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Inclusive Volunteering: A Study of the Main Perceived Barriers in Portugal

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Abstract

Volunteering is a practice that has gained significant recognition, offering a range of benefits to both society as a whole and the individuals who participate in it. In the context of people with functional diversity, the practice of volunteering activities has been found to have particular benefits, such as reducing stigma and stereotypes. Despite this recognition, the level of inclusive volunteering remains low. In light of this paradox, the objective of this study is to analyse the main perceived barriers to inclusive volunteering and the extent to which these barriers may affect its practice. To that end, a mixed methodology was employed in this study. The qualitative methodology entailed the conduction of two focus groups, comprising a diverse range of stakeholders from the field of disability in Portugal. The quantitative method involved a questionnaire targeted towards two distinct groups: (i) people with functional diversity (PwFD), and (ii) organisations working with PwFD. This approach is of particular significance given the paucity of studies focusing on the perspectives of people with functional diversity. A variety of techniques were used to analyse the data. These included content analysis for qualitative data and descriptive, bivariate and multivariate analyses for quantitative data. The content analysis revealed significant barriers relating to institutional and cultural factors, as well as personal and family factors. Subsequently, the presence of these barriers was evaluated from the perspectives of PwFD and organisations, with both groups perceiving the barriers as significant. Finally, studying the relationship between perceived barriers and volunteering revealed that organisations' intentions towards volunteering are not constrained by the level of barriers they perceive to exist. From the perspective of PwFD, it can be seen that, although it is possible to observe the influence of some specific constraints, perceived barriers do not influence current volunteering practices or future intentions.

Keywords: volunteering; inclusive volunteering; disabilities; barriers; Portugal

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1. Introduction

Volunteering can be conceptualised as involving altruistic service, as well as a form of participation, skill development, and agency [1,2]. Traditional perspectives on volunteering often portray people with functional diversity (PwFD) as passive recipients of support. Recent research has presented a divergent perspective on the matter, positing that these individuals possess both the necessary abilities and the capacity to make meaningful contributions within the domain of community engagement [3,4]. Inclusive volunteering is defined as the involvement of all individuals in voluntary activities, recognising that

each person has [5]: (i) a unique set of skills, competencies, and talents that can contribute to serve the community; (ii) the right to participate actively in the development of the community; and (iii) the right to be recognised by the value offered to the community.

Despite growing public interest in disability issues, disability studies is a relatively recent discipline, emerging in the last quarter of the 20th century in pioneering countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In southern European countries like Portugal, the field is in particularly early stages of development, and there is a paucity of scientific literature on the subject, especially concerning inclusive volunteering [3].

This study situates volunteering within broader debates on diversity and inclusion, exploring how social, organisational, and attitudinal factors shape opportunities for meaningful participation. The analysis focuses on the main perceived barriers to inclusive volunteering and the extent to which these barriers influence the practice of inclusive volunteering. Building on studies of minority volunteering, which demonstrate that volunteering can foster social connections, belonging, and personal development [6,7], the investigation aims to extend these insights to the context of disability. Accordingly, the paper employs a strength-based approach, highlighting how inclusive volunteering can mobilise the skills, talents, and agency of PwFD while challenging structural barriers and ableist norms.

In this context, this article aims to study the main barriers perceived in Portugal for volunteering and the extent to which these barriers can affect the predisposition of inclusive volunteering.

The paper explores these questions based on the perceptions of PwFD and the organisations that work in the field and support them. The study is justified by the relevance of the topic and the lack of empirical studies and it contributes to the understanding of volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion, as well as the effective recognition of diversity as a resource for communities.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 establishes the theoretical framework. Then, the methodology is outlined in Section 3. The findings of the study are presented in Section 4, with a subsequent discussion in Section 5. The final section of this study sets out the main conclusions.

2. Inclusive Volunteering: Framework and Barriers

2.1. Volunteering, Diversity, and Participation

Despite its evolution and polysemic nature, the concept of volunteering is widely recognised in Global North countries [6]. Both grey literature (e.g., [8–10]) and scientific publications define volunteering as a work practice carried out for the benefit of others and the community [11,12]. A substantial body of research [1,2,13–16] demonstrates that volunteering is associated with personal and social benefits, including increased community participation and engagement, higher self-esteem and well-being, a stronger sense of belonging and achievement, expanded social networks, and improved mental and physical health.

The assumption that PwFD are less likely to participate as active citizens has been a longstanding component of both public debate and academic research, in an approach that position PwFD as passive recipients of assistance and as dependent on others [17,18]. This assumption, however, has become the focus of increasing critique within the fields of disability studies and civic engagement research, which contest deficit-oriented conceptions of participation and emphasise the agency of individuals with functional diversity [3,4].

The academic field addressing minority volunteering has expanded considerably, encompassing groups such as older adults [2] and people with migration backgrounds. In the context of race, [6] notes that the study of volunteering has predominantly been approached through an individualised lens, rather than as a structural condition that

influences the experiences of participation. Similarly, disability can be approached through this analytical framework, as it is frequently conceptualised as an individual characteristic rather than as a socially produced and politically mediated condition.

Research focusing on minority groups reinforces this understanding by demonstrating that volunteering is not limited to altruistic service, but also functions as a space for skill development, social connection, and the strengthening of agency. For instance, studies examining volunteering amongst individuals with a history of migration reveal its function in broadening social networks and cultivating sentiments of affiliation and community, as well as enhancing individual's capabilities and agency [7].

Volunteering can be regarded as a form of work activity embedded in organisational and community contexts. This perspective is informed by inclusion-oriented approaches commonly associated with human resource management. In light of the growing recognition of volunteering as a form of work within the context of international labour frameworks [19], it provides a pertinent perspective from which to contemplate participation, recognition, and the factors that facilitate or impede individuals' contributions to collective life. From this perspective, it becomes worthwhile to consider how insights from increasingly institutionalised practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion in workplaces [20–22] might contribute to current discussions on inclusive volunteering.

Concurrently, strengths-based approaches in human resource management, particularly those originating from the domain of neurodiversity [23], have the potential to offer valuable insights into inclusive volunteering discourse. The transition from deficit-oriented perspectives to recognition and mobilisation of individual strengths appears to be closely aligned with the principles that underpin the concept of inclusive volunteering. When considered jointly, these perspectives encourage a more comprehensive understanding of volunteering as a form of participation and agency, thereby establishing a conceptual link to disability studies and inclusive approaches to social engagement.

2.2. Disability Paradigms, Language, and Social Inclusion

The consolidation of disability perspectives, which were developed with the aim of overcoming approaches that are complicit with discrimination, medicalisation, and the individualisation of the experiences of people with functional diversity, has unfolded unevenly across different contexts [3]. Despite the emergence of alternative frameworks, the medical model of disability remains robust and continues to influence social attitudes and institutional practices [24].

