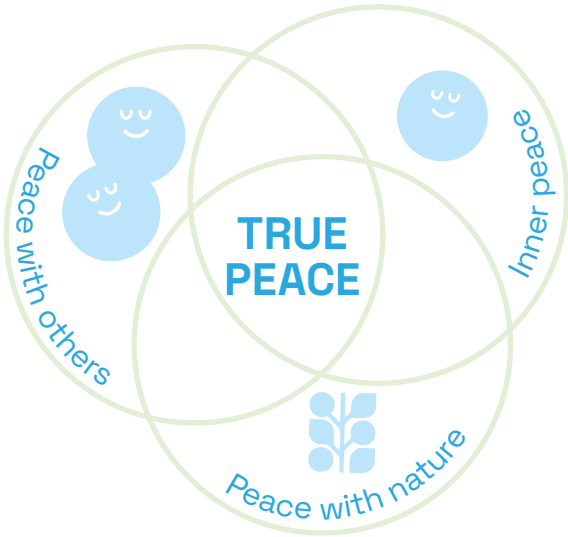
- Volunteering
- Non-Violence
- Human Rights
- Respect for the environment
- Solidarity
- Inclusion
- Empowerment
- Cooperation

Contents

What is “impact” for SCI?

“Impact” for SCI is our contribution to a world characterised by peace, social justice, and sustainable development.

When we talk about “peace” in SCI, we refer to the concept of **positive peace**, where different levels contribute to the attainment of **true peace**.



We measure impact at three levels:

1. **PARTICIPANTS.**
   It focuses on personal growth areas such as inner peace, peace with others, and peace with nature. Indicators include self-awareness, self-esteem, inclusivity, and environmental consciousness.

2. **COMMUNITIES.**
   It evaluates SCI’s impact within local communities, measuring cultural understanding, participation, and community perception of SCI’s work.

3. **ENVIRONMENT.**
   It analyses SCI’s environmental footprint, particularly in terms of CO2 emissions and broader sustainability efforts.

Transformative change for volunteers

The 2024 assessment shows that SCI activities create transformative learning experiences that positively impact volunteers' attitudes toward peace, cultural diversity, and environmental sustainability.[1]

INCREASED LIFE SATISFACTION

+17,6%

volunteers reported a significant boost in overall happiness after participating in SCI projects.

Studies on life satisfaction point to social relationships, enjoyment and perceived meaningfulness of one's work, and satisfaction with self, learning, growth and leisure, as main sources of satisfaction. All these elements can be found in SCI volunteering projects.

CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR

55%

of volunteers believe that the experience changed their behaviour a lot or a great deal.

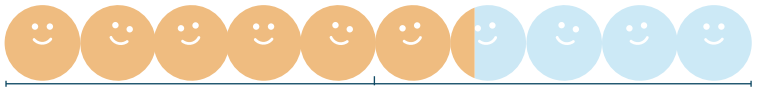
> *I now feel more committed to protecting the environment and have taken concrete steps to reduce my impact...*

CHANGES IN PERCEPTION OF PEACE

62,5%

of volunteers see a probable or definite change in their perception of peace after the project.

> *Projects like these strengthen emotional ties and generate respect for other countries and cultures.*



Volunteers who were interviewed 6 months after their projects highlight growth in personal confidence and inner balance as one of the main outcomes for them.

"If there is a will, there's a way. I didn't have any time to say 'I'm too scared to do this'. Just when I arrived and had to take a train, I had to adapt. It's the adaptability, that skill that you learn."

S.P., Volunteer, Mexico

[1] *To understand the impact on participants (the volunteers), we measure different levels of peace:*

- ***Inner Peace**, using the Wellbeing index (aligning with the framework's focus on self-awareness, self-esteem, and life satisfaction) and the Active Citizen index*
- ***Peace with Others**, using the Active Citizen index, Inclusives Attitudes index, and the Communication, conflict and cultural competency index*
- ***Peace with Nature**, using the Nature connection index*

Well-being

Inner peace

+12.6%

increase of volunteers feeling at peace with themselves "most of the time" or "always" after participating.

