



# Promoting the mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity

A practical toolbox for actors and stakeholders in the field of youth

*Developed by the Expert Group set up by the European  
Commission to support the process of reviewing the 2008  
Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers in Europe*



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# 1.0

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Toolbox contains good examples of practice related to cross-border volunteering and other solidarity activities in Europe, in order to inform and inspire actors interested in this space. The examples were identified by an Expert Group, set up under the aegis of the European Commission, and with a mandate to propose inputs for the review process of the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers in Europe.

The Expert Group was composed of experts appointed at national level as well as representatives of European-level actors and stakeholders (for a list of participating experts, see Annex I). The Expert Group based its work on an analysis of the situation concerning cross-border volunteering and solidarity in Europe, underpinned by an accompanying dedicated study<sup>1</sup>. The Group met between September 2019 and June 2020. The Group identified 15 themes that needed to be addressed and analysed these in order to identify more concrete messages. They also contributed practice examples to provide inspiration for actors and stakeholders responsible for implementing the proposed interventions in their activities. The key messages of the Group, and the submitted practice examples, feature in this Toolbox.

Immediately after the conclusion of the process leading up to the identification of the 15 themes, the Covid19-crisis struck, throwing the European voluntary sector into turmoil, as borders closed and rendered all activities involving transnational, physical mobility impossible. The Expert Group met again to reassess the material in the light of the crisis, but decided – albeit with small amendments and changes – to retain the 15 themes, as they were deemed relevant also in extreme situations like the one at hand.

The 15 themes are listed below, divided into three categories: organisational framework, participants and processes.

## 1.1 Organisational frameworks

**Capacity building:** Organisations and individuals working in the field of volunteering and solidarity should be supported to strengthen their capacity for implementing more – and more inclusive – cross-border mobility projects. This is not only a matter of ensuring financial sustainability, but also of providing opportunities for staff training and knowledge-sharing.

**Community involvement and impact:** It is important to acknowledge the role of the communities – both the sending and hosting communities – as important contributors to and recipients of the solidarity activities.

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1) PPMI, 2019. Removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities: Final Report

**Complementarity:** Regional, national and European schemes for volunteering and solidarity should be coordinated in order to exploit synergies and complementarity and avoid overlap and competition.

**Knowledge sharing and networking:** Existing platforms and networks must be better exploited as vehicles for knowledge-sharing in order to prevent valuable resources being spent reinventing the wheel. This goes for physical networks (e.g. through training courses and peer learning activities) as well as virtual platforms.

## 1.2 Participants

**Access:** Participation in cross-border volunteering and other solidarity activities should be a realistic proposal for all segments of the youth population, and not just the privileged few. Despite efforts over recent years leading up to 2019-20, young people with fewer opportunities are still underrepresented, so it is necessary to continue the work as well as developing new approaches for inclusion.

**Administrative obstacles:** Protracted and cumbersome administrative procedures need to be simplified, particularly visa applications for third country nationals participating in cross-border volunteering. Where feasible and relevant, application and reporting procedures should be digitalised to ease access to schemes.

**Awareness:** Information about opportunities should be made available to all young people, but information alone is not enough. Special measures must be taken to boost the motivation and commitment of young people to whom a cross-border experience is not necessarily a self-evident proposal.

**Protection:** The health and safety (both physical and mental) of participants in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities is of paramount importance in all phases – both before, during and after the event. Protection should also cover persons involved in an organising role as well as beneficiaries.

**Social and legal status:** The social and legal status of cross-border volunteers is in many cases unclear, and this can lead to loss of social security benefits both in the host country and in the home country upon return. Often these difficulties arise from the lack of a clear, common understanding of the phenomenon – in other words a European definition – of activities and those participating.

## 1.3 Processes

**Digital forms of volunteering and solidarity activities:** Digital forms of volunteering are well established, including in a cross-border context, and this needs to be reflected in policy documents. It can be used as a tool for inclusion as well as preparing young people for, and following up, on physical volunteering activities. It can also be used to replace volunteering in extreme cases, where physical mobility is not an option.

**The environmental context:** Cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities should, wherever feasible, take into account environmental issues (e.g. travel, resource consumption, food etc.) as an integral aspect of the work. Participants should be involved in reflections about the climate impact to make them environmentally conscious.

**Learning:** Cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities offer a valuable potential for non-formal learning, especially for young people with fewer opportunities. However, to fully exploit learning processes, these should be underpinned by structured preparation, mentoring/supervision and debriefing activities.

**Recognition:** To allow participants to use learning outcomes from volunteering and solidarity work both in the labour market and in a broader, societal context, the learning outcomes must be identified, described and, where feasible, validated and recognised. Existing European tools to aid this should be maximised, notably the Youthpass and Europass.

**Quality assurance:** Given the proliferation of opportunities for cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities – also in a commercial setting – it is vitally important to work on issues of quality to promote comparability and transparency, so that young people can make informed choices about participation.

**Research:** More research is needed on cross-border volunteering and solidarity, both to develop the quality of practices and to underpin policymaking with rigorous evidence. Special care must be taken to ensure that results of research projects are not compartmentalised in narrow segments but disseminated to all relevant actors and stakeholders in Europe.





**2.0**

INTRODUCTION



## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

This Toolbox is a short guide accompanying the revision process of the Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers in Europe from 2008. It has been developed by an Expert Group with experts from most European Member States as well as representatives of relevant European stakeholder organisations, set up under the aegis of the European Commission. The primary purpose of the group was one of providing expertise in support of the political process leading up to the Recommendation. However, as part of their mandate the group was also tasked with providing the draft for an accompanying “toolbox” with additional information and good examples of practice that could serve as information and inspiration for people responsible for implementing the proposed measures at European, national and regional levels.

