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**YOUTH RESEARCH**

## **Council of Europe & European Commission Youth Research Partnership**

**How does the voluntary engagement of young people enhance  
their active citizenship and solidarity?**

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**Report**

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## Contents

CONTENTS .....	2
1. INTRODUCTION .....	3
2 POLITICAL CONTEXT .....	3
3. EMPIRICAL PICTURE.....	5
3.1 <i>Who volunteers?</i> .....	5
3.2 <i>Regional differences</i> .....	5
3.3 <i>National programmes and mobility</i> .....	5
3.4 <i>Improving data</i> .....	6
4. LEARNING CITIZENSHIP FROM VOLUNTEERING .....	6
5. EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES .....	8
6. THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND VOLUNTEERING .....	9
7. BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION .....	10
7.1 <i>Obligation</i> .....	10
7.2 <i>Financial and legal barriers</i> .....	10
7.3 <i>Young people with less opportunities</i> .....	11
7.4 <i>Access to information and uptake of opportunities</i> .....	11
7.5 <i>Time</i> .....	12
7.6 <i>Negative image of volunteers</i> .....	12
7. RECOMMENDATIONS .....	12
7.1 <i>Recommendations of Working Group 1: Citizenship</i> .....	12
7.2 <i>Recommendations of Working Group 2: Obstacles</i> .....	12
7.3 <i>Recommendations of Working Group 3: Recognition and Promotion</i> .....	13
8. DEFINITIONS .....	14
PARTICIPANTS .....	14

## **1. Introduction**

This research seminar brought together researchers from across the wider Europe with practitioners and policy makers in order to develop a better understanding of volunteering at a European level and to help provide policy makers with a guide to implementing youth policy on voluntary activities, namely the implementation of European Common Objectives on voluntary activities. In comparison with research seminars on topics of participation, inter-cultural dialogue and non-formal learning the research field of youth volunteering is less well developed and in this sense the research seminar provided a starting point for bringing together knowledge on volunteering across Europe and a provided momentum for further research in this field.

The European Common Objectives identify that voluntary activities should be orientated towards young people's active citizenship, and sense of solidarity and towards social cohesion. This discourse is mirrored in national government debates such as the UK 'Civil Renewal' agenda (Goodchild and Stanely) to address the increasing individualisation and the decline of traditional forms of active participation by young people in civil society, and to resolve intercultural conflicts. The seminar highlighted critical issues such as: How do we know when voluntary activities have given young people citizenship skills and a sense of solidarity? What criteria should be established to ensure this success? How do we enable young people with fewer opportunities to participate? How many volunteers do we want? How many young volunteers do we need in Europe?

The focus of the research seminar and subsequently this report is on three different policy aims for volunteering: first the relationship to citizenship and solidarity, second, the relationship to employment and social inclusion, and third the relationship to the provision of social welfare. This report then focuses on the barriers to young people's participation on volunteering, in particular examining the barriers for people with less opportunities.

The final section of this report contains recommendations created by working groups in the seminar. These recommendations were presented by the European Commission to the Council youth working group (representatives of national administrations in the youth field) who were discussing the draft Resolution on common objectives for voluntary activities of young people. The European Commission also informed the Committee of the Regions about the seminar and its results at its meeting on the Committee's position on the Commission proposal for common objectives in the field of voluntary activities of young people.

## **2 Political context**

The European Union countries have created Common Objectives on volunteering through a process known as the Open Method of Coordination which was organised by the European Commission Youth Unit. The process involved national governments answering questions on the reality of volunteering in their countries and their future

policy direction regarding this field. The answers were gathered together in a synthesis report by the Youth Unit, and Common Objectives were proposed and adopted by the European Council. The European Common Objectives identify that voluntary activities should be orientated towards young people's active citizenship, sense of solidarity and social cohesion. The Common Objectives cover the development of voluntary activities, removing the obstacles to participation, the promotion of voluntary activities and recognition for participation in voluntary activities. These objectives are oriented towards the dissemination of existing opportunities, increasing the number of opportunities, reducing the barriers to participation, and facilitating the ability of young people with fewer opportunities to participate. This seminar brought together the research evidence to assist the Member States in implementing these Common Objectives.