The medical model of disability is predicated on the premise that disability is purely an individual, diagnosable condition, and pathologises lived experience [24]. Another perspective that has exerted significant influence is the biopsychosocial model, which was proposed by [18] in 2001. This model acknowledges the multifaceted nature of disability, encompassing biological, psychological, and social factors that collectively influence an individual's experience of disability. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health [25] is a widely adopted framework that encapsulates this comprehensive approach to understanding disability. It is evident that both of these theoretical frameworks have a tendency to create an environment that is conducive to the isolation of the individual. Furthermore, there is an assumption that society as a whole is not held accountable to a great extent for ensuring that there is adequate accommodation of diverse needs in shared spaces. Consequently, PwFD are frequently excluded from essential domains such as education, employment, leisure, sport, political participation (e.g., elections), and access to basic services (e.g., public transport). These exclusions engender further everyday challenges, thus perpetuating entrenched institutionalisation and discrimination.

These trajectories are closely linked to the politicisation of disability and to the specific challenges faced by people with functional diversity across different social contexts [3]. Within this perspective, the terminology employed to refer to disability has also been contested, particularly within the disability rights movement [17], a movement that is conceptualised as a global, activist-led initiative that strives for equal opportunity, accessibility, and inclusion. As [26] contends, the conceptualisation of disability within the framework of administrative categories signifies a politically influenced commitment to the validation of claims for social support during specific periods and geographical locations.

As the field of disability studies has evolved, the language used to describe disability has also developed accordingly. Terminology has frequently been identified as the primary site of social exclusion and marginalisation, with labels such as "handicapped people", "special people", "people with special needs", "incapable", and "defective" historically applied to this population [25]. The act of categorisation is frequently associated with the process of diagnosis and with broader systems of regulation. As with other categories that are socially constructed, such as age, sex, or nationality, disability is not an inherent individual trait; rather, it is a social construct shaped by political, cultural, and institutional processes. The diversity of terms currently in use, including those employed to denote individuals with disabilities and PwFD, is indicative of the ongoing political and epistemic debates.

The field of disability studies has undergone significant development at both international and national levels since the 1960s. This progression has been driven by various factors, including social struggles, the establishment of international regulations, and the engagement of the academic commitment to challenge ableism [3].

In the context of this evolving framework, the paradigm of disability has shifted from assistentialist and medical models to the social model and, more recently, to human rights-based approaches [27]. This evolution concurs with more extensive shifts from deficit-oriented perspectives towards strength-based approaches in human resource management and organisational inclusion [23]. It also entails a shift away from normative understandings of vulnerability, which often limit the recognition of human agency and create a "morality of low expectations" [28], towards the rejection of universalised notions of vulnerability, thereby favouring the acknowledgement of individual agency, specific needs, and unique resources [29].

In this context, the maximisation of difference is increasingly being advocated, marking a transition from diversity management to the effective inclusion of diversity's potential within organisations. This paradigm shift entails the development of specific and specialised procedures that are tailored to individual needs [20]. Inclusion is therefore defined as a process that progresses from recognition of diversity towards the active facilitation of participation. The foundation for this approach is established through the assurance of equality and non-discrimination, extending to the cultivation of individualised approaches that respond to the particularities of each individual [21].

These theoretical and political shifts have been pivotal in redefining disability as a matter of rights, participation, and social responsibility, thereby creating space for inclusive approaches to employment and civic engagement, including volunteering.

2.3. From Diversity to Inclusion by Means of Volunteering

2.3.1. Inclusive Volunteering as Work and Participation

The concept of inclusive volunteering can be defined as the active participation of people with disabilities or functional diversity in volunteer activities. The objective of inclusive volunteering is to recognise and mobilise the resources of individuals who are often not perceived as potential or active agents within their communities, particularly people

with disabilities. In an era characterised by multiple and concurrent crises [30], community capacity-building offers an opportunity to combine efforts and enhance collective talents and capabilities [5].

Empirical studies on volunteering by PwFD report significant benefits, including new experiences, improved social relationships, self-realisation, enhanced mental and physical health, and a strengthened sense of social identity [2], as well as increased self-confidence, autonomy, and a sense of responsibility [31]. It is also widely acknowledged that organisations, with a particular emphasis on non-profit entities, that implement inclusive volunteering programmes stand to benefit from a number of key advantages. These include enhanced work efficiency and a reduction in stigma, stereotypes, and prejudice towards PwFD [1]. A review of the extant literature indicates that the advantages of incorporating PwFD are generally considered to exceed the challenges associated with inclusive volunteering [32].

In inclusive volunteering, the practice of volunteering is enacted by people with functional diversity, even though other significant actors are directly or indirectly involved in the process, such as caregivers, supervisors, or family members [2]. These actors provide the essential support that is required for PwFD to engage in voluntary work, and they have also the capacity to either trigger the volunteering activity by publicising or suggesting volunteering opportunities to PwFD [33].

In the field of volunteering, the issue of motivations has been identified as a pivotal element. It is recognised as a catalyst for human behaviour, providing the stimulus that leads individuals to offer their time and energy to volunteering activities. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is recognised as complex, as it could be influenced by several factors [34].

In accordance with the theory of planned behaviour [35], the intention to perform behaviours can be shaped and predicted by three fundamental interacting dimensions: (i) attitude; (ii) subjective norms; and (iii) perceived behavioural control. This model has been adopted extensively in various fields, including volunteering [36]. The model posits that behavioural intention is defined as the degree to which individuals are predisposed to engage in a particular behaviour. Attitudes are related to individuals' positive or negative evaluations of the development of a given behaviour. Subjective norms are related to individuals' perception of the normative support and opinion of others regarding that behaviour. Finally, perceived behavioural control refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to carry out a specific behaviour, which is based on their self-assessment of the difficulty of that behaviour.

The self-determination theory offers a different approach to the study of motivation in volunteering. This theory conceptualises motivation as either (i) autonomous or (ii) controlled [37]. Autonomous motivation is defined as an intrinsic motivation, whereby behaviour is performed with a full sense of free will and choice, and is self-determined [34]. In such cases, the intention to act is fostered by self-determination and engagement in an activity perceived as interesting and enjoyable. In contrast, controlled motivation is characterised by external regulation [37], whereby the intention to act is influenced by external contingencies or pressures, such as the attainment of desired consequences or the evasion of punishment [34]. Both types of motivation have been recognised as pertinent to volunteering practices and that they can co-exist, although intrinsic motivation is more prevalent [34,38].

2.3.2. Barriers to Inclusive Volunteering

Despite the increasing prominence of human rights and individualised inclusion, people with functional diversity still continue to face exclusion from fully exercising their rights and participating in community life, including volunteering [3]. In spite of the

evident benefits, participation remains disproportionate between different demographic and social groups, indicating the ongoing presence of structural, organisational and attitudinal barriers.

Societal barriers limit the capacity of PwFD to participate fully in society and to live a full life as citizens. These obstacles also have a detrimental effect on volunteering, which remains a key avenue for community engagement. PwFD are frequently underrepresented among volunteers for a number of reasons, including a lack of acceptance by organisations and their volunteers, insufficient accessible transportation and facilities [1], and the absence of personalised support or adapted volunteer roles [1,5,39]. However, a paradoxical finding is that these volunteers are frequently described by managers as being highly committed, conscientious, reliable, and motivated to learn new skills [5].

The barriers experienced in many areas of life are also evident in volunteering as well [40]. Ableism is a widespread phenomenon, and volunteers with functional diversity often experience a sense of alienation within organisational settings [1]. This exclusion can be attributed to various sources, including staff members, fellow volunteers, and even the general public, such as clients and beneficiaries [5].