The Expert Group convened regularly between September 2019 and September 2020 to discuss issues related to cross-border volunteering and solidarity in Europe, and to identify good examples of practice across Europe that could illustrate important aspects of the Recommendation. A full list of the members of the group can be found in Annex I at the back of this publication. Parallel to the work of the Expert Group and to complement this, the European Commission funded a European-wide study to throw light upon perceived obstacles to cross-border volunteering<sup>2</sup>.

At the end of the work period of the Expert Group, the Covid-19 crisis struck, radically changing the landscape of European cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities. During the last two meetings of the group, it was discussed how the toolbox could be made to cover even such extreme situations as the one caused by Covid-19. The findings of the experts with regard to the Covid-19 situation have been incorporated in the toolbox.

### 2.1 Why the Toolbox was created

The 2008 Recommendation addresses a number of issues related to cross-border volunteering, which were, by and large, still relevant in 2019/20. When it was deemed necessary to review and revise this, it was first and foremost because of new developments within the field which were not foreseen in 2008.

At an organisational level, the most notable of these developments was the launch in 2016 of the European Solidarity Corps, which replaced the European Voluntary Service (EVS) that had existed since 1996. Besides offering a significant boost in funding, the European Solidarity Corps also went beyond the EVS by introducing new types of activities, notably “jobs and traineeships”, which are remunerated work practice or employment opportunities for young people, allowing them to enhance their skills and experience while making a contribution to addressing important societal challenges. It is also anticipated that the current EU Aid Volunteering programme will be included in the European Solidarity Corps as an integral part, adding another dimension to the activities. Additionally, the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis has brought unprecedented

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2) PPMI, 2019. Removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities: Final Report



challenges to the organisation of cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities. These challenges have introduced a new dimension in terms of obstacles to these activities, which – due to its conspicuous impact on the said activities – is to be included in any revision of the 2008 Recommendation.

In terms of concrete developments, three trends – albeit that existed in incipient forms in 2008 – had since gathered such momentum that they needed to be addressed in a revised Recommendation:

- **Cybervolunteering:** This is also known as “digital volunteering”, “virtual volunteering” and “online volunteering”. This is volunteering that does not involve any physical presence or mobility but is undertaken via the internet. Not all volunteering activities lend themselves to cybervolunteering, but many nevertheless involve tasks that can be undertaken at a distance using IT. Cybervolunteering provides new opportunities for less mobile segments of youth and may also be used to underpin, complement and prepare for later physical mobility. Cybervolunteering is also particularly relevant in times where physical mobility is not a possibility.
- **Voluntourism:** This is a concept that refers to the practice of combining volunteering and holidays, where people participate in volunteering as an integrated part of a touristic experience. Many tour operators and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have identified a business potential in this and have been offering travel packages that include a volunteering experience abroad. This activity started gaining popularity in the 1990s but has since gathered momentum and by 2018 had developed into what the European Volunteer Centre called “a multi-billion Euro industry” (CEV, 2018). This had raised some concern among actors and stakeholders, since the introduction of a financial motive also opens up to risks of misuse, where the quality of the volunteers’ stay is compromised by concerns for profit and/or where volunteering activities are offered that make little or no difference to the environment where they are located – or even have harmful consequences by depriving local people of employment opportunities (job substitution).
- **Service learning:** This denotes placements that are undertaken in a solidarity context, but as part of the curriculum of a formal education programme. In its grounding in formal education and training, it differs from other forms of volunteering and solidarity activities, which primarily take place in a non-formal and informal context. Service learning is thus in a “grey zone” between volunteering and formal education.

Finally, the Experts thought that the increased focus on the *climate crisis* must also be reflected in activities that involve large numbers of people moving across borders in Europe.

## 2.2 How the Toolbox was created

The Expert Group identified 15 thematic areas that they thought the revised Recommendation needed to address. Some of these were also present in the 2008 Recommendation, whilst others reflected new developments. The 15 thematic areas were loosely structured into three categories:

**Organisational frameworks**, containing:

- Capacity building
- The role of communities – involvement and impact
- Complementarity between schemes
- Knowledge sharing and networking.

**Participants**, containing:

- Access and inclusion
- Administrative obstacles
- Awareness
- Protection
- Social and legal status.

**Processes**, containing:

- Digital forms of volunteering and solidarity activities
- The environmental context
- Learning
- Quality assurance
- Recognition
- Research.

When reading the text, readers are reminded that the thematic areas to a certain extent represent analytical abstracts, and that some overlap therefore is inevitable.

For each of these 15 thematic areas, the Expert Group identified a number of key messages. These messages were to highlight the individual actions required to increase and improve youth solidarity activities. Annex II details key documents that were used during the work of the Expert Group. The Expert Group also identified a set of good examples of practice that illustrate how some of these key messages could be implemented.

This Toolbox is structured around these thematic areas. It introduces each thematic area and explains why it is necessary to focus on this area. It then includes the key messages related to each theme and the examples of good practice. The practice examples cover projects as well as policies, and come from regional, national and European contexts.

Definitions of key terms used have, where appropriate, been incorporated into the text. For readers wishing to delve deeper into individual examples, references to further information have, where available, been inserted.





# 3.0

ORGANISATIONAL  
FRAMEWORKS

## 3.0 ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

How can we bring about more and better volunteering and solidarity projects? What is the role of communities and the impact on these? What is the interplay between programmes and schemes at regional/national and European level? How do we avoid reinventing the wheel?