The European Commission European Voluntary Service (EVS) is one action of the YOUTH Programme that funds voluntary activities for young people. The EVS allows around 3500 young people between the age of 15-18 to engage in volunteering in a big variety of areas, and has with a funding of approximately 33 million EURO this year. The EVS scheme is considered a quality model for trans-national voluntary service. A key element is the balance between providing a service to the community and non-formal learning: young volunteers receive training and acquire important new skills and competences which can enhance their employability. A European Certificate is issued upon the end of the service.

The European Parliament and Council of Ministers have produced a Recommendation on Mobility within the Community for Students, Persons Undergoing Training, Volunteers, Teachers and Trainers (2001/613/EC). The Recommendation states that involvement in trans-national voluntary activities helps to shape young people's future careers, develop their social skills and smooth their integration into society, thereby fostering the development of an active citizenship. It also emphasizes that not recognising the specific nature of voluntary work is a hindrance to the mobility of volunteers. Therefore it states that Member States should consider the removal of legal and administrative obstacles

The Council of Europe are currently evaluating the success of their Recommendation and Convention on trans-national and long-term volunteering. The Recommendation is towards national governments to create a definition of voluntary services that emphasises both educational aspects and importance for society and promote voluntary services. It also recommends removal of the difficulties for volunteering across national boundaries in Europe, in particular for central and Eastern European countries, and the financial support of individuals or groups who wish to volunteer on a European level. It finally recommends encouraging increased co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe, in order to create an appropriate political, legal and financial framework of support for voluntary service in all European countries. The Convention, which as yet is not ratified, sets a legal framework for trans-national volunteering providing details of the roles and procedures of all the actors involved in the sending, hosting and participation in volunteer activities.

### **3. Empirical picture**

#### *3.1 Who volunteers?*

The typical volunteer across Europe is female (Moskwiak), educated and from a relatively wealthy background (Stanely). The educated and wealthy have better access to information (Gran), better understanding of the skills that will be learnt, more likely to have the language skills needed and can afford to take time away from paid work. The gender difference, i.e. greater voluntary participation by young women, has been attributed to women's traditional relationship to the labour market as marginal players with stereotypical roles that place less expectation on them to achieve paid or career jobs (Minguez). Now that the benefits of volunteering on intercultural, citizenship, inclusion and key skills for the labour market have been highlighted, the need to equally include young male volunteers has become an issue. In many European countries national agencies have been finding ways to include more young men in EVS projects (Moskwiak).

#### *3.2 Regional differences*

In the former communist countries/ new member states of the European Union, volunteering has a historical link to communist ideology where citizens were expected to be involved in community improvements (Moskwiak) in 'so called' (Schroer) voluntary activities, thus leading to a negative image of this activity. Although many people were involved in NGO activity in spite of the regimes present, this was not considered to be volunteering (Moskwiak). Thus the involvement in volunteering was slow to restart in the new democracies of Europe. However, in the last couple of years volunteering by young people has increased as information about the different possibilities increased with countries such as Poland being well oversubscribed for the EVS programme (Moskwiak).

Civil society as a whole, and in particular volunteering grew rapidly during the 1990's in southern Europe, in particular Italy, Spain and France (Sudulich). These voluntary activities were no longer linked to the traditional organisers of volunteering, such as political institutions which people had lost trust and faith in, and there were fewer volunteers connected to religious and ideological work. Thus it was the informal and new forms of volunteering in which the numbers grew.

In contrast, in the UK participation in volunteering, in particular regular activities, has been decreasing. There was a lack of data on young people volunteering on other countries in northern Europe.

#### *3.3 National programmes and mobility*

National civic service exists in Germany, Italy, France, Luxembourg and Czech Republic (EU working paper on voluntary activities). Most national volunteer programmes are designed to meet national interests and allow national citizens (Italy) or EU citizens (France) to participate (Schoer). The Czech Republic, Germany and Poland allow third country residence to participate (Schoer). Some national schemes are only held within the

countries borders (Germany) whilst others send young citizens abroad to third countries (Italy and France) (Schoer). The relationship between national civic service programmes and military service is discussed later in section 6 of this report.

### *3.4 Improving data*

Trends in volunteering are difficult to establish as until now across Europe there have been differing definitions of volunteering and varying amounts and quality in the collection of data (EC working paper on voluntary activities). With definitions now established (see section on definitions) and with the creation of the European Knowledge Centre (youth-knowledge.net accessible from 30 April 2005), a database that will collect data from across Europe on this topic, a better knowledge of volunteering across Europe can be developed.