Most organisations are not adequately equipped to support volunteers with diverse profiles, considering their actual skills, talents, and needs, and often lack the resources to implement necessary accommodations [5]. The aforementioned challenges were emphasised by volunteers themselves in the study by [2], who noted the absence of volunteering opportunities and the inadequate preparation of organisations.

Addressing these obstacles requires coordinated efforts, including organising information on functional diversity and the involvement of specialists who can act as mediators. Proper training of key players, such as volunteer coordinators and staff at community volunteer centres, is also essential. Collaborations with local advocacy organisations and other groups supporting individuals with functional diversity have been demonstrated to be effective in ensuring the provision of necessary accommodations [5]. These partnerships can also be valuable when negotiating with management teams to implement inclusive changes [5]. Furthermore, the provision of positive reinforcement and encouragement by support networks, comprising family, friends and peers, is conducive to the enhancement of well-being. This approach aligns with the principle central to the independent living movement, which frames the barriers as social and environmental rather than individual deficits [3].

Despite the long-standing tendency for people with functional diversity to be marginalised in the realm of volunteering [1], there has recently been a notable paradigm shift towards the adoption of inclusive practices. This evolution has prompted traditionally marginalised groups to assume an active role in volunteering, rather than passively receiving the contributions of others. The initial research was focused on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while subsequent studies expanded to include people with physical and sensory disabilities [2].

Based on the literature review and grounded in the theory of planned behaviour, the following hypotheses are deduced:

H1. *Higher perceived barriers negatively influence the intention to the practice of inclusive volunteering by organisations dealing with individuals with disabilities.*

H2. *Higher perceived barriers negatively influence the intention to the practice of inclusive volunteering by individuals with disabilities.*

3. Methodology

In light of the paradox concerning inclusive volunteering and the necessity for additional research in this area, this study aims to identify the barriers to inclusive volunteering and the extent to which these barriers may or may not influence the practice of inclusive volunteering. To this end, a mixed research methodology was employed, incorporating a convergent strategy with a quantitative emphasis (QUAN + qual). In accordance with this strategy, the collection of qualitative and quantitative data was conducted concurrently. Consequently, the integration of the data was undertaken during the data discussion. The primary conclusions were informed by quantitative data, while qualitative data served a complementary explanatory function. Consequently, quantitative data was prioritised in the mixed-methods design that was employed. The utilisation of a mixed-methods design is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Mixed-methods design.

Qualitative Method	Target:	• PwFD • Professionals working with PwFD
	Data collection instrument:	Focus Group (FG) based on semi-structured interview
	Data collection period:	Between July and September 2024
	Participants:	15 in total, distributed as follows: • FG1: 7 PwFD • FG2: 7 professionals working with PwFD • FG3: 8 professionals working with PwFD
Quantitative Method	Target:	• PwFD • Organisations working with PwFD
	Data collection instrument:	Two online questionnaires • One for PwFD • One for the organisations
	Data collection period:	Between June and October 2024
Strategies for integration of results	Integration during the stage of interpreting and discussing results: • Quantitative data informs the main conclusions • Qualitative data plays a complementary explanatory role	

Source: Own elaboration.

Initially, the study employed a qualitative methodology, utilising focus groups as a research instrument. Three focus groups were conducted between July and September 2024. One focus group comprised seven participants with disabilities, while the other two focus groups involved 15 professionals working with PwFD, primarily from local councils and social economy organisations. The focus group was conducted using a semi-structured script prepared by the researchers, considering the literature review and the research objectives.

A quantitative method based on a survey was also used. Two questionnaires were designed to collect perceptions of inclusive volunteering. One was addressed to PwFD and the other to organisations working directly with PwFD.

The aim was to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by examining the perceptions of two key stakeholder groups.

The researchers designed the questionnaire based on: (i) the objectives of the study; (ii) the existing literature on the subject; and (iii) the report on Recommendations for public policies: more inclusive volunteering [41].

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and was divided into two main groups. The first group aimed to assess the respondents' position concerning the practice of inclusive volunteering. The second group included questions to assess which aspects were or were not perceived as barriers to this type of volunteering. The questionnaire addressed to organisations also included a third set of questions, which sought information on the general characterisation of the organisation.

The two questionnaires were designed to align closely in structure, ensuring the comparability of the dimensions in the subsequent analysis. Nevertheless, it was necessary to make certain adaptations in view of the characteristics exhibited by the two groups under analysis. The questionnaire for PwFD was the focus of particular attention. To this end, close collaboration was initiated with institutions specialising in PwFD, with the objective of designing an accessible questionnaire. This was reflected in the language used, the number of questions and scales used, and the readability of the platform used (Lime survey). Indeed, it was necessary to employ categorical variables when constructing the questionnaire for PwFD, as opposed to the questionnaire for social organisations, which is based on interval variables. The questionnaire administered to participants at PwFD incorporated pictograms to facilitate comprehension of the response options. Following the development of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted with the target group in collaboration with psychologists from organisations working with PwFD. The psychologists provided supervision and support for the responses to the questionnaire and identified potential areas for improvement. The questionnaire initiated with a section relating to the informed consent form that participants had to read and digitally accept. The platform used (LimeSurvey) only permitted respondents to advance with the questionnaire subsequent to their acknowledgement and consent to the stipulated informed consent terms. As the study does not involve clinical research, human intervention or the collection of identifiable personal data, ethics committee approval was not required, according to Portuguese legislation (Law No. 21/16 April 2014). Notwithstanding, the Data Protection Department was consulted in advance and indicated that, given the nature of the data involved, no further validation was necessary regarding the matter.

By means of a quantitative method, the study aimed to analyse whether perceived barriers are able to influence the position towards the practice of inclusive volunteering, from the perspectives of social organisations and PwFD. From a terminological perspective, the manuscript adopted the term 'people with functional diversity' in alignment with contemporary paradigms for addressing disabilities. However, during the data collection processes—specifically, focus groups and questionnaires—the term 'people with disability' was utilised, as respondents are traditionally more familiar with the meaning of this expression.

In order to analyse the organisation's perspective, the dependent variables considered were the predisposition to use inclusive volunteering in the future, assessed either in the short-, medium- or long-term. The measurement of these three variables was conducted using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'very unlikely' (1) to 'very likely' (5). The utilisation of these variables proved instrumental in the evaluation of research hypothesis H1. In order to analyse the perspective of people living with a disability, and to test research hypothesis H2, two dependent variables were considered: (i) the current volunteering practices and future intentions. In both cases a dummy variable was also created, where respectively (i) 0 corresponds to the current development of volunteering and 1 corresponds

to the absence of such development; and (ii) 1 corresponds to a clear intention to develop volunteering in the future, and 0 otherwise.

The different types of barriers to inclusive volunteering were considered as independent variables, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of variables in the quantitative method.