### 3.1 Capacity building

The 2008 Council Recommendation spoke about the need for “*supporting the development of the hosting capacity for cross-border volunteers*”. This theme still needs to be in focus, as many organisations, particularly at regional and local level who might otherwise engage in cross-border solidarity, do not have the capacity to prepare young people to go abroad, or lack the funds to sustain efforts and make these a regular feature of their activities. However, in some cases this is not merely due to a lack of knowledge and/or funds, but also due to insufficiently developed organisational infrastructures, including the ability to self-assess and self-improve. This problem has actually worsened in the last five to ten years leading up to 2019 due to budget cuts across Europe, constraining organisational capacity. Organisations that derive their main funding from projects involving physical mobility may be extremely vulnerable in situations where this is no longer possible (e.g. as seen during the Covid19-crisis).

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- It is necessary to ensure that organisations are able to provide volunteers with adequate preparation, monitoring/accompaniment as well as to offer returning volunteers support in continuing their engagement in solidarity activities, especially for young people with fewer opportunities (YPFO)
- The mobility and training of youth workers and voluntary organisation practitioners must be supported
- Cooperation and networking between the mobility providers for purposes of knowledge-sharing should be strengthened
- Efforts must be made to strengthen the (financial) sustainability of organisations involved in cross-border solidarity activities in order to ensure there are sufficient numbers of organisations with the motivation and resources able to carry out in practice the intentions enshrined in the Recommendation. **Ensuring financial stability is of particular importance in situations when organisations are cut off from their regular funding sources, i.e. in times when physical mobility is not feasible.**

### 3.1.1 Coordinator of volunteers

*Coordinator of Volunteers* is a recognised qualification in the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) in the Czech Republic. The National Register of Qualifications (*Národní soustava kvalifikací* - NSK) is a public register of complete and partial qualifications with accompanying assessment standards that allow the objective verification and recognition of abilities. Qualifications are awarded by authorised bodies in accordance with the relevant assessment standards.

The qualification *Coordinator of Volunteers* was created in order to ensure that competent and adequately trained staff were available for implementing and coordinating volunteering and solidarity activities. It is made up of the following elements:

- Analysis of the contribution of volunteers' involvement
- The creation of activity structures for volunteers in an organisation and determining their authorities and responsibilities for the relevant areas
- Planning and preparation of voluntary work in an organisation
- Management of voluntary work
- Evaluation of voluntary work in an organisation
- Multi-source financing of an organisation or project
- Marketing and public relations
- Individual management of volunteers, their motivation, development and appreciation
- Health and safety
- Organisational, administrative and legal aspects of voluntary work.

[https://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/qualification-752-Coordinator\\_of\\_Volunteers](https://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/en-us/qualification-752-Coordinator_of_Volunteers)



### 3.1.2 Maps of Volunterra

The project “Maps of Volunterra” gathered 28 participants from 10 EU and neighbouring countries (Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Italy, the UK, Ireland, Hungary, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) in Kharkiv, Ukraine for a course on the organisation of transnational volunteering projects. During the course, the participants developed their competences to:

- promote volunteering, active citizenship and democracy principles;
- develop leadership and team working skills for leading an international project;
- promote social inclusion of youngsters with fewer opportunities in the intercultural dimension;
- contribute to sustainability of international youth and volunteer projects as a particular tool to promote active citizenship and community development by empowering and motivating young people to organise and participate in international or local volunteer activities;
- empower young people to take an active part in promoting a culture of peace worldwide by facilitating acts of solidarity at global and local levels;
- strengthen participants’ decision making, coaching, conflict resolution and communication skills as well as aptitude for giving and receiving feedback;
- exchange experiences and share best practices from different European backgrounds and systematise them; and
- promote sustainability of traveling, everyday life and project management.

One of the main outcomes of the course was the compilation of a youth leader’s cookbook in convenient PDF format that gathered tools, methods and activities that can be useful when coordinating international voluntary and youth projects.

<https://www.sci-d.de/file/toolkitcookbookmapsofvolunterra.pdf>

## 3.2 Community involvement and impact

In the 2008 Recommendation, the focus was primarily on the volunteers and the outcomes of their participation, in particular in the shape of competence acquisition and the development of active citizenship. Whilst this remains a crucial issue, the intervening years up to 2019 have seen an increasing emphasis being placed on the purpose and impact of volunteering and other solidarity activities. For example, Article 2 of the new Regulation (EU) 2018/1475 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which lays down the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps, states that solidarity activity means an activity that addresses important societal challenges to the benefit of a community or society as a whole.

However, it is not just the hosting community that should receive attention – the role of the sending community is also important; aspects to consider include how volunteering and solidarity is anchored in the local community, and how volunteers are encouraged to continue their involvement in altruistic causes upon their return.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- It is important to clearly recognise the two beneficiaries of cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities: the individual participant and the community (hosting and sending organisations, municipalities, civil society etc.)
- Support should be given to returning volunteers to continue to engage in solidarity activities
- The impact of volunteering and solidarity activities should be emphasised, in particular the value of intercultural exchanges on communities should be underlined.
- Programmes should make provisions so that when physical cross-border mobility may not be possible, such as during crisis situations, adaptations can easily be made to the project design to ensure community impact can be sustained. Programmes should contain clauses that allow budget flexibility and, in extreme cases, budget increases to alleviate the consequences of force majeure crisis situations.

### 3.2.1 The impact of European Voluntary Service projects on local communities

In the years from 2014-16, three National Agencies (Poland, Hungary and Lithuania) of the Erasmus+ programme undertook a research project in order to observe and explore the impact of long-term European Voluntary Service (the predecessor of the European Solidarity Corps) projects on the local environments where they were implemented. The project consisted of ten case studies of hosting organisations/communities in the three Member States and was based mainly on qualitative analysis. The research aimed at answering the following questions:

- What are, in general terms, the results of a long-term EVS project?
- What is the influence of long-term EVS projects and volunteers on the target groups of the hosting organisations?
- What is the influence of long-term EVS projects and volunteers on the local communities in which they live and work?