Interviews shed light on how peace in workcamps is not an abstract concept but an embodied experience, a sense of being "at home" within oneself and in relation to others. The interviews reveal that inner peace emerges through meaningful connections to work, to others, and to places. Many volunteers describe how the workcamp structure, based on shared responsibility and adaptation rather than top-down direction, enabled them to develop leadership, initiative, and decision-making skills guided by the camp coordinators.

Peace with others

+13.7%

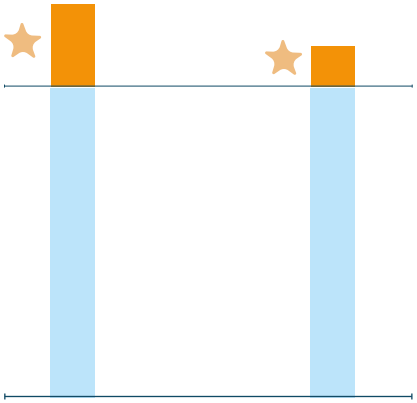
increase of volunteers feeling at peace with the world "most of the time" or "always" after their projects.

Volunteers who were interviewed described a higher sense of self-knowledge and peace derived from the collective yet autonomous nature of the workcamp experience, illustrating how peace with oneself manifests not as withdrawal or detachment but as an active state of personal equilibrium and emotional clarity, cultivated through shared work and community life. In contrast to competitive or high-pressure environments, workcamps offer a setting in which volunteers can reconnect with intrinsic motivations and discover value in simplicity and presence.

Active citizenship

+14%

of volunteers "somewhat" or "extremely likely" to confront statements opposing peace and to advocate for peace activities after their projects

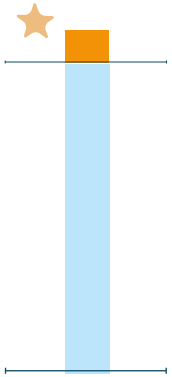


+7,6%

of volunteers "somewhat" or "extremely likely" to try to change a friend's or acquaintance's mind about the value of peace activities after participating.

The interviews show that the communal lifestyle of workcamps cultivates empathy, communication, and conflict-resolution skills, confirming SCI's value as a training ground for intercultural understanding.

Peace with nature



+5,9%

of volunteers feeling "somewhat" or "strongly" connected to all living things and the earth as a result of the project.

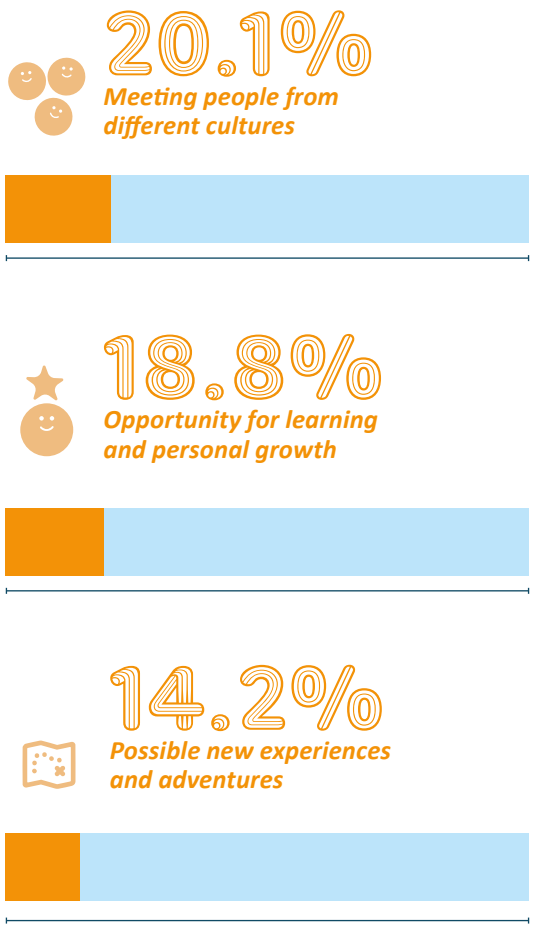
The interviews confirm a holistic vision of peace, linking social justice, ecological care, and non-violence. By participating in tangible environmental work, volunteers come to understand peace not only as harmony among people but as harmony with the living world.