	Organisations		PwFD	
	Variable	**Variable Type**	**Variable**	**Variable Type**
Dependent variables	Predisposition to inclusive volunteering in the short-term	5-point Likert scale	Current practice of volunteering	Dummy
	Predisposition to inclusive volunteering in the medium-term		Intention to volunteer in the future	
	Predisposition to inclusive volunteering in the medium- to long-term			
Independent variables	Lack of supporting staff by organisations	5-point Likert scale	Lack of supporting staff by organisations	Categorical
	Lack of time and other resources by PwFD		Lack of time and other resources by PwFD	
	Lack of knowledge about the needs of a person with disability		Lack of knowledge about the needs of a person with disability	
	Lack of accessibility		Lack of accessibility	
	PwFD's fear of not being able to volunteer		PwFD's fear of not being able to volunteer	
	PwFD's fear of making other people feel uncomfortable		PwFD's fear of making other people feel uncomfortable	
	Lack of encouragement from the PwFD family members		Lack of encouragement from the PwFD family members	
	Lack of opportunities		Lack of opportunities	

Source: Own elaboration.

The data collection period occurred between 28 June and 6 October 2024. The questionnaires were distributed through the networks and email contacts of the organisations working on this issue in Portugal.

A total of 104 valid responses were received from organisations and 67 from PwFD.

The responding organisations are located throughout the country, although the north (35.6%) is more prominent, followed by the peninsula of Setúbal (19.2%) and the centre (18.3%). The majority of organisations are located in urban areas (69.2%), while local (43.3%) or regional (26.9%) organisations are also included in the sample.

In terms of size, the majority of organisations have fewer than 100 employees. Organisations with teams ranging from 10 to 49 individuals (22.1%) and 50 to 99 individuals (20.2%) are of particular significance. Only a low percentage (5.8%) of the organisations have more than 250 employees. With regard to the number of users served by the organisa-

tions in the sample, 33.7% of these were found to be organisations with more than 250 users, whilst 19.2% were organisations with 10 to 49 users.

Given the nature of the individual respondents, with functional diversity, no information was collected on personal characteristics in order not to compromise the attention span to answer the core questions of the questionnaire, and due to the sensitivity of raising the issue for the respondents.

Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected through the focus group. SPSS was used (version 29) to analyse the primary quantitative data collected, using different statistical tools such as descriptive techniques, bivariate and multivariate data analysis.

The use of different sources of primary data collection was important for purposes of data triangulation. The integration of results was carried out during the stage of interpretation and discussion of results, by means of joint displays.

4. Results

4.1. Positioning Concerning Volunteering

4.1.1. Organisations

The results obtained show that most of the organisations surveyed (74%) involve PwFD in the development of volunteering activities (Table 3). However, a large proportion of these organisations (35.6%) only involve between 1 and 3 PwFD in volunteering, while the percentage of organisations with more than 15 PwFD in volunteering is only 11.5%. In addition, 26% of the organisations reported that they had no users involved in volunteering.

For the individuals who do volunteer work, volunteering is most often the result of opportunities provided by the organisations supporting PwFD (59.6%), followed by the PwFD own initiative (28.8%). Recommendations from family members (9.6%) and friends (2.9%) were less common.

The majority of organisations (73.1%) indicate that they suggest some form of volunteering to the PwFD they work with. However, this suggestion is usually made on an occasional basis (43.3%), and less often regularly (13.5%) or as part of a strategy to support the users (16.3%).

When the organisation proposes volunteering to their users with functional diversity, they tend to accept the offer with enthusiasm (38.5%). In addition, 23.1% say that, despite initial reluctance, users accept the proposal. In contrast, 10.6% say that proposals are usually rejected, either after a short analysis (9.6%) or immediately upon receipt (1%).

The main reason organisations do not offer voluntary activities to PwFD are the lack of human resources (15.4%). Other reasons given by some organisations (only 5.8%) are the lack of synergies with local organisations, the lack of knowledge on how to proceed, or the lack of adherence to the network supporting PwFD.

It should be noted that the responding organisations consider their contacts with institutions hosting inclusive volunteering to be limited. In total, 38.5% of the organisations said they had no contacts and 51.9% said they had contacts, but that they were insufficient. Only 9.6% of the organisations said they had a lot of contacts with institutions offering opportunities for inclusive volunteering.

After that, we analysed if organisations were interested in applying inclusive volunteering in the future.

The results obtained (Table 4) show that most organisations are very likely to engage with inclusive volunteering in the future, whether in the short-, medium-, or long-term. However, the longer the time horizon, the more likely organisations are to engage in volunteering.

Table 3. Organisation's overall perception of the practice of inclusive volunteering.

Question	N	%
PwFD who are accompanied by the organisation and who have already been involved in volunteering		
None	27	26.0
Between 1 and 3	37	35.6
Between 4 and 7	19	18.3
Between 8 and 15	9	8.7
More than 15	12	11.5
Occurrence of volunteering in the lives of PwFD supported by the organisation		
The opportunity to volunteer has been made available by the organisation	62	59.6
Volunteering is a result of the individual's initiative	30	28.8
Volunteering was recommended by family members	10	9.6
Volunteering was recommended by friends	3	2.9
Other reasons	2	1.9
The organisation offers volunteer activities to the PwFD it accompanies		
Not usually	28	26.9
Very occasionally	45	43.3
Very regularly	14	13.5
It is part of the organisation support strategy	17	16.3
Typical reaction of PwFD when presented with a volunteering proposal		
They usually reject the proposal immediately	1	1.0
They usually listen, are not very open to the proposal, and reject it	10	9.6
They usually listen, and are not very open to the proposal but accept it	24	23.1
They enthusiastically accept the offer to volunteer	40	38.5
Other	1	1.0
No answer	28	26.9
Reasons for not proposing volunteering activities to PwFD		
Lack of synergy with local organisations	6	5.8
Lack of human resources that can be allocated to this specific task	16	15.4
Lack of knowledge on how to do it in an organised way	6	5.8
Poor adherence to PwFD support networks	6	5.8
Other reasons	6	5.8
Have contact with organisations that can provide inclusive volunteering opportunities		
None	40	38.5
Yes, but not enough	54	51.9
Yes, several contacts	10	9.6

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4. Predisposition to inclusive volunteering in the future.

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Short-term (up to 1 year)	12.5	20.2	21.2	20.2	26	3.27
Medium-term (between 1 and 3 years)	4.8	14.4	26	27.9	26.9	3.58
Medium- to long-term (between 3 and 5 years)	3.8	10.6	20.2	34.6	30.8	3.78

Note: 1 corresponds to very unlikely and 5 to very likely. Source: Own elaboration.

In the short-term (up to one year), 32.7% of organisations say that they are unlikely, or very unlikely, to offer volunteering opportunities to the PwFD they support. This percentage drops to 19.2% if the period is between 1 and 3 years and to only 14.4% if the horizon is between 3 and 5 years.

4.1.2. People with Functional Diversity

When analysing the practice of volunteering among PwFD (Table 5), it can be seen that most respondents (50.7%) have volunteered in the past, even if they do not currently volunteer. Only 22.4% of respondents say they are currently volunteering and 26.9% say they have never volunteered. Of those who volunteer, 13.4% volunteer weekly, and 3% volunteer monthly. Sporadic participation was reported by 6% of respondents. There was a considerable under-reporting of the frequency of volunteering (77.6% of respondents), which may indicate a lack of experience or interest in the subject.

Table 5. Position on volunteering.