A particularly interesting finding of the project concerned the impact on the local community caused by welcoming volunteers from abroad over a longer period:

*“In many cases EVS volunteers helped to reduce the isolation of “others” in the community – EVS volunteers don’t have prejudices about locals and therefore they are trying to create contacts and communicate with all locals. At the beginning of their project EVS volunteers don’t recognise any differences between locals, they treat them equally and they tend to be equally open for all of them. Their attitude could be, for all the community, a symbol of tolerance”.*

<http://czytelnia.frse.org.pl/media/The-impact-of-EVS-on-local-communities.pdf>

### 3.2.2 Community based youth volunteering initiatives

In Malta, a particular highlight in the range of cross-border solidarity initiatives is those arranged by informal groups supported by a parish or an organisation.

These initiatives are the result of a cultural tradition where a group of young people organise a solidarity initiative in another country through the contacts of the parish or organisation. The group (7 to 12 per group) works together with the parish or organisation to raise funds that would ultimately go for resources required for the implementation of the solidarity initiative and a monetary donation to the host organisation itself. This results in a bigger involvement and support of the wider local community to these initiatives. Members of the community encourage the young members to take on this commitment by supporting such events and monetary collections, making this youth volunteering initiative a collective community endeavour. The young people, individually, work all year to save up to cover their own costs for flights and visas (sometimes even accommodation). They also spend much of their free time organising fund-raising events and other initiatives to collect the funds required.

The practice has become part of the cycle of yearly events of local communities, bringing together members of the community to contribute to the 'wider good'. The involvement of the wider community is so important that, so far, most of these initiatives have consciously avoided external funding schemes (e.g. the European Solidarity Corps), as funding opportunities may be considered a threat to the culture of volunteering and community solidarity and counter-productive to wider community commitment.

### 3.2.3 Mission Tradition

A crucial factor in the development of intercultural competences is to be aware of one's own cultural context and values. In many communities, however, old traditions are falling out of use and being forgotten, with precious cultural capital lost.

This challenge was tackled by the project *Mission Tradition*, which took place in Cyprus from May 2019 to May 2020. It was implemented by the Cypriot organisation Youth for Exchange and Understanding and involved volunteers from Romania, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, North Macedonia and France. The project had as its aim to increase the awareness of local and regional communities of their cultural heritage by identifying and describing traditions, and to promote these through events and workshops involving the local population.

More specifically, the volunteers:

- explored and documented a variety of traditions in Cyprus;
- improved their intercultural skills by leading intercultural workshops;
- engaged in solidarity activities and promoted volunteerism to help the Cypriot community to explore their identity and find ways to become more active;
- brought their own skills into play to motivate local young people to express themselves, while participating in music / arts and crafts / theatre / dance / photography workshops;
- learned how to use non-formal methods to raise awareness and support educational needs;
- promoted the social and educational value of being involved in traditions and heritage through youth initiatives.

By constantly engaging the host community in an intercultural dialogue, bringing into play the cultural diversity also of the volunteers themselves, the learning processes of the project resulted in shared outcomes that were shared by participants and the hosting community alike.

<https://missiontradition19.wixsite.com/home>



### 3.3 Complementarity

A study on obstacles to solidarity mapped national/regional level schemes and found that, '19 out of 28 European countries have one or more national/regional level schemes supporting cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities among young people.<sup>3</sup> Given that complementarity and synergy between EU funding instruments and national, regional and local schemes is an explicit element of the European Youth Strategy, it would seem natural to coordinate existing schemes at national level to avoid overlap and competition, yet the above study *"has not identified a single EU Member State that possesses a dedicated strategy on youth volunteering"*. Also, there is very little dedicated research available to throw light on what the interplay is between the EU programmes and initiatives and those that operate at national and regional levels.

Consequently, there is a need to create more synergies, complementarities and continuities between the different European and Member-State level schemes and initiatives.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- Peer-learning and exchange of good practice should be promoted
- It is important to establish the mutual recognition of quality labels and other support mechanisms between European and national/regional schemes for cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities to reduce the administrative work of involved organisations
- The Youth Wiki<sup>4</sup> should be utilised to promote and inform local, national and European cross-border volunteering schemes in a coherent way.
- In crisis situations that prevent cross-border mobility, established relationships and complementarity between EU funded cross-border schemes and national ones can be essential in finding flexible, fast and suitable solutions to re-assign participants.

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3) PPMI, 2019. Removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities: Final Report

4) <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/youthwiki>

### 3.3.1 Analytical tool to assess the interplay between EU youth mobility schemes and other regional, national and international schemes

In a European study from 2012 the co-existence – or interplay – between EU action programmes in the field of mobility and other mobility schemes either at regional, national or international level was analysed. It concluded that the interplay may manifest itself in a number of ways, not all of which are the result of conscious decisions and not all of which necessarily have positive effects. Basically, four analytical models of interplay emerged from the study:

- *Complementarity* is when synergies are developed and exploited, and the EU action programmes and other mobility schemes work together to cover a wider variety of mobility activities or target groups than would otherwise have been the case
- *Competition* is when schemes overlap and compete for participants and sources of co-financing, and consequently fail to share resources and knowledge
- *Instigation* is when the introduction of European Action programmes and supporting measures creates a heightened awareness of mobility and helps elevate it on the political agenda and possibly encourage new developments
- *Substitution* is when funding from European Action programmes simply replaces other sources of funding without resulting in an increase in participation, or is used as an excuse to cut back on national or regional funding and/or cancel already existing schemes.

