

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



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Pillar 2: SOLIDARITY and Democracy **Theme 4: Volunteering** **Teasers**

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What are we talking about?

This theme looks at volunteering, as a means of civic engagement for and by young people. It also covers the relevance and value of voluntary service types of intervention, particularly in two respects: for **young people as citizens**, and for **young people's competences**, particularly in relation to the job market. This theme may also cover the relevance of **international programmes**, through which young people can have learning mobility opportunities. The practices considered here are exchange / voluntary service programmes.

“Volunteering pertains to all forms of voluntary activity —at home or abroad, informal or formal, part-time or full-time—undertaken of a volunteer's own free will for the general public good without concern for financial gain. Volunteering is an essential part of contemporary societies, and its importance as an educational experience, a form of social participation, a factor of integration and an instrument for the development of active citizenship”¹

Civic engagement

Through volunteering, young people are made aware of society from different perspectives beyond their family, school and peer group.

Opportunity to help others or work to promote a cause.

Activities with older generations fosters intergenerational communication.

Fosters a 'gift' mentality where the return is not monetary nor a direct or immediate benefit to self.

Trust predicts volunteering

Torney-Purta, et al. (2004) found, youth institutional trust, in particular, directly predicts a range of forms of civic and political participation, including voting, volunteering, joining a political party, and writing letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns.

Religious, political and ideological (cause oriented) organisations represent important volunteering opportunities for young people. Opportunities for young people to volunteer are uneven both between and within countries.

Volunteering is associated with higher socio-economic status

Two of the main indices of socio-economic status, education and income, are both independently related to political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996), to interest in politics, voting and the absence of a cynical view of politics and politicians (Bynner et al., 2003), and to the likelihood of volunteering, attending community meetings and working on neighbourhood problems (Foster-Bey, 2008).

Recent evidence shows significant national clustering of attitudes towards volunteering

¹ EU-CoE youth partnership: <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/voluntary-activities?desktop=true>

Trends in attitudes towards the efficacy of volunteering are clustered as shown in the evidence from the [MYPLACE project](#) which collected questionnaire data from almost 17,000 young people in 30 locations in 14 different countries between Sept 2012 and April 2013 (Ellison and Pollock 2014).

Respondents were asked about their views on the “[Effectiveness of Working in Voluntary Associations and Organisations](#)” (see page 186 of the hyperlinked document). This was an 11-point scale (0-10, where 10 = most effective).

The overall mean is 5.30 (n=16,313, sd=2.55). Mean responses vary by location with the highest mean score in Kuopio (Finland) with 6.39, and the lowest mean score in Forstate & Jaunbuve (Latvia) with 3.56.

There was some clustering of locations, with locations in Spain and eastern Germany in the top third, indicating higher beliefs in the effectiveness of participation in voluntary organisations. Locations in Latvia, Hungary, and Croatia were, clustered in the bottom third, indicating less effectiveness. Most countries had similar mean scores between the two locations; a notable exception was Russia (Vyborg and Kupchino), with a 1.3 point difference between two mean scores.

In recent years, mainly since the European Year for Volunteering in 2011, volunteering opportunities and recognition of contributions continued to be promoted and included in a diversity of CoE and EU programmes and initiatives, such as in the funding of the European Youth Foundation, Erasmus+ (Youth in Action), Europe for Citizens, European Solidarity Corps, EU Aid Volunteers and also in the framework of 2013 European Year of Citizens. Below, you can find more details about some of the initiatives.

The European and international youth movement namely the [European Youth Forum](#) (YFJ) and the [Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations](#) have been actively contributing to the promotion and recognition of voluntary activities. For example, the YFJ, approved in 2011 a [Resolution on the Rights Based Approach to Volunteering](#). A rights-based approach to volunteering establishes volunteers and volunteering providers as active rights-holders and creates corresponding duties for responsibility-holders. In the framework of the European Year of Volunteering it was also developed a [Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers](#) that appeals to European, National and Local Authorities and all other relevant stakeholders for designing and updating policies related to volunteering.

The reality of (youth) volunteerism is very diverse in Europe. There are several countries that have national volunteering schemes, but the format and approach can be very different. It is not the same to have punctual mobilisation of youth volunteers to support logistical organisation of youth and sports’ large scale events or to promote more structured opportunities that see volunteering assignments as an educational opportunity and that implies pedagogical and mentoring responsibilities for the promoters. In addition, legal environments and frameworks are also different and rights and duties are understood, promoted and protected in different ways (and consequently recognition also differs). The issue of remuneration of volunteers is also an old debate that relates, among other issues, to cultural

background of the practice and social and economic reality. In addition, online volunteering is still something new and from local to European levels this could be further explored to allow the engagement of more young people. In a Europe that in some contexts being a volunteer is also being an activist and a human rights defender, the issue of assuring the conditions to volunteer and the protection of the volunteers is something that also needs debate and further action.

Is there a legal framework on volunteerism in your country? And national volunteerism schemes? Are they adapted to the specificities of youth volunteerism?

How could the opportunities for volunteering be widened to include a broader cross section of society?

Are there any groups that are systematically excluded from volunteering?

What are the prospects for online volunteering?

How can we assure the rights and protection of volunteers in more challenging contexts?

Voluntary organisations facilitate youth citizenship and develop their competencies

The concept of the good citizen promotes community values and social solidarity. Participation in voluntary work facilitates learning and skill development which enhances employment prospects. Voluntary organisations act as mediators between young people and more formal societal structures.