Question	N	%
Volunteering		
I have never done any voluntary work	18.0	26.9
I do not volunteer at the moment, but in the past, I've done	34.0	50.7
I do volunteer work	15.0	22.4
Frequency of volunteering		
Weekly	9.0	13.4
Monthly	2.0	3.0
Rarely	4.0	6.0
No answer	52.0	77.6
Who suggested volunteering		
The institution that accompanies me	12.0	17.9
Myself	26.0	38.8
Family members	5.0	7.5
A friend	8.0	11.9
Other people	2.0	3.0
Have I received any offers to volunteer?		
Never	24.0	35.8
Sometimes	30.0	44.8
Often	9.0	13.4
I don't know or I don't answer	4.0	6.0
I know functional diversity volunteers		
I don't know any	27.0	40.3
I know some	24.0	35.8
I know many	11.0	16.4
I don't know or can't answer	5.0	7.5
In the future, I'd like to volunteer		
Yes	49.0	73.1
No	6.0	9.0
I'm not sure about this	12.0	17.9

Source: Own elaboration.

In most cases (38.8%), the initiative to volunteer came from the individual themselves, while 17.9% of respondents said they had been influenced by the institution they attended, followed by suggestions from friends (11.9%). Influence from family members (7.5%) or other elements (3%) was less common. These findings suggest that while the decision to volunteer is often personal, the support from institutions and friends also makes a significant contribution.

When asked whether respondents had ever received invitations to volunteer, 58.2% responded positively, with 44.8% saying they had received invitations a few times and only 13.4% saying they had received invitations many times. However, 35.8% of respondents said they had never been approached to volunteer. This suggests that although some people are approached, many respondents have never had the opportunity, highlighting the need for better publicity and more direct and frequent invitations to attract new volunteers. Most

respondents (52.2%) say they know PwFD who volunteer, although it is more common to know only a few people in this situation (35.8%). This finding suggests that inclusive volunteering is still limited and that there is a need to develop actions and policies to promote volunteering among PwFD.

An analysis of future volunteering intentions shows that 73.1% of respondents are interested in volunteering in the future, 9% do not express this intention and 17.9% are still unsure about their interest. Thus, the results indicate a predisposition towards future involvement in volunteering by PwFD.

4.2. Perceived Barriers to Volunteering

4.2.1. Qualitative Results on Barriers to Volunteering by People with Functional Diversity

The content analysis of the focus groups provided an in-depth understanding of the barriers experienced by the participating organisations. According to the evidence gathered, the barriers to volunteering for PwFD can be divided into two main types: (i) institutional and cultural barriers, and (ii) personal and family barriers.

Institutional and Cultural Barriers

The results of the focus group indicate that institutional and cultural barriers are one of the main obstacles that PwFD face when trying to get involved in volunteering. For example, the lack of institutional openness is mainly mentioned by the professionals interviewed, who say that many institutions are not prepared to receive volunteers with functional diversity. According to the participants, the main reason for this is the perception of the organisations that these people need more time and individual support. As one participant said: "Organisations think that people with disability will take up their time because they need individual support" (Participant 03).

In general, according to the participants, there is a limited culture of volunteering in Portugal. This culture is even more narrow if we consider inclusive volunteering. In the words of one respondent: "It is not common to do volunteering in Portugal, especially not inclusive volunteering" (Participant 04).

Related to the limited culture of volunteering, participants mention structural discrimination against PwFD, particularly in terms of ableism and a certain infantilisation. Such attitudes make it difficult to perceive PwFD as active volunteers: "People with disabilities are still seen as objects of volunteering, not as practitioners" (Participant 03). Participants explained that attitudinal barriers are also an obstacle to greater participation of all people in volunteering.

In addition, architectural barriers and physical accessibility remain a serious challenge to the active participation of PwFD. The lack of accessible infrastructure remains a key barrier. As mentioned in the focus group, statements like the following are still a reality: "I wanted to volunteer but I couldn't because of a step" (Participant 03).

Personal and Family Barriers

In addition to institutional barriers, focus group participants pointed to excessive family protection. Indeed, families seem to overprotect PwFD, fearing they might fail to integrate into the activity. As one of the participants said: "Family members are always afraid that the person will have difficulties integrating" (Participant 01).

Barriers of a more individual nature are also identified for PwFD who cannot volunteer due to their physical or mental condition. As the focus group revealed, health (participant 06) and motivational issues (participant 05) prevent participation. There is also a lack of information about inclusive volunteering projects and the opportunities they can create.

4.2.2. Quantitative Results on Barriers to Volunteering

The quantitative results on barriers to volunteering are presented from the perspective of the two groups of participants involved in the study. Therefore, first the evidence gathered regarding PwFD is described, followed by that regarding organisations.

The Perspective of the Organisations

When analysing the barriers identified by organisations to the practice of volunteering by PwFD (Table 6). The most commonly perceived barrier is the perception that there are few opportunities for inclusive volunteering, with 73.7% of organisations agreeing or strongly agreeing (mean score of 4 out of 5). This was followed by a lack of support staff (mean score 3.7) and a lack of encouragement from family members (mean score 3).

Table 6. Barriers to the practice of inclusive volunteering by organisations.

Barriers	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
It is difficult for people with disabilities to volunteer because of the lack of supporting staff.	3	7.1	32.3	36.4	21.2	3.7
People with disabilities don't have the opportunity to volunteer because it takes a lot of time and other resources that they don't have.	9.1	21.2	34.3	26.6	9.1	3.1
People responsible for managing and accompanying the volunteers are not aware of the needs of people with disabilities.	5.1	24.2	23.2	36.4	11.1	3.2
Lack of accessibility to the places where volunteering takes place.	6.1	16.2	42.4	24.2	11.1	3.2
More disabled people don't volunteer because they are afraid they won't be able to.	5.1	26.3	36.4	27.3	5.1	3.0
More disabled people don't volunteer because they fear making other people feel uncomfortable.	8.1	36.4	35.4	17.2	3	2.7
More disabled people don't volunteer because family members don't encourage it.	4	9.1	31.3	43.4	12.1	3.5
There aren't more disabled people volunteering because there are not many opportunities.	2	5.1	19.2	41.4	32.3	4.0

Note: 1 corresponds to totally disagree and 5 to totally agree. Source: Own elaboration.

On the other hand, organisations do not consider the fear of PwFD about their ability to perform or the discomfort of people around them to be significant barriers, with mean scores of 3 and 2.7 respectively.

After a descriptive presentation of the results obtained, the study aims to examine the extent to which the perceived barriers are, or are not, able to influence involvement in volunteering. For the purposes of bivariate data analysis, the Kruskal–Wallis H test was used. This non-parametric test was employed to facilitate a statistical comparison between individuals exhibiting divergent perceptions regarding the favourability or unfavourability of different factors in terms of their predisposition towards volunteering. The analysis of the results (Table 7) shows that the result of the Kruskal–Wallis H test is not statistically

significant at the 5% confidence level for any of the barriers analysed. This means that there are no significant differences between the organisations' intentions towards volunteering, according to the level of barriers they perceive to exist. Thus, according to the results obtained, it is not by the fact that organisations perceive the presence of higher or lower barriers that they change their intention to develop inclusive volunteering activities, either in the short-, medium-, or medium–long-term.