The study identified examples of all four models, but in line with the findings of the study on obstacles to cross-border volunteering and solidarity (see Annex II), it concluded that none of the countries had developed focused mobility policies that identified and networked key players, and sought to analyse and coordinate activities to eliminate possibilities for competition and substitution.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/da/news-and-press/news/study-mobility-developments-school-education-vocational-education-and-training>

### 3.3.2 Interaction at national level

In Belgium, the national mobility scheme Bel'J has, since 2009, supported youth exchanges, youth volunteering projects and exchanges of youth workers between the three linguistic communities in the country. The adoption of the regulation establishing the European Solidarity Corps in 2018 with the possibility to organise “in-country” activities gave rise to concerns about the possibilities of overlap between the European Solidarity Corps and the national scheme. As a consequence of these concerns, the three NAs of Belgium elaborated a note with guidelines on how this should be tackled.

Taking its point of departure in a detailed analysis of possible overlaps in activities, target groups, financing models and administrative procedures, the note outlines five possible approaches to addressing the issue of complementarity at community level:

1. To implement both programmes alongside each other without consideration of possible overlaps
2. To ensure an integral approach by having all activities that overlap fall within the Bel'J and all others within the European Solidarity Corps
3. To modify the national programme Bel'J and remove all strands that overlap with the European Solidarity Corps
4. To allocate the budgets of Bel'J to the European Solidarity Corps
5. To allow the programmes to run alongside each other in their present forms, but to try and achieve coherence (rather than complementarity) through youth policies.

Given the decentralised nature of Belgian youth policies, it is up to each community to decide for itself how it wants to address the issue of complementarity between the programmes (with the exception of the third scenario, which would require agreement between the communities). With this exercise, the communities were provided with a sound analysis on which to base their decision.

### 3.4 Knowledge-sharing and networking

Sharing knowledge and learning between organisations participating in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities is crucial for improving the quality of activities and practices in Europe and can save precious resources by preventing “the constant reinvention of the wheel”.

Platforms for knowledge sharing already exist, such as the European Youth Portal<sup>5</sup>, the SALTO centres<sup>6</sup> and the Youth Wiki as well as various communities of practice, but this aspect can be further developed and the opportunities presented by these better exploited. Alumni networks of former volunteers are not in themselves dedicated knowledge-sharing platforms, but nevertheless constitute another important opportunity that should be more consciously used.

When creating networks and platforms, it is important to also consider relevant organisations outside the youth sector, since expertise and experience on issues impinging on cross-border volunteering and solidarity is distributed among many actors.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- Better use should be made of existing spaces where resources and knowledge can be shared amongst Member States and NGOs. This must also consider organisations outside the youth sector
- Space for innovation (including digital forums) should be made available to further develop new forms and methods of volunteering
- Peer learning opportunities should be created
- Networking through alumni communities and exchange of youth workers and voluntary organisation practitioners should be intensified
- Enhanced training and qualification opportunities should be made available.

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5) [https://europa.eu/youth/EU\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en)

6) <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/>

### 3.4.1 European Platform on Learning Mobility (EPLM)

*The European Platform on Learning Mobility in the youth field* (EPLM) is an open, participatory space for exchange and cooperation between practitioners, researchers and policymakers organised under the European Union Council of Europe youth partnership. The Platform brings together programme staff, trainers and researchers, youth workers and other stakeholders in the youth field and in youth work. The EPLM has a mission to engage in the improvement, knowledge, visibility and recognition of learning mobility in the youth field, including cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities. More concretely, it:

- provides a network for the exchange and cooperation of researchers, policy makers and practitioners dealing with learning mobility in non-formal and informal learning as well as formal education;
- creates and maintains a collective, multi-professional voice from the youth field – and beyond if relevant - with the common concern of learning mobility;
- deepens knowledge and understanding and provides regular state-of-the-art existing research linked to learning mobility;
- works on a number of themes, as described in the EPLM's position paper, regularly revised;
- implements projects such as conferences bringing together actors in the field of learning mobility, and develops publications; and
- follows-up and implements outcomes of conferences and links them to relevant policy discussions in Europe.

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/european-platform-on-learning-mobility>

### 3.4.2 SOHO training courses

SOHO stands for **S**ending **O**rganisation **H**osting **O**rganisation and is an acronym for training courses that were designed and regularly carried out in the framework of the European Voluntary Scheme (predecessor of the European Solidarity Corps). SOHO targeted people directly involved in the support system around the EVS volunteer (e.g. mentors and task-related support persons) on the hosting, sending and coordinating side. The overall aim of the SOHO training course was to increase the quality of EVS activities through development of competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of key actors involved in the support system around the volunteers in the EVS projects developed within the frame of the Erasmus+.

The specific objectives of the SOHO course were as follows:

- To get a better understanding of the concept of EVS as “learning mobility” and related quality aspects in the EVS
- To improve the ability for co-operation and working in international partnerships
- To reflect on the roles, responsibilities and challenges within the EVS volunteer support system
- To raise awareness of the learning dimension in EVS and provide tools for learning support
- To support the recognition of non-formal learning in EVS through the competent implementation of Youthpass<sup>7</sup>
- To provide an opportunity for EVS support persons to exchange their experiences, share good practices and for informal partnership building.

[https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/download/salto%5Ctrainingcalendar%5Cmodel%5CDownload-5677/SOHO%20InfoPack%20for%20participants\\_2016.pdf](https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/download/salto%5Ctrainingcalendar%5Cmodel%5CDownload-5677/SOHO%20InfoPack%20for%20participants_2016.pdf)

Since the European Solidarity Corps started in 2018 a new training format has been developed and established: TOSCA - Training and support for organisations active in the Solidarity Corps. The TOSCA training activity aims to support and build up the capacities of organisations that actively participate in Volunteering Actions of the European Solidarity Corps, in order to ensure quality and impact in the respective projects.