The EU is investing in volunteering

EU funds directly finance the *European Social Fund (ESF)* and the *ESF* – where **volunteering** is viewed as important as is demonstrated through the Your First European Employment Services, ‘EURES Job search initiative’, which has the remit to provide at least 10,000 **volunteering** opportunities and a framework for high quality traineeships (European Commission, 2011; 2012).

Does volunteering really facilitate positive labour market outcomes?

While there is an intuitive causal link which suggests that to be involved in voluntary work there is a likely enhancement to an individuals’ employment prospects, there is evidence to suggest that this may not actually be the case. A study by Paine et al. (2013) using the longitudinal British Household Panel Survey, which is able to track career development through time, found that the evidence for a positive effect was at best weak. This held true for both entry to work and for wage progression. This finding is echoed by researchers looking to see if voluntary work can be a way of enhancing the skills of the unemployed in order to facilitate them getting jobs

(Kamerāde 2013).

In 2014, the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe became the 1st European structure of its kind to officially acknowledge the work of thousands of youth work volunteers. The [VTR](#) (volunteer time recognition) method was introduced to valorise volunteer time contribution in grant applications and reports for work plans and international activities and for pilot activities. The methodology used to calculate VTR is based on specific criteria.

On the 20th anniversary of EVS, the European Commission has communicated an [EVS Factsheet and Impacts](#). It is shared that In twenty years, 100 000 volunteers between 17-30 years old had the opportunity to be engaged in initiatives with a duration between 2-12 months (in some cases shorter experiences such as 2 weeks). The EVS volunteering assignment is a unique opportunity to contribute to the work of an organisation and at the same time to develop volunteer's competences. When asked about how they believe the EVS experience has affected them, EVS participants' responses highlight the development of language skills and intercultural competences, a stronger interest and awareness on European issues, strengthening of self-confidence and the ability to manage personal finances, improvement of their team work skills and the opportunity to identify future opportunities for personal and professional development. As to the main impact in the local communities where the projects took place, project managers underlined that through participation in the initiatives, EVS participants developed their practices and values on tolerance, solidarity, respect and mutual understanding. In addition, the local communities became also more aware of the needs and aspirations of young people.

Competences developed in the framework of informal and non-formal learning, such as in volunteering related activities, have been also valued and tools have been developed and adapted for their recognition in the labour market, for example through the [YouthPass](#). Recently these competences can also gain further recognition in the framework of the recent revision process of EuroPass and the Key Competences framework.

What should be the primary motivating factors for a young person to undertake voluntary work?

Should a national educational curriculum include a component which encourages volunteering?

How can the visibility and recognition of volunteering related competences and experiences in the labour market be improved?

International mobility programmes

Language, intercultural understanding and broader social, historical and political awareness is increased through educational mobility programmes.

Increased international experience benefits individuals, organisations and commercial activity.

The ERASMUS student mobility scheme, and its associated programmes, has been, since 1987, the most effective vehicle for student mobility in a national, cultural and linguistically diverse region anywhere in the world. While the scheme has succeeded in achieving staggering levels of flows of young people across Europe (Rodríguez González et al. 2011), these experiences are enjoyed by a relatively narrow, although slightly broadening, socio-economic class (Otero 2008). The scheme aims to remove the financial barriers to student mobility and provide access to all but this has yet to be realised. It has been argued that there is a need to emphasise the practical benefits in order to broaden participation (Souto-Otero et al. 2013). A major evaluation of the Scheme from the perspective of students, employers and teachers found that the benefits to students are to significantly enhance the international dimension of their future professional life, making them attractive employees for organisations working in an international environment (Janson et al. 2009).

The main youth volunteering programme in Europe is the European Voluntary Service (EVS) promoted in the framework of Erasmus+ (Youth in Action). EVS offers young people aged 17-30 the chance to volunteer in another Member State as well as outside the EU. The European Voluntary Service started in 1996.

More recently, another two volunteering initiatives were launched: the [European Solidarity Corps](#) and the [EU Aid Volunteers](#). The European Solidarity Corps (launched in December 2016) allows young people to volunteer (or work) in projects for the benefit of communities and people around Europe. The European Solidarity Corps is open to people between the ages of 18 to 30.

The second initiative is not limited to young people, the minimum age is 18 years but there is no upper limit. EU Aid Volunteers brings together volunteers and organisations from different countries, providing practical support to humanitarian aid projects and contributing to strengthening the local capacity and resilience of disaster-affected communities.

Other volunteerism related initiatives include the [European Youth Portal](#) that has a [Volunteering Database](#) where young people can find information about current volunteering opportunities. The European Commission also supports Member States through the promotion of exchange of experiences through the Expert Group on the Mobility of Young Volunteers across the EU.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, in his Five-Year Action Agenda (2012-2016) recognised the enormous potential of young people to contribute positively to their societies and announced a specific measure to “create a UN youth volunteers programme under the umbrella of UN Volunteers”. As stated in the report (A/70/118) of the UN Secretary General “[Integrating volunteering in the next decade](#)” that includes a 2016-2030 Action Plan: “youth volunteerism not only engages that large segment of the population in positive activities that contribute to peace and development, but also bolsters the personal growth and employability of young people.”

How can we improve access to international mobility and volunteering programmes?

What is the role of online volunteering in international programmes?

Is it relevant to extend volunteering opportunities beyond Europe (assignments and participants)?

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