Table 7. Statistical test of the relationship between perceived barriers and volunteering intentions in the organisations.

	Short-Term Predisposition to Develop Inclusive Volunteering		**Medium-Term Predisposition to Develop Inclusive Volunteering**		**Medium- to Long-Term Predisposition to Develop Inclusive Volunteering**	
	Kruskal–Wallis H-test value	Sig.	Kruskal-Wallis H-test value	Sig.	Kruskal-Wallis H-test value	Sig.
It is difficult for people with disabilities to volunteer because of the lack of supporting staff.	6.771	0.15	2.786	0.59	2.209	0.70
People with disabilities don't have the opportunity to volunteer because it takes a lot of time and other resources that they don't have.	5.333	0.26	2.779	0.60	0.781	0.94
People responsible for managing and accompanying the volunteers are not aware of the needs of people with disabilities.	5.879	0.21	4.902	0.30	5.645	0.23
Lack of accessibility to the places where volunteering takes place.	2.558	0.63	4.599	0.33	8.403	0.08
More disabled people don't volunteer because they are afraid they won't be able to.	0.806	0.94	1.285	0.86	2.067	0.72
More disabled people don't volunteer because they fear making other people feel uncomfortable.	1.785	0.78	3.501	0.48	2.346	0.67
More disabled people don't volunteer because family members don't encourage it.	6.915	0.14	6.131	0.19	3.164	0.53
There aren't more disabled people volunteering because there are not many opportunities.	7.27	0.12	2.744	0.60	3.171	0.53

Source: Own elaboration.

To enhance the analysis, multivariate data analysis was also performed. To identify whether different barriers could be predictive of the likelihood of social organisations using inclusive volunteering, tree classification was also used, given its potential to identify

patterns within heterogeneous data. The structure of the data, combined with the sample size, did not support the use of regression methods. Instead, the CHAID method and adjusted significance values using Bonferroni methods were employed. This involved constructing a decision tree based on dividing the data into homogeneous subgroups using chi-square (χ^2) tests, in order to determine whether the different barriers considered conjointly could explain the involvement of PwFD in volunteering.

For all time horizons analysed (short-, medium- and long-term), the model found no divisions, meaning the analysis of the data was limited to the root node (Node 0). Thus, the findings show that none of the barriers studied were statistically significant and do not have sufficient explanatory power to predict the future probability of volunteering by PwFD. The results obtained using this method are consistent with those obtained using bivariate data analysis, thereby reinforcing the robustness of the patterns obtained. According to that, hypothesis H1 is not supported.

The Perspective of the People with Functional Diversity

When analysing the barriers to volunteering from the perspective of PwFD (Table 8), the main barriers perceived by respondents are lack of opportunities (59.7%), followed by lack of knowledge about the needs of PwFD (56.7%), lack of accessibility (53.7%) and lack of time or resources of PwFD to do volunteering (52.2%).

Table 8. Barriers to the practice of inclusive volunteering by individuals.

Barrier	Disagree (%)	Neither Disagree Nor Agree (%)	Agree (%)	I Don't Know or Can't Answer (%)	Total
There is no supporting staff.	26.9	19.4	41.8	11.9	100.0
There are no time or resources by people.	17.9	17.9	52.2	11.9	100.0
Lack of knowledge about the needs of a person with a disability.	23.9	11.9	56.7	7.5	100.0
There is no accessibility.	22.4	11.9	53.7	11.9	100.0
People are afraid of not being able to.	29.9	20.9	43.3	6.0	100.0
Fear of making other people feel uncomfortable.	26.9	14.9	49.3	9.0	100.0
Lack of encouragement of family members.	26.9	14.9	49.3	9.0	100.0
Lack of opportunities.	20.9	11.9	59.7	7.5	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

Fear that other people will feel uncomfortable or that family members won't encourage volunteering are barriers mentioned by almost half of the respondents (49.3%).

Given the nature of dependent variables as dummy variables, the chi-square test was employed for the purpose of bivariate data analysis, in order to examine whether there is a relationship between perceptions of perceived barriers and attitudes towards volunteering by PwFD. The analysis of results of the test results shows that the current practice of volunteering by PwFD is not related to the different barriers analysed, for $\alpha = 0.05$ (Table 9). The only statistically significant barrier is the fear of making others feel uncomfortable, but only at a confidence level of 10%.

Table 9. Statistical test of the relationship between perceived barriers and individual volunteering practices.

	Current Volunteering Practice		**Future Volunteering Intentions**	
	Test Value χ^2	Sig.	Test Value χ^2	Sig.
There are no support staff.	0.886	0.642	2.137	0.344
There are no time or resources by people.	0.519	0.772	1.792	0.408
Lack of knowledge about the needs of a person with a disability.	0.014	0.993	4.103	0.129
There is no accessibility.	0.016	0.992	1.755	0.416
People are afraid of not being able to.	3.160	0.206	1.702	0.427
Fear of making other people feel uncomfortable.	4.930	0.085	0.800	0.67
Lack of encouragement of family members.	1.892	0.388	0.086	0.958
Lack of opportunities.	0.610	0.737	5.762	0.056

Source: Own elaboration.

Thus, the results suggest that volunteering practice and perceived barriers are independent variables, meaning that the performance of inclusive volunteering is not conditioned by the sense of favourability to perform it.

However, a similar result is observed when we examine the intention to develop volunteering in the future among PwFD. The result of the test suggests that most of the barriers are not able to condition future willingness to volunteer. The only exception is found for the perceived lack of opportunities, that is statistically significant for $\alpha = 0.056$. The remaining barriers are not found to condition the intention to volunteer in the future.

To analyse the influence of perceived barriers in volunteering from the perspective of PwFD, two binary logistic regressions were used (Table 10). This multivariate data analysis technique allowed to assess the extent to which the likelihood of volunteering among PwFD might be influenced by their perceptions regarding the range of barriers under the study. Both regressions were found to fit well, as indicated by the Hosmer–Lemeshow test ($p = 0.288$ and 0.795, respectively).

Table 10. Multivariate analysis of individual volunteering practices according to perceived barriers.

	Current Volunteering Practice			**Future Volunteering Intentions**		
	B	Wald	Sig.	B	Wald	Sig.
Constant	0.243	0.036	0.85	−2.229	1.895	0.169
There are no support staff	−0.584	0.584	0.445	0.343	0.258	0.612
There are no time or resources by people	1.083	1.136	0.287	1.326	2.102	0.147
Lack of knowledge about the needs of a person with a disability.	−0.346	0.127	0.722	−0.302	0.118	0.731
There is no accessibility	0.478	0.762	0.383	−0.526	0.704	0.401
People are afraid of not being able to	0.336	0.3	0.584	0.291	0.189	0.663
Fear of making other people feel uncomfortable	1.21	3.155	0.076	0.283	0.133	0.715

Table 10. *Cont.*

	Current Volunteering Practice			Future Volunteering Intentions		
	B	Wald	Sig.	B	Wald	Sig.
Lack of encouragement of family members	−0.99	2.565	0.109	0.038	0.004	0.952
Lack of opportunities	−0.727	1.662	0.197	−1.147	3.652	0.056

Source: Own elaboration.