## **4. Learning citizenship from volunteering**

Voluntary activities are one form of non-formal learning that provides learning opportunities through doing activities and participating in experiences. They differ from formal learning experiences through their 'voluntary' nature and that learning in itself is not the explicit goal. Voluntary activities as with other forms of non-formal learning, have been less documented, and the learning of citizenship skills has rested on 'intuition' (Stanley) rather than hard evidence. Certification of skills and competencies learned can be seen as the first step to providing the evidence. One example given at this seminar was the Finnish study book where young people can demonstrate learning of skills such as communication and problem solving (Airaksinen). The book is divided into subsections of different learning areas that young people can demonstrate in voluntary or leisure activities areas, including 'international activities and 'holding positions of trust and responsibility within NGOs' (Airaksinen).

It was made clear at the seminar that all voluntary activities *per se* do not teach citizenship or intercultural values. Along with certification quality criteria needs to be established that help develop and maintain opportunities that provide these beneficial experiences for young people. Kristensen defined quality as living up to expectations. It is these expectations that need to be defined and criteria given for their success. The expectation may differ on national and local levels but the expectations for European youth policy are towards citizenship (preferably European) and building a sense of solidarity or social cohesion. Using the results from the research seminar on political participation, citizenship was defined at the start of this research seminar as:

*'Citizenship is a wider concept than a legal or civil status and is linked to people's willingness and ability to actively participate in society (Dwyer 2000). Also, citizenship is no longer limited to the structures of the nation-state (Delanty 2000) but is performed when citizens take responsibility in their relations to a wide range of private and public institutions. Applying the broader approach to citizenship, Roker and Eden (2002) develop a concept of constructive social participation. It encompasses various social actions: formal voluntary work, informal community networks, neighbourliness, informal political action, awareness-raising, altruistic acts, and caring work at home and the community, through which young people 'participate in their communities and influence policies and practices in the world around them' (Roker and Eden, 2002:7)' (see seminar report on political participation).*

Citizenship and social cohesion have many different aspects of learning, such as intercultural learning and human rights, that help young people live together in the global and diverse environment in Europe. The training courses on training run by the Council of Europe and European Commission partnership work towards training youth workers to assist young people to achieve these skills through activities such as volunteering.

The UK government set as the criteria for the success of volunteering? The aim of creating citizenship as community cohesion, active citizenship and cross cultural work and is in the process of creating indicators for this (Goodchild). Stanley suggested that civil engagement could be seen from patterns of informal social engagements with family and friends, participation in voluntary and community organisations and engagement public realm. AmeriCorps volunteer programme has been considered a good model for national volunteer programmes to follow as there is some evaluation, although incomplete, to suggest that the young people who have participated in the year long programme have developed a long term ethic of civic responsibility (Stanley).

Murtz's research in Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Hungary, UK and Spain interestingly demonstrated a link between voluntary activities and the learning of social solidarity, social affiliation and social capital (another way to break down some of the aspects of citizenship). The requirements for this learning were: active participation, self-determination and responsibility given to the young people. These were reaffirmed by Kristensen who highlighted that self-reliance and taking responsibility with support before, during and after the experience were quality criteria for the success of a mobility project. Machin supplied evidence that young people were not satisfied with their voluntary experience if they were given less opportunities than older volunteers to participate fully in the activities. But it not just self-responsibility but direction and control – this means that young people may have objectives different to that of the organisation or to the policies it would wish.

Other necessary criteria for learning citizenship were seen to be the 'longer and more intense the engagement, the more sustainable the learning process', but experiences that were overwhelming with no pedagogical support and reflection were not effective (Mutz and Kristensen). Despite the evidence that preparation, support during activities and reflection are criteria for learning citizenship skills Germany and the Czech Republic were the only countries known to support the pedagogical training needed by volunteers on national voluntary schemes (Schoer). The difficulty also remains in transferring the new learning into the daily lives of young people. The requirements for the transfer of these skills into their everyday environment were said by Murtz to need personal and societal recognition of achievements.

Most national voluntary programmes work on national agendas and in national borders, lessening the likelihood of learning European citizenship. International programmes such as European Voluntary Service are therefore very much needed. The added value to performing voluntary activities abroad, such as in European Voluntary Services, are said by Kristensen to be the experiencing of another culture and the experience of

geographical distance from home. These factors offer the opportunity for intercultural learning through ‘transformative’ learning processes where everyday practices are performed differently and subsequently challenge currently held ‘mental programmes’. The distance from home allows the open space to explore the differences and new identities. The emphasis was always placed on the need for reflection and pedagogical support, this is reaffirmed by recent research that reveals that travel such as gap years before university reinforces stereotypes of other cultures rather than challenges them (Stanely).