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/tosca/about/>

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<sup>7</sup>) <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/>





4.0

PARTICIPANTS



## 4.0 PARTICIPANTS

How can volunteering and solidarity activities become a realistic opportunity for all? How do we ensure the health and safety of participants? How do we ensure that participating in cross-border activities does not lead to lack of coverage or loss of social benefits in the home and the hosting country?

### 4.1 Access and inclusion

Everybody should be able to participate in volunteering and solidarity programmes, but research has shown that often international volunteering and cross-border solidarity activities are not a genuine proposal to all segments of the youth population, but just the privileged few. Including young people with fewer opportunities (YPFO) requires special efforts in terms of both awareness-raising and motivation, but also specially designed volunteering and solidarity opportunities, such as shortening the duration of activities and providing more intensive mentoring and supervision.

Simplifying application and reporting procedures could provide easier access for volunteers, especially with the aid of technology. However, digitalisation is not necessarily an answer in itself: electronic versions of applications and reporting procedures are often complicated and not user friendly. Moreover, if digitalisation only for the sake of digitalisation is introduced, it may in fact create new barriers and exclude some young people from applying.

The availability of insurance for certain groups participating in transnational projects, particularly people with disabilities, is limited, and this can discourage them from participating in cross-border solidarity activities.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- Increased opportunities should be provided to young people with fewer opportunities
- The range of volunteering opportunities should be enhanced to cater for young people who cannot afford to go abroad or are otherwise prevented (e.g. through cybervolunteering)
- Youth organisations and other civil society organisations should develop the motivational aspects of preparation efforts to make YPFO more comfortable with the idea of going abroad
- Application and reporting procedures should be simplified to allow easier access, e.g. through digitalisation

- Existing European mechanisms that can help youth mobility, such as mobility cards, should be promoted
- National governments should work with insurance providers to make available insurance for all groups of volunteers, especially YPFO
- Short-term, part-time and local solidarity activities should be consciously offered as a way to encourage people to participate in cross-border activities, particularly YPFO.

#### **4.1.1 The Bloom Foundation**

The Bloom Foundation in the Netherlands organises several short-term group volunteering projects of 15 days, each with 8 participants and 2 group leaders. With these projects Bloom gives young people with fewer opportunities (often those who are NEET - Not in Employment, Education or Training) a nonformal learning experience. Bloom has been successful in including those young people that do not have any other experience of volunteering in European programmes. The programme is having a high impact on the participants, often resulting in a transition from NEETS into education, employment or training.

The lessons learnt have been made into a manual on how to organise this kind of inclusive activity.

<http://bloomfoundation.eu/>

### 4.1.2 Grenzenlos

The Municipality of Vienna in Austria provides financial support to the umbrella organisation *Grenzenlos* in order to support the implementation of projects with an inclusive focus under EU volunteering programmes. The financial support covers part of the staff costs for *Grenzenlos* for coordination activities (to support grass-root organisations to join the programme) as well as additional financial support for organisations who host a volunteer with fewer opportunities with the support of *Grenzenlos*.

The cooperation (**together with wienXtra – a young city programme**) started in 1998 and offers stable funding to realise inclusive volunteering projects (to fund partnerships building on national and international level, reinforced mentorship, networking activities for volunteers and organisations in Vienna).

Different volunteering formats are organised in the Melange framework: short term and long-term individual volunteering, national and cross-border activities and youth worker mobility. *Grenzenlos* offers organisations support with application and reporting, administration during the project period (pocket money, insurance), logistical arrangements (accommodation, local transport), general support for volunteers (conflict mediation, leisure time activities). This support makes it easier for small organisations to host volunteers and at the same time creates a network and a community of organisations, former and active volunteers. Additional support (financial and advice) is provided for organisations willing to host volunteers with special needs and with fewer opportunities.

[www.melange.at](http://www.melange.at)

### 4.1.3 SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre

The SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre provides resources (training tools, publications, information and more) for persons and agencies supporting young people with fewer opportunities (Inclusion workers, youth workers, social workers, National Agencies (NAs) etc.). By offering opportunities for training, exchange and reflection on inclusion practice and diversity management, the SALTO Inclusion and Diversity works towards the visibility, accessibility and transparency of inclusion and diversity work and towards making ‘inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities’ and ‘positive diversity management’ a widely supported priority.

More than 300 tools for inclusion are available from the SALTO Inclusion website, of which there are about 100.000 downloads per year from across Europe and beyond. In addition to this, SALTO organises approximately eight training courses per year at the European level with an inclusion focus and sends out a regular newsletter to around 10.000 subscribers. Through the website, it is also possible to locate relevant European-level policy documents and find references to inclusion research.

<https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/>

#### 4.1.4 Volont'R, the national civic service programme for refugees

In France, the inter-departmental delegation for the reception and integration of refugees in collaboration with the Civic Service (Service civique) Agency launched a national volunteering programme for refugees called Volont'R in 2018.

This programme has enabled 1,500 young French citizens aged 18 to 25 to engage in civic service (volunteering) projects for the benefit of refugees, and has also provided volunteering opportunities to 500 young refugees in activities adapted to their situation. These solidarity activities last on average 8 months and the volunteers receive a monthly allowance. To ensure that linguistic proficiency in French is not an obstacle to the participation and engagement of the volunteers, the participants receive French language courses two and a half-days per week throughout their volunteering experience.

The proposed volunteering projects for refugees can cover all themes covered by the Civic Service Agency (e.g. Culture, Sports, Environment, Intergenerational Solidarity, etc).