The regression analyses are consistent with the findings obtained from the bivariate analysis of the data, showing that the results are robust even when the effects of all the barriers are considered simultaneously. Due to restrictions relating to participants' privacy, information on personal characteristics could not be requested. Consequently, it was not possible to control for these factors in the results. Based on the findings achieved, there is not enough evidence to support H2, which is rejected.

5. Integrated Analysis and Discussion

The study employed a mixed-method approach based on different sources. An integrated analysis of the main barriers to inclusive volunteering is provided in Table 11.

Table 11. Integrated analysis of the main barriers perceived to inclusive volunteering.

Dimension	Qualitative Evidence	Quantitative Results: Organisations	Quantitative Results: PwFD	Meta-Inference
Main barriers groups	• Two main barrier groups are found: (i) institutional and cultural barriers; and (ii) personal and family barriers.	• Barrier variables related to institutional and cultural barriers, as well as personal and family ones, are recognised as being quite prevalent.	• Barrier variables related to institutional and cultural barriers, as well as personal and family ones, are recognised as being quite prevalent.	• Convergence of qualitative and quantitative data, whether provided by organisations or PwFD, indicates the presence of relevance barriers at institutional, cultural, personal and family levels.
Institutional and cultural barriers	• They are considered one of the main barriers to inclusive volunteering. • Limited tradition and culture of volunteering. • Stigma (ableism and a certain infantilisation). • PwFD are seen as objects of volunteering, not as practitioners. • Cultural factors reduce the willingness of organisations and PwFD to be involved in inclusive volunteering.	• A small number of people with disabilities supported by the organisation engage in volunteer work (35.6% between 1 and 3; 18.3%: between 4 and 7). • The organisation offers volunteer activities to the PwFD it supports on a very occasional basis.	• It is quite common for PwFD not to know other PwFD who volunteer (40.3%).	• Low levels of inclusive volunteering and a lack of role models are consistent with the recognised limitations of traditions and cultural factors.

Table 11. *Cont.*

Dimension	Qualitative Evidence	Quantitative Results: Organisations	Quantitative Results: PwFD	Meta-Inference
	Resources: • Disinformation about the resources required for organisations to engage in inclusive volunteering (overvaluation).	• Lack of resources/staff by social organisation to support inclusive volunteering (M = 3.7). • Lack of resources by PwFD is also mentioned (M = 3.1). • People responsible for managing and accompanying the volunteers are not aware of the needs of people with disabilities (M = 3.2). • The lack of human resources that can be allocated to inclusive volunteering is the main cause why social organisations do not propose more to PwFD.	• There is no supporting staff (41.8%). • Lack of resources by PwFD (52.2%). • Lack of knowledge about the needs of a person with a disability (56.7%).	• Quantitative data shows that there are insufficient resources to encourage higher levels of inclusive volunteering. • Both organisations and volunteers recognise that resource constraints are evident from the perspectives of the organisations, the volunteers themselves and people involved in volunteer management. • Each group in the analysis (organisation vs. PwFD) considers its own lack of resources to be more pressing. • This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that there is some misinformation about the resources needed for inclusive volunteering.
	• Architectural barriers and physical accessibility issues remain serious challenges.	• Lack of accessibility to the places where volunteering takes place (M = 3.2).	• Lack of accessibility (53.7%).	• The results converge on the issue of accessibility. • Although quantitative data shows that it is not the most significant barrier, it is still considered a major concern.
	• Lack of opportunities for inclusive volunteering.	• There aren't more disabled people volunteering because there are not many opportunities (4.0). • Most of the organisation have a limited contact with other organisations that can provide inclusive volunteering opportunities (38.5%) or no contact at all (40%).	• There is lack of opportunities for inclusive volunteer (59.7%). • Several PwFD never received any proposal for inclusive volunteering (35.8%).	• The results are convergent on the critical importance raised by the lack of opportunities for inclusive volunteering. • The prevalence of this barrier is emphasised by the quantitative data.

Table 11. *Cont.*

Dimension	Qualitative Evidence	Quantitative Results: Organisations	Quantitative Results: PwFD	Meta-Inference
Personal and family barriers	Family barriers: • Excessive family (over)protection. • Family members fear PwFD will fail to integrate into the volunteer activity.	• Lack of encouragement from family members (M = 3.5). • Few cases where the participation of PwFD in volunteering is recommended by family members 9.6%.	• Lack of encouragement from family members (49.3%.) • There are few cases where the participation of PwFD in volunteering is recommended by family members (7.5%). • Most of PwFD consider that participation in volunteering arose from their own initiative (38.8%), and there is low involvement from the social organisations that accompany them (17.9).	• The low participation and lack of stimulus by family members is always found (overprotection), although they are not the only actors to avoid exposing PwFD to volunteering.
	Personal barriers: Specific barriers at an individual level: physical or mental condition; lack of motivation.	• Fear by PwFD of not being able to perform volunteer work (M = 3.0). • Fear by PwFD of making other people feel uncomfortable (M = 2.7). • Volunteering is a result of the individual's initiative in only part of PwFD (28.8%), being an initiative mainly triggered by social organisations (59.6%). • Most PwFD when receiving a proposal to volunteer accept it immediately (38.5%); however, a significant percentage have to analyse it before deciding (32.6%).	• Fear by PwFD of being able to perform volunteer work (43.3%). • Fear by PwFD of making other people feel uncomfortable (49.3%).	• Some fears are found related to the personal abilities of PwDF to perform volunteer work. • Organisations are especially concerned with personal capacities, and PwDF's relationships with others. • A lack of confidence in one's ability to volunteer is reflected in the need to carefully consider the decision to get involved in volunteering. • Low levels of participation of PwDF in volunteering could also reflect motivation issues.

Source: Own elaboration.

Volunteering depends on people's choices to get involved [10]. However, based on the literature and despite the scarce empirical studies, it could be expected that the way both institutions and individuals perceive the environment and the existing opportunities and barriers could shape their behaviour regarding engaging in inclusive volunteering.

In the literature, the potential benefits of volunteering are predominantly explored, as it is recognised that there are benefits at different levels, such as: the target group, society, and also the volunteer (the person doing the volunteering) [5,14]. Despite these widely recognised benefits, the literature suggests that the potential of volunteering is not fully

realised, particularly among PwFD, whose participation in volunteering is particularly low [1,5].

This study shows the same reality in Portugal, where institutions involve only a small number of the users they support in volunteering, and the vast majority of PwFD report that they do not currently volunteer, even if both show a strong inclination towards inclusive volunteering in the future.

The study of perceived barriers shows that both PwFD and the organisations that support them are aware of the existence of several difficulties that PwFD face in volunteering, that could be grouped into institutional and cultural barriers, as well as personal and family barriers. Both target groups are aligned in the way they perceive external constraints and how unfavourable they can be to the practice of inclusive volunteering. The triangulation of data, based on a mixed-methods approach, indicates the robustness of the findings on the existence and prevalence of these barriers. The results show that the main obstacles, more than physical accessibility, are mainly cultural and related to the lack of a strong tradition of inclusive volunteering. This is reflected in the lack of existing opportunities for the practice of volunteering, the lack of role models, and the lack of involvement in the role of families who do not encourage the practice of volunteering by PwFD.