The need was highlighted for further research to take place to define clearly indicators for the learning of citizenship so that volunteering programmes can orient these programmes more precisely towards these outcomes.

## ***5. Employment, social inclusion and voluntary activities***

European policy has stressed the need for increasing basic skills in order to drive the knowledge economy of Europe to compete internationally (Lisbon 2010 agenda). These skills, such as intercultural competences and foreign languages, can be learned through non-formal learning experiences such as European voluntary activities (Kristensen).

The link between volunteering and employment is quite controversial in the dilemma between altruism and benefits for the individual. However, in particular in the new member states of the EU and in south east European countries where unemployment is high and there are shortages of skills, the benefits of volunteering can not be ignored. Young people across the wider Europe lack work experience; the transition into the labour market is difficult for young people who have not worked or who are long term unemployed, leaving them susceptible to social exclusion and a loss of identity within the community (Karajkov). Karajkov described how unemployment leads to a sense of isolation and a lack of self-worth. It is difficult to imagine how young people can be European citizens and feel a sense of solidarity without access to the labour market. Volunteering can contribute to an increase in confidence as well as skills needed for the labour market (Karajkov).

In Poland (Moskwiak) and the Czech Republic (Schroer), where unemployment is very high in particular for young people, voluntary activities are considered by some to be a professional experience where young people can learn key skills that are useful for the labour market. In the Czech Republic there is a scheme ‘volunteering for unemployed people’ involving young people 4 days a week in NGO work (Schroer). In Germany they have launched a ‘voluntary social training year’ targeted at people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Schroer). In Poland young people, in order to ‘help themselves’, are therefore applying more and more to voluntary schemes such as EVS (Moskwiak). The young people in the EVS schemes identify that they learn international, language, interpersonal and intercultural skills. However, the difficulty in Poland is that many employers prefer formal qualifications and do not recognise voluntary experiences as learning environments or value the learning that has taken place (Moskwiak).



Regine Schoer, highlighted that young disadvantaged were encouraged to take a year of voluntary work in the profit sector to increase their chances of being employed and integrated into the professional world. The danger is that voluntary activities can be used as unpaid labour substituting the normal paid workforce or used as 'free' training programmes taking the responsibility for paying workers and running training programmes, away from government and private enterprise (Musiala). There was a real concern that vocational training could be understood as a voluntary activity (Schoer). As a result of these dangers there is a resistance to recognising the link between labour market skills and competence development by volunteering (Musiala).

## **6. The provision of social welfare and volunteering**

In Europe the third sector is becoming increasingly important as the quality of care and social protection of citizens is seen as important as economic markets in the development of society (Minguez). Increasingly across Europe NGOs are being called upon to play their role to help provide public service as with the aging population financial resources are stretched to meet the demands (Schoer). NGOs are well placed to perform this role because they are flexible, able to access private money towards public goals and at the same time are training skilled workers (Minguez). The third sector is made up both from volunteers and paid employment. Research across the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Hungary and Denmark gave a calculation of 19 million paid workers and involving 1.1 billion dollars that is much greater than private enterprise (Minguez). 28% of the population in these countries volunteer which means the total contribution of the third sector is vast. Typically the areas of focus of this engagement are in education, health and social services, sport and recreational activities, defence of civil rights and environmental organisations. The contribution of the third sector, and in particular volunteers to civil society, is large and until recently forgotten (Minguez). For example, in Spain the whole welfare state, in particular child care, relies on family 'volunteers' many of which are women.

Some countries that have abolished or are in the process of abolishing compulsory military service (Germany, France and Italy) have or are now creating schemes for national voluntary service. This is clearly linked to the social welfare system which in these countries, and in particular Germany and Italy, has relied heavily on the enforced placements of conscientious objectors. With the removal of compulsory service this workforce has been or will be lost. The hope is that voluntary service by young people will fill the gap. Poland and the Czech Republic may also face these difficulties if they too decide to stop compulsory military service (Schoer).

In total in order to meet the demands for social welfare in Europe there will need to be an increase in the numbers of volunteers working in the third sector (Regine Schoer). The risk of the third sector becoming the service provider is that organisations perform the work needed by government rather than focusing on critical political engagement (Minguez). Goodchild questioned whether young people would still want to volunteer if volunteer work becomes too closely connected with implementing government policy and providing a workforce for social welfare.