These changes demonstrate how SCI activities contribute to significant improvements to volunteers' wellbeing, connection with nature and their attitudes towards peace advocacy.

Volunteers who reported inner calm also described stronger relationships with others and heightened environmental sensitivity, showing that the different learning dimensions are interdependent: personal empowerment supports social harmony, and both are deepened by contact with nature.

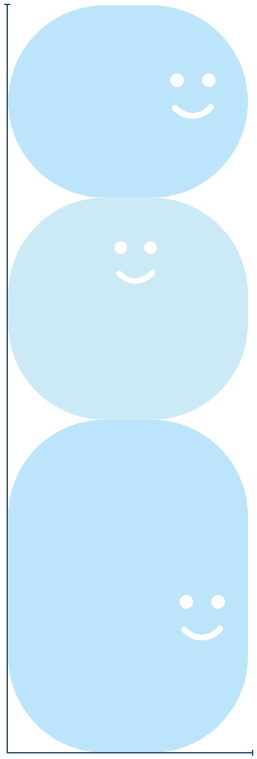
Motivations, learning expectations & outcomes

In joining a project, volunteers were especially motivated by the prospect of meeting people from different cultures, the opportunity for learning and personal growth and possible new experiences and adventures, among other reasons.



These motivations strongly align with the core values and structure of SCI and the goals of short-term international volunteer projects to purposefully bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds to live and work with local communities and facilitate cross-cultural understanding.

In terms of learning, they primarily sought to gain new perspectives through intercultural exchange (56.25%), followed by personal growth (37.5%) and better understanding and addressing social issues (32.5%). The data shows that SCI projects successfully deliver on these expectations, with participants reporting significant learning in these areas after their experience. This highlights the value of SCI projects as a space for experiential learning and capacity-building.



32.5%
Better understanding and addressing social issues

37.5%
Personal growth

56.25%
New perspectives through intercultural exchange

For many volunteers we interviewed 6 months after their project, **the workcamp was their most significant encounter with a truly intercultural environment, requiring them to live, work, and communicate with people of different nationalities, languages, and generations**. The result is a recurring narrative of empathy, patience, and mutual discovery, which last beyond the camps and reaches out to people and environments around the participants, often starting with a simple step:

> ***Even if I didn't want to speak English or maybe my three, four words in German, even if I didn't want to, I had to. Because if I wanted to ask where's the bathroom or where can I go buy something, I had to.***
>
> ***S.P., Volunteer, Mexico***

Interpersonal connection extends beyond the temporary project: **volunteers often describe forming enduring friendships that continue to shape their understanding of cultural** diversity long after the camp's conclusion.

