

Making Things Happen in Debian

Reflections from two DPL terms

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Agenda

- 1 DPL Changelog
- 2 Methods
- 3 Lessons learned

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Fun fact: Local media coverage

- It took two days until Sruthi was *in Indian media*
- It took more than two years until I made it into German media.

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2024-08: Bug of the Day

- Initial idea: Demonstrate how to fix bugs to newcomers
- Work on packages on Salsa, Debian's collaboration platform
- Pick packages with long-overdue uploads

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2025-01: Stop posting on X

- Publicity team no longer posts on X
- Platform no longer aligned with our values
- Don't feed it our valuable content

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2025-10: Creating Archive and DFSG team

- Historically grown situation changed thanks to a hint born inside the team
- Splitting responsibilities of distinct tasks
- Timed to follow the Trixie release
- Make new processing more transparent
- Faster processing
- Fresh blood with new ideas turned into code
- More licenses in `/usr/share/common-licenses?`

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2026-01: Empty delegation of Data Protection team

- All previous members stated to step back — and insisted on publishing this
- Responsible and transparent handover
- ... even if triggering *lots* of unhelpful offers to help from non-DDs
- Solved by naming the problem publicly

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2026-04: Refreshing delegations

- Discussion came up on debian-private with good arguments
- Announced in Bits (2026-02)
- Confirmed by DPL candidate on debian-vote (2026-03)
- More controversial than expected
- Governance is hard
- Silence is hard to parse

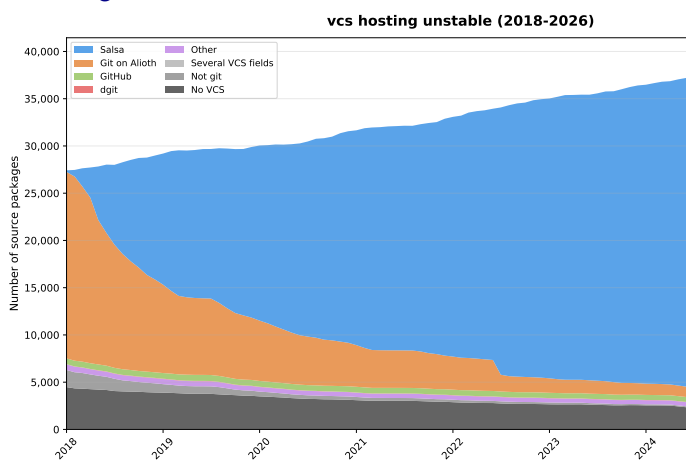
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Collaborative maintenance

- Salsa: our main collaboration platform — fewer than 2000 packages missing
- Professionalism in process is what makes volunteer projects scale
- Strict maintainership: historically sensible, increasingly a source of friction
- Hard to know whether package orphaned or just needs no work
- Silence was hard to interpret and hard to accept for me
- I pushed too hard without seeking consensus first

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Vcs hosting in unstable



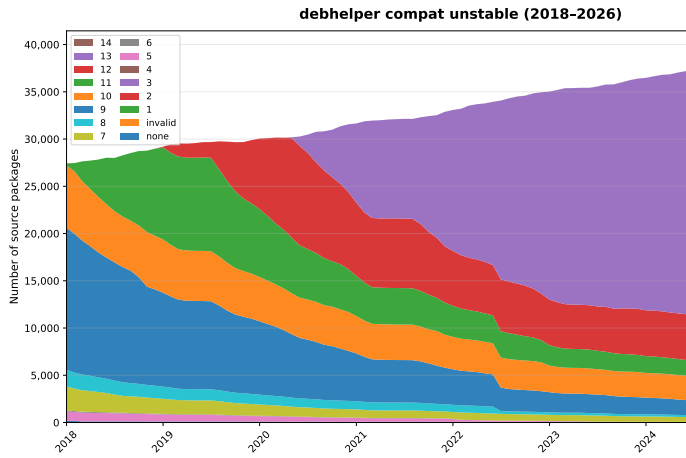
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Package modernisation trends

- Migration to short-form dh rules
- Widespread adoption of debhelper compat 13
- DEP5 copyright
- cdb's removed from unstable

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Debhelper compat level, no cdb's



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MIA

- MIA team is MIA
- No means to track inactive accounts
- Combined with strict maintainership, orphaned packages are hard to act on
- No solution in my two terms

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Review

- Talk to other DDs
- Ask for review

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My usage of LLMs

- Communication in foreign language
- Communication in different cultures
- Controlling emotions
- Focusing on topic
- Neutral interpretation of ambiguous responses

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LLMs — a legitimate tool

- Tool for clarity, not a ghostwriter
- Not depersonalisation but responsibility
- I own the intent — LLM helps with the expression

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Usage of LLMs as editor not author

- I provide a precise description of the situation
- I give a clear definition of my goals
- I write the draft myself
- LLM refines — never generates — my draft
- I review and own the final result

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Lessons learned

- Listen carefully to the community
- Select the parts that are promising
- Focus on specific and reachable goals
- Courage to make hard decisions
- Don't fear pushback
- Ensure cooperation of volunteers who back this decision
- Acknowledge mistakes openly
- Change is possible

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Lessons learned about Debian culture

- Someone steps up and picks up tasks that need doing
- Everyone benefits, nobody feels responsible
- Stepping back gracefully is harder than stepping up
- Positive exception: Data Protection team

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More lessons learned

- Opinions are more diverse and divergent than expected
- Whatever I said, the interpretation was "DPL has said"
- It took one year to understand things and another year to change things.

"Everything must change so that everything can stay the same."

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa

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