## **7. Barriers to participation**

From the empirical picture it was possible to see that participating in voluntary activities is more prevalent amongst certain types of young people than others. In the section of the seminar that discussed barriers to participation the reason for this different levels of participation was explored and a number of proposals were presented

### *7.1 Obligation*

Leaving home to perform EVS in another country is not a possibility for all young people as many have obligations that prevent them leaving the home or the local community. Some young people across Europe hold religious beliefs. Those with strong beliefs, as Gran pointed out, may have obligation to religious activities which could be difficult to practice in the host country/family/ organisation, such as dietary requirements, fasting, stopping work at particular days/ times, and attending religious facilities. Gran also noted that young people may hold family obligations such as providing care for their own children or looking after siblings or elder family members.

### *7.2 Financial and legal barriers*

The family obligation could also take the form of financial support and responsibility (Gran). Many young people simply may not be able to afford to take up unpaid voluntary activities. Pocket money is given in many countries but the level of money and the consequences for taxation depend on the country that the volunteer is working in (Schroer). In some countries in Europe, taking up voluntary activities means that unemployment benefit and or other forms of social protection such as paying for pensions and health care is stopped (Musiala). Family and/or child benefits are stopped in some European countries when young people volunteer abroad (Schoer). The EVS scheme gives compensation toward the loss of some social protection through a private scheme but not all voluntary activity programmes have this possibility and, depending on the situation this may not be enough (Musiala). Weekly income has been utilised with some success in the UK where it can be understood as facilitating participation for those who would not normally be able to afford it rather than rewarding it with money (Kate Stanley). Complications of providing financial help for voluntary activities are the legal status and whether it is then considered employment requiring taxation, social security, healthcare and pension schemes. Many countries do not have a standard legal status for volunteering and those countries that do have different arrangements for different countries (EC working paper on voluntary activities). Without a common legal framework across Europe for volunteers it remains difficult to maintain minimum standards for transnational volunteers in terms of pocket money (Schroer), social protection, taxation and recognition by formal education or employers (Musiala). As Musiala highlighted, a minimum level of 'social security, covering illness, accident, civil liability and repatriation' is required. Some countries are trying to implement the CoE convention or the recommendation created by the European Parliament and European Council on mobility 2001 (EU analysis report) to achieve a basis for definitions and standards, but more effort is required to achieve this.

### *7.3 Young people with less opportunities*

In general it is the wealthy and the highest educated who participate in voluntary activities. The take up from this group is very high and when evaluation focuses predominantly upon numbers it is easy to see why there is little advantage to be gained in trying to engage young people with less opportunities in voluntary schemes (Stanley). Civic engagement is lowest amongst disadvantaged groups. As such, young disadvantaged people have the most to gain from volunteering aimed at active citizenship as they are the group which claims that it has the least influence on public policy and could profit from learning active engagement. However, as Kate Stanley described, they are the group which are most difficult to get involved. One barrier to participation has been the lack of financial resources. As mentioned above it is often impossible for young people to take unpaid work when they need to support themselves and/or their families. It takes significantly more resources in money and extra support given to involve disadvantaged young people and achieve successful outcomes. Evaluation that includes qualitative information, for example on the learning experience, and examines the qualitative impact on young people's lives, greater trust and involvement in the political life, and reduction of youth crime was promoted at the research seminar as very necessary (Stanely).

One method to involve young people with less opportunities is through targeting schemes at these young people. However, targeting of young people with less opportunities can be difficult as it can stigmatise those involved. What Stanely proposed was a scheme that was made accessible to all so that people can work together from diverse backgrounds and therefore develop wider social networks.

### *7.4 Access to information and uptake of opportunities*

The information available to young people on voluntary activities is an important part of the door to open access on participation. Information is in general more open to groups from higher economic status and families with higher social capital. Television is the most accessed form of communication across Europe but is rarely used to promote volunteering programmes. The internet is a widely used format, such as the European Commissions tool youth-net.

Receiving information sometimes is not enough; it is important who gives the information. Closed knit groups and communities may not be open to information passed in from the outside (Gran). Information and encouragement to participate by family (Machin and Goodchild), by peers (Gran) or by personal experience of volunteers helping them (Goodchild) is usually the most successful in terms of uptake. Thus it is interpersonal relationships, rather than mass media approach, which was seen to be the motivator for taking up opportunities to volunteer (Goodchild). Young people rarely discuss their motivation in terms of wanting to become better citizens (Goodchild).