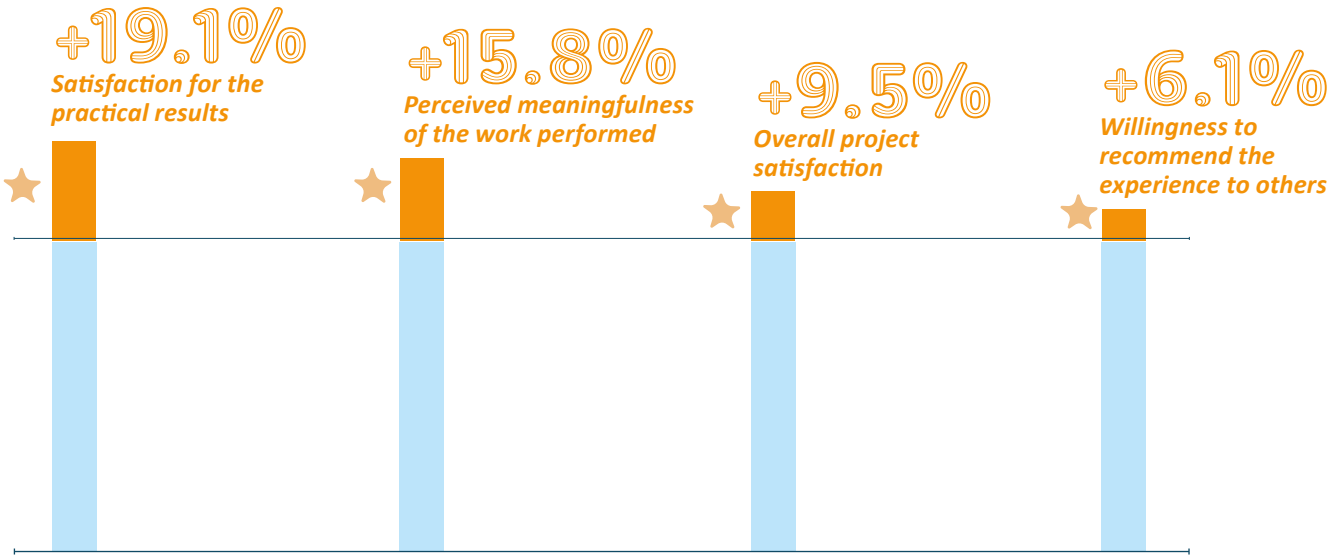
> ***We also keep in touch with people who are still our friends and we've also swapped countries and visits and our kids know each other now [and] they're friends.***
>
> ***A.K., Volunteer, Poland***

Project experience & satisfaction

> *An opportunity to feel part of a global community and have time to reflect on how to make positive impacts once home, while having a lot of fun!*

Compared to previous research, SCI volunteers reported significantly higher scores for overall project satisfaction, satisfaction for the practical results, perceived meaningfulness of the work performed, and willingness to recommend the experience to others.

Volunteers reported high levels of satisfaction with their SCI experiences, with many describing them as "**great**," "**enjoyable**," and "**inspiring**." The sense of community, cultural exchange, and meaningful contribution were frequently highlighted as the most valuable aspects.



> *Join the volunteering with SCI! It will give a unique, meaningful and wholeheartedly human experience.*

> *My volunteering experience was absolutely incredible, and I highly recommend it to anyone! It was a rich cultural exchange where I learned so much and discovered that I'm capable of so much more than I ever imagined. It truly was the best experience of my life, and I can't wait to volunteer again soon!*

> *Workcamps are the most AUTHENTIC experiences that make us dive into cultures, local communities, languages and personal stories. The time together opens our minds and hearts, and teaches us lots of news skills!*