<https://www.service-civique.gouv.fr/actualites/le-service-civique-se-mobilise-pour-laccueil-et-lintegration-des-refugies-lancement-du-programme-volont'r>

## 4.2 Administrative obstacles

Many Member States do not have any dedicated legal framework regulating cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities (as described further under Social and legal status). This leads to a number of administrative obstacles, notably accessing visas and residence permits for third-country nationals. In some cases, access to visas and residency permits is not possible at all as volunteering is not a legal ground for obtaining a residence permit. Whilst significant progress has been made in recent years at European level (notably with the 2016 Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing), the Expert Group still offered the observation that very few (if any) residency application forms and few visa application forms have a box to tick that says that the reason for the residency is “volunteering”. Even in Member States where these possibilities exist, complicated and burdensome administrative procedures create barriers to participation.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- The responsible authorities at national level should provide easier access for participants in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities to visas and residence permits by providing access and simplifying their application procedures
- Cross-border solidarity activities should be recognised as grounds for applying for a visa
- Administrative procedures (including digitalised procedures) should, where feasible, be simplified.

### 4.2.1 Recognised partnerships for visas

In the Netherlands, the timely receipt of visas for volunteers from non-EU countries was recognised as a problem by many organisations operating within the former European Voluntary Service and the European Solidarity Corps. Therefore, in 2005 the NA Erasmus+ took the initiative to facilitate a discussion with the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service to support organisations participating in the programme. This resulted in a pilot for a “Recognised Partnership” with ten experienced Erasmus+ volunteering organisations. This pilot was successful and has since been expanded and opened up for all experienced organisations in the field of volunteering and other solidarity activities.

For the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service the EVS (and now the European Solidarity Corps) the Quality Label is a prerequisite. All important information is covered by the questions posed in the “Quality Label” that organisations participating in the Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps programmes must have before being able to request for a grant and receive volunteers. Therefore, organisations with a Quality Label can request for such a “Recognised Partnership”. The costs for this must be covered by the organisation, and the fee is approximately € 2.000. To keep this Recognised Partnership, an organisation has to apply for a visa at least once every three years.

### 4.2.2 Simplified visa procedures

In Italy, a procedure has been introduced that facilitates visa procedures for non-EU volunteers entering Italy as part of the European Solidarity Corps (and earlier the EVS). Based on an agreement between the Italian NA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this procedure means that the Italian NA now can issue a “visa support letter” that is recognised by Italian embassies/consulates abroad, thereby avoiding individual clearance procedures, which can be very time-consuming. The procedure consists of the following steps:

- The IT hosting organisation sends to the Italian NA a formal request for a visa support letter containing all the relevant details of the volunteer and of the project the volunteer is going to take part in, excluding the official invitation (the latter must be sent by the IT hosting organisation to the relevant IT Embassy; moreover the IT Embassy may ask the volunteer/the hosting organisation any additional document needed for security/immigration controls).
- The Italian NA verifies the details, either through the Epluslink database or by contacting the NA of the sending country. In the case of projects granted through the European-level Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), a copy of the signed agreement is required.
- The Italian NA sends a letter to the Italian embassy/consulate in the home country of the volunteer requesting a visa to be issued. To avoid any misuse, this letter is treated as a confidential administrative document that cannot be distributed to any third parties.

- The Italian NA sends an email to the Italian hosting organisation with a notice that the visa support letter has been sent to the embassy or consulate in question. The hosting organisation forwards this email to the volunteer.
- The volunteer visits the embassy/consulate, where staff can easily check the documentation submitted by the volunteer against the information in the visa support letter, and the visa can be issued forthwith.

### 4.3 Awareness

Different studies have repeatedly documented that only a minority of the potential target group are aware of cross-border volunteering and other solidarity activities. The availability of information about existing programmes and schemes is, of course, an important parameter, but awareness goes beyond information; it is also about the motivation and commitment of young people. Even though information is available, this does not necessarily mean that those concerned are aware of the benefits that participation may bring.

The need for increased awareness-raising was an important issue of the 2008 Recommendation, but it is a challenge that still requires addressing. As an integral part of this, the overall consciousness of quality in cross-border volunteering should be raised to enable young people to make informed choices between the many possibilities that exist, including those of a commercial nature.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- There is a need to develop people's knowledge on the benefits of volunteering, traineeships and other cross-border solidarity activities. These benefits relate to both the individual and the community. Families and/or carers of YPFO should especially be made aware
- Awareness raising of the idea of international volunteering needs to be strengthened in the national volunteering sector
- It is also necessary to increase young people's awareness of the importance of intercultural competences, language learning, EU citizenship and solidarity
- Supporting the creation of local contact points to provide information to all including people with disabilities, young volunteers, and youth and civil society/solidarity organisations generally should be ensured. These contact points can include local spaces and the alumni network
- Organisations involved in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities should receive information and support to develop aspects of inclusion and support in their strategies

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- There should be sufficient information about the voluntary activity, its organisers and the volunteer, so as to enable both parties to make an informed decision about the activity's suitability and meet any legal requirements
  - The Youth Portal<sup>8</sup> should be continually developed as a “one-stop-shop” for young people searching for volunteering opportunities and for organisations offering volunteering services and solidarity placements
  - Measures should be taken to ensure volunteers are sensitive to the existence of dangerous and poor-quality volunteering opportunities.

### 4.3.1 EuroPeers International

EuroPeers is a European network of young people who have gathered European experiences under the EU's youth programme and want to share them with their peers. They may have gone abroad with the European Solidarity Corps or dealt with European issues as participants in a youth exchange or youth initiative in Erasmus+ Youth in Action. Members of the EuroPeers network talk to their peers about the Erasmus+ programme, the European Solidarity Corps and other mobility schemes for young people. EuroPeers either organise their own events or may be invited by schools, youth welfare offices or cultural centres to speak at events organised by these. All EuroPeers members perform these activities voluntarily. EuroPeers is organised in national networks connected to National Agencies. Since April 2020 a European EuroPeers Coordinator has taken over the European coordination of these networks.