### *7.5 Time*

Volunteering has to compete with formal education (Machin). Young people with aspirations for university studies consider volunteering as competing with time spent on their studies. Young people often aspire and wish to be able to volunteer, as Machin's example for Scotland suggests but do not have the time to do so.

### *7.6 Negative image of volunteers*

Volunteering in countries such as the UK has an image of white, middle class, women doing good to the less fortunate (Kate Stanley). Such an image provides a barrier to young people, working class and those from different ethnic backgrounds.

## **7. Recommendations**

### **7.1 Recommendations of Working Group 1: Citizenship**

- The concept of volunteering ought to be promoted through formal and non-formal methods, such as citizenship education and peer training.
- It is necessary to identify the types of voluntary activities that provide added value to society, and eventually establish guidelines.
- Young people must participate in the design and administration of voluntary activities in order to reflect young people's view points. This would help to safeguard young people's autonomy, responsibility and motivation in the context of volunteering.
- The above should be reflected from a global perspective with a view to what Europe can contribute on a global level.

### **7.2 Recommendations of Working Group 2: Obstacles**

- The main recommendation for removing obstacles to young people's participation in voluntary activities is to build a European volunteering infrastructure.
- The purpose of this infrastructure would be to remove inconsistent practices and provide quality standards.
- The centre should have a brand name equated with quality.
- The European volunteering infrastructure would provide the following services in general:
  - Offer tools to countries and organisations that do not meet quality standards

- Support networks of volunteers, voluntary organisations, sending and hosting organisations
  - Fund projects
  - Carry out and fund research to gain a greater understanding and a better knowledge of voluntary activities
  - Facilitate the development of new forms of volunteering
  - Help build partnerships between sending and hosting organisations
  - Promote awareness for volunteering, in particular to the private economic sector
  - Provide training on all aspects of volunteering, including mentoring, supervision, recruitment and monitoring.
- The European volunteering infrastructure should provide the following services to organisations:
    - Provide minimum standards on sending and hosting
    - Work on removing the legal obstacles to volunteering
    - Provide standard application forms.
      - The European volunteering infrastructure should provide information:
        - Information should be provided to all actors on all aspects of volunteering
        - Information could take the form of booklets, Internet, databases, etc.
        - Information should be provided in all languages.
          - The European volunteering infrastructure should have a particular focus on young people:
            - It should provide tailor-made information to young people
            - It should ensure, in cooperation with national administrations, that laws are adopted on volunteering of young people
            - In cooperation with the national administrations it should also work towards the removal of obstacles
            - It should fund projects involving young people
            - It should offer support to young people (e.g. on filling in applications, etc.)

### **7. 3 Recommendations of Working Group 3: Recognition and Promotion**

- No unduly restrictive overarching definition should hinder voluntary activities of young people.
- Individual activities need to be defined within the larger framework of this definition.

- Potential skills acquisition needs to be defined.
- Acquisition processes (learning processes) should be identified.
- Young people's voluntary experiences need to be recognised both in formal and informal manner. Formal refers to access to employment and formal education systems, whilst informal access refer to status and recognition by families, peer groups, schools, work place, local communities etc.
- There should be a commitment to carry out evaluative research in order to improve and demonstrate quality.
- Voluntary activities should become part of career guidance and counselling in order that young people are aware of the possibilities for all forms of learning.
- All recommendations need a concerted effort by all Ministries and other authorities concerned.

## ***8. Definitions***

In Europe a wide variety of definitions exists surrounding the research that has taken place on voluntary activities. In order to facilitate the Member States' replies to the questionnaire the Commission has used the following definitions in the entire process of developing a proposal for common objectives. They are as follows:

**Voluntary activities** are understood as comprising all kinds of voluntary engagement. They are characterised by the following aspects: open to all, unpaid, undertaken of own free will, educational (non-formal learning aspect), added social value.

**Voluntary service** is understood as being part of voluntary activities and is characterised by the following additional aspects: fixed period (no matter if short or long-term), clear objectives, contents and tasks, structure and framework, appropriate support, legal and social protection.

**Civic service** is a voluntary service managed by the State or on behalf of the State e.g. in the social field or in civil protection.

**Civilian service** is an alternative to compulsory military service in some countries, but not voluntary.

## ***Participants***