Recommendations & future engagement

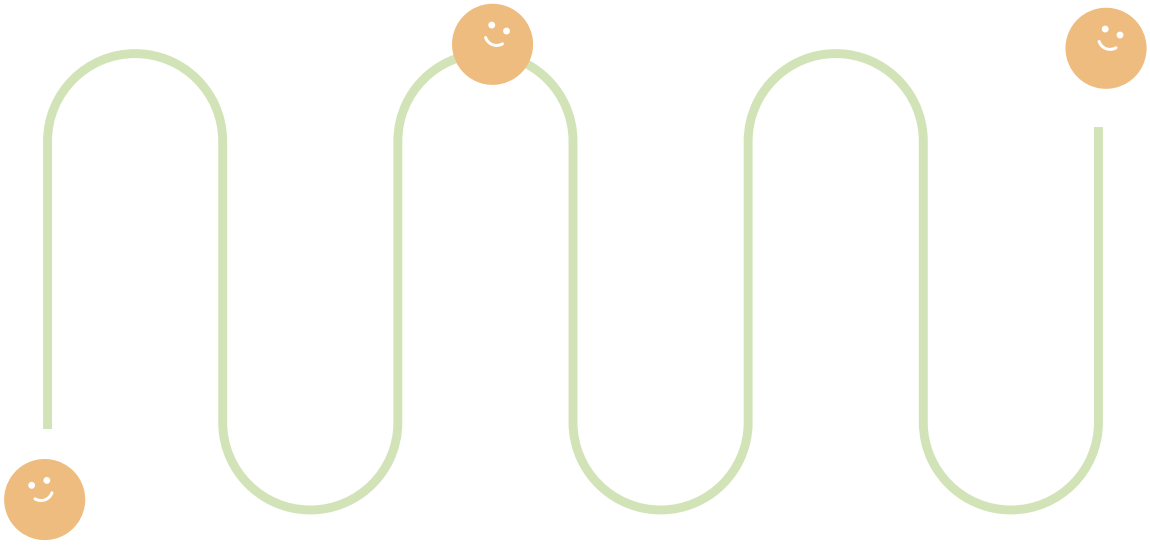
Continued Participation

41.8% *of volunteers expressed interest in participating in similar projects again, showing strong satisfaction with their experience.*

Deeper Involvement

20.3%

were willing to help with "anything" in the organization, while others expressed interest in long-term projects (11.4%) or coordinating workcamps (6.3%).



Pre-departure Preparation

Volunteers who attended in-person preparation sessions reported better outcomes than those who had online only or no preparation. Participating in pre-departure training is highly recommended to all volunteers.

Financial constraints were identified as the main barrier to future participation, while language and cultural barriers were the least concerning factors for volunteers.

Volunteer demographics

The 2024 impact assessment included **459 volunteers** from **40 different branches** and partners.

80 volunteers, 17,4% of the participants, filled both surveys they received (before and after their workcamp).

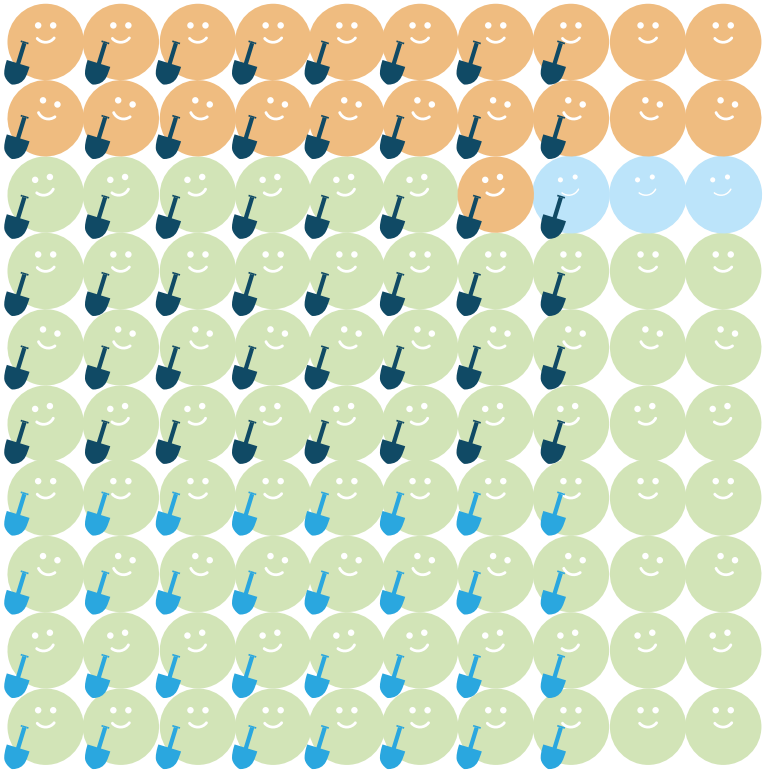
Volunteers' representation

74.9% *High-income countries*

21% *Upper middle-income countries*

3.9% *Lower middle-income countries*

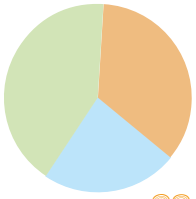
0.2% *Low-income countries*



Volunteers' experience

A significant 80% of the volunteers had previous volunteering experience, 36% had volunteered with SCI before, indicating an important rate of returning participants.