The results of the study show that the barriers typically associated with PwFD [3,24,34] are also perceived in the practice of volunteering, as claimed by [34]. The extension of these barriers to the field of volunteering and as an obstacle to volunteering accentuates the potential process of exclusion and the sense of equality compared to citizens who are not excluded from this possibility of civic participation. Furthermore, it also contributes to perpetuating the under-representation of PwFD in inclusive volunteering, resulting in a concomitant loss of potential.

The analysis of the relationship between perceived barriers and inclusive volunteering practices provides important insights. On the one hand, despite the recognition of a significant number of obstacles, these do not influence the current practice of inclusive volunteering, either for organisations (either in the short-, medium- or long-term), or for individuals. On the other hand, when it comes to future volunteering intentions by PwFD, the results are not so straightforward as some specific variables have been identified as potentially having some kind of influence.

The results suggest that the predisposition towards volunteering remains unchanged for both organisations and PwFD, despite the presence of significant external and normative barriers to volunteering. The barriers found to be relevant to the practices of inclusive volunteering can be understood as linked to the subjective norms and perceived behaviour control of the theory of planned behaviour [36]. The quantitative analysis suggests that these dimensions are not conducive to the conditioning of human behaviour. Indeed, although subjective norms and perceived behaviour control are perceived by organisations or PwFD as being very unfavourable, they are unable to retrain their intentions towards volunteering practice. This finding, which may initially appear paradoxical and counter-intuitive, gives rise to a number of significant theoretical debates. Firstly, this intriguing finding gives rise to questions concerning the possibility of the behaviour towards the volunteer being or not being the result of a conscious decision. As this fuzzy result is found for both social organisations and PwFD, we can admit that there is some kind of rationality in the behaviour of the two actors, even if this rationality is subjective, as argued by [35]. Consequently, as subjective norms and perceived behaviour control are found not to be relevant, the explanation for the formation of volunteering intentions must be built on positive attitudes towards inclusive volunteering. In this context, the prevailing belief concerning the potential of volunteering, whether for PwFD themselves or for the community, predominates over the prevailing negative perceptions regarding subjective

norms and perceived behavioural control. As posited by [35], emotions have the capacity to exert a significant influence on the development of attitudes. Consequently, the findings emphasise the pivotal role of internal factors in shaping intentions within the domain of inclusive volunteering. Accordingly, the findings lend support to the applicability of the theory of planned behaviour, albeit raising questions regarding the relative importance of each dimension in human behaviour in the context of inclusive volunteering. This should not be interpreted as a recognition of the limitations of the theory of planned behaviour. Rather, it is indicative of the flexibility of the theory, which allows for its application in very specific contexts, even though these require a very specific assessment of their application.

The findings achieved can be discussed through the lens of self-determination theory. The empirical evidence collected suggests that autonomous motivation is more prevalent than controlled motivation. Furthermore, controlled motivation appears to be irrelevant in the context of inclusive volunteering behaviour.

It has been observed that there is a considerable intention to use volunteers by PwDF, even in the presence of significant institutional, cultural, personal and family barriers. Thus, the behaviour exhibited in relation to volunteering appears to be self-determined, guided by intrinsic motivations as opposed to external ones.

The findings also raise important considerations about how perceptions can influence the behaviour of different actors in different ways. For social organisations, although they are aware of the difficulties faced by PwFD in practicing volunteering, this situation is not found to be an obstacle to the institution engaging their users in inclusive volunteering. For PwFD, we observe that their perceptions do not change the current situation: individuals already involved in volunteering, although aware of the difficulties, do not change their current actions. However, looking to the future, we could admit the influence of some specific barriers, especially if a wider confidence interval is considered. In this case, the study highlights the role that the lack of opportunities for volunteering can exert, and how this can undermine the effective exploration of volunteering potential. This underutilization of PwFD volunteers means that their potential has not been developed and the value that they could provide has not been derived and has long been recognised in the literature [32]. It also means that society is not using the power of the skills, competencies, and talents they have, according to the position of [5], either for the promotion of a common good [12] or for the well-being, empowerment, and self-realisation of PwFD [2,31,41]. It is interesting to note that accessibility is not perceived as one of the greatest barriers, but rather as a factor that conditions the choice of PwFD to volunteer. Despite the advances that research offers in the study of inclusive volunteering, further studies are still worthwhile.

6. Conclusions

The paradoxes in the literature about the potential of volunteering and the low level of volunteering, especially among the groups at risk of social exclusion, led to the realisation of the study. The research aimed to analyse the main barriers perceived in Portugal to the practice of volunteering and whether or not they can influence the activity of inclusive volunteering in the country.

The results show that although there are some good practices of inclusive volunteering in Portugal, they are still rare. The analysis of the perceptions of both institutions supporting PwFD and PwFD themselves shows a rather low level of volunteering, although both actors (organisations and PwFD) are predisposed to volunteering in the future.

The volunteering practices of PwFD are seen as quite challenging, as several barriers are perceived to be present. These barriers are not able to condition the current practice of volunteering, as they have already been internalised in the decision-making of the PwFD and the organisation. In addition, an examination of future predispositions reveals that a

considerable group of PwFD express a desire to engage in volunteering activities, despite being aware of the challenges associated with this endeavour.

In this study, the future intentions of social organisations are not influenced by their perception. Thus, the most serious gap regarding volunteering intentions is observed mainly in the PwFD, due to their more vulnerable situation and lack of capacity to cope with the adversities they experience.

The main contribution of the paper to the extant paradox concerning inclusive volunteering is derived from an in-depth and comprehensive study of the role that perceived barriers play towards volunteering, that could arise at the interaction of the behaviour of different actors and at the intersection of existing barriers and motivations. The results bring relevant contributions to the field of research and give practical contributions to the implementation and development of more inclusive volunteering in the country, following the principles of equality and non-discrimination, guaranteeing the right of PwFD to play an active and participatory role in society. The findings provide valuable theoretical contributions, particularly in terms of the debate on the utilisation of the theory of planned behaviour and self-determination theory within the domain of volunteering, and more specifically, inclusive volunteering.

The results obtained highlight the importance of public policies to promote the removal of the most inhibiting barriers to volunteering, which are also found in the everyday lives of PwFD. In particular, the research highlights the importance of working on accessibility, creating opportunities for inclusive volunteering, and the resources needed to support PwFD in their integration and development. The conclusions also point to the need to promote networks that can create opportunities for inclusive volunteering and bring them to the attention of key stakeholders.

Despite the potential of the research, there are some limitations. First, it is important to note the small sample size, which prevented the use of other types of statistical analysis and imposed the need for some caution when interpreting and generalising the results. It is worth highlighting that it works based on perceptions and focuses on a single country. Furthermore, it was not possible to obtain any information regarding the types of disabilities or the organisations involved in the volunteering activities, which constitutes a limitation. Future research could examine this, employing a different strategy for distributing questionnaires or by focusing specifically on particular types of disabilities. Future studies could either explore the barriers experienced by other stakeholders, namely family members of PwFD, and the extent to which they can, or not, constrain inclusive volunteering. The paradigm posited by the social model could also be explored in detail in future research by means of a questionnaire. An in-depth study of the barriers experienced according to the personal characteristics of the PwFD could also be considered in future research.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

PwFD People with Functional Diversity

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