Projects

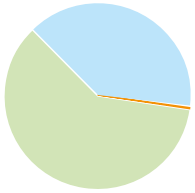


41.8% *Environmental and climate change issues*

34.9% *Social and peace-focused camps*

23.2% *Community and art projects*

Volunteers identifying as

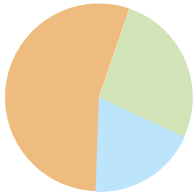


60.4% *Female*

39.2% *Male*

0.4% *Non-binary*

Age group



54.9% *18–25 years*

26.6% *26–39 years*

+15% *40 years old or older*

Positive contribution to communities

> *[Volunteers] came up with some really interesting activities that allowed for a beautiful interaction between local children and children of refugee families who live in the area, who maybe usually during the year are always a little more reluctant to participate.*
>
> *SCI Italy, Terzo Millennio*

The 2024 assessment included interviews with community partners in Italy, Nigeria, and Australia, who hosted SCI workcamps. These qualitative insights reveal how workcamps foster social inclusion, contribute to local development, promote intercultural dialogue, and address operational challenges.

> *It was an honour to be part of the life of the community... they made us feel like part of it.*

Community Engagement & Social Inclusion

A key motivation for SCI volunteers is the opportunity to connect with people from different cultures, learn from others, and experience personal growth. These values are echoed in the qualitative testimonies of host communities, who describe how workcamps promote inclusive community engagement, foster empathy, and break down social barriers. Local actors deliberately facilitate this process with their activities, where social inclusion is not only an outcome, but a practice embedded in the everyday dynamics of camp life.

From our case studies, the workcamps facilitated meaningful connections between local children and families from different backgrounds, promoting social inclusion and overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers; fostered integration of international volunteers with young adults with disabilities, encouraging mutual learning and challenging stereotypes; promoted community youth engagement, which has led to increased participation and knowledge sharing; helped gaining insights into community life and the rural world.

Practical Contributions & Local Development

For volunteers, perceiving their work as meaningful was a key factor in overall satisfaction. Community interviews show how SCI workcamps contribute to important material outcomes and how tangible improvements are interwoven with skill-sharing, knowledge transfer, and increased community mobilisation.

From building sanitation facilities to maintaining ecological spaces and assisting with agricultural production, communities created volunteer projects that addressed critical needs.

> ***Working together on this project united us toward a common goal because even though these children are not ours biologically, we assume a sense of responsibility for them. […] More parents are now enrolling their children in school because they know there's a proper toilet facility. Volunteers made this project a reality, and their passion inspires us to keep contributing to social change.***
>
> ***VWAN Nigeria, Olorunda***

Intercultural Dialogue & Personal Transformation

While volunteers reported significant positive changes in intercultural understanding, peace perception, and inclusive attitudes, community members' observations of volunteers support this perception. Through shared meals, collaborative work, and daily interactions, volunteers and local residents are breaking down cultural barriers and building genuine understanding. These programmes demonstrate that peace and intercultural learning aren't abstract concepts—they're lived experiences that happen when people from different backgrounds come together.

The impact extends far beyond the volunteers themselves. Local communities, from children learning new games and languages to elderly residents forming unexpected friendships, are experiencing profound cultural exchanges that challenge preconceptions and foster mutual respect.

> ***"Many times, we have had feedback from international young people telling us that in their country they have never had the opportunity to live together, meet, or have experience with people with disabilities. This initial fear has always dissolved during the days of living together and transformed into doing things together, living together for 7- 10 days, sometimes 15 days depending on the edition. […] The interesting thing is that at the beginning they imagine themselves to be there to assist people with disabilities, in fact many tell us that. Then instead they find themselves in a context where we are all volunteers - clearly we have a role of presence, but in the end, we are all equal, no one assists anyone or everyone assists everyone in some way."***
>
> ***SCI Italy, Terzo Millennio***

Logistical and Operational Challenges

Returned volunteers gave mixed responses regarding preparation, coordination, and communication prior to and during the camps. Similarly, local partners expressed concern about some logistical and operational barriers, particularly around volunteer accommodation, skills and language barriers, and clear communication.

Accommodating volunteers is one of the main logistical difficulties faced by the local partners.

> ***"Another challenge is accommodation. Since we [the hospital] no longer provide it, finding host families can be difficult."***
>
> ***VWAN Nigeria, Olorunda***

However, local partnerships, e.g. with schools or the municipality, can bring positive impact on participation and the quality of the activities, such as adequate accommodation.

Lack project-specific skills or language skills can also pose a barrier to successful project implementation:

> ***"Well, one thing I'd say is that, if they don't speak English, it does make it difficult. We have had one in particular who didn't, and we tried to communicate, but had to go by the daughter."***
>
> ***IVP Australia, Goulburn***

Similarly to what was highlighted by some of the volunteers in the surveys, the need for clearer communication about the workcamp conditions, for choosing good leaders and for cooperation in the creation of the info-sheet was also mentioned by local partners.

Sustainability & Recommendations for the Future

Communities also reflect on the sustainability of projects and believe that longer-term volunteer placements can play a complementary role. They also suggest better alignment of volunteer profiles with project needs, clearer pre-departure information, more theoretical inputs and improved funding mechanisms.

> ***"We always speak very highly of the volunteers when we're talking about the [agricultural] show afterwards and even before, because, you know, we couldn't do it without them, because those extra people are just gold."***
>
> ***IVP Australia, Goulburn***

> ***It was one of the best experiences ever! Getting to be part of a community - even though it was for a short period of time - helped me to get to know a little part of somebody else's world. And they made me feel home.***

Environmental impact

After participating in SCI projects, volunteers reported increased environmentally friendly behaviors.

100%

of volunteers reported picking up their trash/waste "most of the time" or "always" (+2.5%)

81.2%

of reported using bicycle and public transportation more (+5.3%)

+15.1%

Significant increase in buying local and/or organic food

However, **travel to projects remains a challeng**e, with 58.8% of volunteers using airplanes as their main transportation. Only **3.7% purchased carbon offsets**, suggesting a need for stronger guidance on sustainable travel.

Conclusions

Across the three dimensions of Inner Peace, Peace with Others, and Peace with Nature, a unifying pattern emerges: learning in SCI workcamps is experiential, relational, and transformative. Volunteers do not acquire peace as knowledge; they practice it through lived situations that demand reflection, cooperation, and care.

The impact is sustained over time, with volunteers interviewed after 6 months of their projects confirming the persistence of friendships, continued ecological habits, and follow-up involvement in local volunteering, and communities highlighting the lasting results of projects, especially when repeated over multiple years. However, the impact on the environment is an area that we need to evaluate more in the future.

SCI workcamps remain powerful instruments of non-formal peace education, fostering comprehensive learning that integrates emotional, social, and ecological dimensions. They also strengthen communities and enhance commitments to climate action. The findings underscore the enduring relevance of SCI's century-old vision of peace through deeds.

Methodology & Implementation

SCI developed its impact framework in 2021, outlining the theory behind it, its goals in measuring impact, and specific processes and indicators.

In 2024, SCI refined its impact assessment approach using pre-test/post-test surveys with volunteers. This quasiexperimental design allowed for more accurate measurement of changes resulting from participation in SCI activities. The research focused on outcomes related to peace, active citizenship, inclusive attitudes, and nature connection. The study also incorporated in-depth interviews with selected volunteers and qualitative analysis of community experiences. This mixed-methods approach provided rich insights into how SCI projects contribute to personal transformation and community development. A calculation of carbon emissions from volunteer travel was incorporated this year, to integrate the assessment of impact on the environment.

This publication is a result of the annual Impact Assessment research through the project “Partnership on Peace 2025” (101194475), co-financed by the CERV Programme.

sci.ngo

ServiceCivilInternational

@sciint

Service Civil International (SCI)

sciint

SCI Service Civil International

IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT 2024

Co-funded by the European Union

This project has been co-funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.