The key objectives of EuroPeers International are to:

- inform and motivate many young people about learning mobility, engagement and participation opportunities through the Erasmus+ or the European Solidarity Corps, based on their own experience;
- increase the visibility and the sustainable dissemination and exploitation of Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps results;
- increase awareness of European topics related to young people;
- empower themselves and other young people to become informed, motivated and active citizens in Europe; and
- reach out to young people with fewer opportunities through a peer-to-peer approach and based on their personal backgrounds.

<https://www.europeers.de/international/>

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8) [https://europa.eu/youth/EU\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en)



### 4.3.2 The PRONI Centre

In Croatia, the project “I Count for Two” was implemented as an awareness-raising initiative by the PRONI Centre for Social Education in cooperation with four other civil society organisations. The project was based on a structured dialogue between young people and decision-makers from four regions and involved a total of 159 young people and 108 decision-makers (representatives of Local Partnership for Employment and employers from the targeted regions). The objectives of the project were:

1. Raising the awareness amongst young people about the importance and value of participation in volunteer programmes in terms of community contribution and possibilities for personal and professional development
2. Raising awareness among employers about competences gained through volunteering and the value of these in the labour market.

In order to achieve the objectives, a survey involving 1,567 young people and 256 employers was implemented, and, based on the results, five separate focus group discussions with young people, five separate focus group discussions with decision-makers and one joint focus group discussion in which representatives of bigger employers from eastern Croatia were implemented. The conclusions were formulated in the form of joint recommendations for increasing the awareness about the importance and value of volunteering for employability, and these were disseminated throughout the region to 659 e-mail addresses of employers from public, business and civil sector in order to achieve a wider impact on the target groups.

## 4.4 Protection

An integral part of making cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities a realistic opportunity for all is the presence of adequate mechanisms for protecting both participants and those organising the experience, so that problems can be detected before they develop and emergency situations be dealt with in a timely and concerted manner. This protection should cover both the physical and the mental well-being of those involved.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- The health and safety of participants in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities is of paramount importance in all phases of the activity (before, during and after). This protection should cover volunteers, staff and other people involved in the implementation of the activities and the beneficiaries of the activities.
- Organisations involved in the implementation of cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities should have clear and adequate procedures for dealing with crises and emergency situations, and these should be communicated to all.
- Force majeure clauses should ensure that in crisis situations all participants, irrespective of project context and organisational attachment, receive proper attention and care.

### 4.4.1 Counselling service for volunteers

A special counselling service for volunteers was implemented by the Estonian NA in 2016 as it became clear that cross-border volunteering puts volunteers in a completely new situation in an unknown environment, and that mental problems therefore are not uncommon. To prevent the problems developing into serious mental health conditions, volunteers are now offered up to three meetings with a counsellor, who has practical experience and an education in psychology and experience with EVS or the European Solidarity Corps. The service is provided to volunteers in Estonia, but also to Estonians who are doing their service abroad or have returned from abroad recently.

The possibility to use a counsellor is introduced to the volunteers during their preparatory training. To get a meeting with the counsellor, all they need to do is to contact the NA – they do not need to specify the problem, a request is enough. The NA then forwards the request to the counsellors and they contact the young person directly. In general, around 10-15% of volunteers require the service, and the demand has required the involvement of from one to three counsellors on an annual basis. The intervention is considered a success if the volunteers manage to solve their problem during the consultations and do not return from the volunteering placement prematurely. Most of the time only one meeting is required, as the volunteer often just needs a neutral person with whom to reflect on the situation. But if the volunteer needs additional help or the mental health condition requires another professional, the volunteer and the organisation is supported in finding a suitable solution in collaboration with the counsellor.

### 4.4.2 Crisis management

The NA in Flanders/Belgium (JINT) has developed a comprehensive support material in case of crises arising during an international experience for involved organisations. The material consists of descriptions of emergency procedures developed by experts and is divided in two parts: one on crisis response and the other on crisis prevention.

Part 1 defines crisis situations and presents a step-by-step plan to follow for each of these emergencies. It concludes by directing the person to a compilation of good practice examples on crisis management. These can help users assess whether they have acted appropriately or whether some further action is required. It also provides links to important contact points that can be of assistance in the emergency.

In Part 2, the document provides tips and tricks on crisis prevention. It formulates tailor-made advice for different situations and provides links to sources of information for each of these.

The material provides an information form that can be filled-out by users for the purpose of recording an incident in order to build up the knowledge base. The form allows the intervening person to record basic information (e.g. contact information of the organisation in need of assistance, project(s) concerned) and a description of the incident, such as the nature of the incident, parties concerned, assistance that has already been provided and additional persons to contact with regard to the situation.

## 4.5 Social and legal status

The social and legal status of cross-border volunteers is often unclear or even not defined at all in legislation both at home and abroad. This can lead to obstacles in accessing the host Member State's social security system and losing social security benefits in the participant's home Member State upon return. For remunerated jobs and traineeships, their position in relation to social and legal status is less complicated, as these are covered by EU legal instruments covering migrant workers. However, the concept of "solidarity jobs and traineeships" does not yet exist in any structured form besides in the framework of the European Solidarity Corps programme. Such lack of regulation can lead to the exploitation of the trainees, low or no remuneration as well as low quality traineeships. The status of people engaging in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities should therefore be provided (e.g. on the Youth Wiki) to help overcome such exploitation.

Provisions governing the right to insurance, compensation for the costs incurred while volunteering, taxation of the allowances/pocket money and travel refunds received are usually spread throughout various legal documents and a unified source of consolidated information is lacking. Such a diverse legal framework makes it hard to understand the overall picture at the country level. This also affects recruitment, as the prospect of losing out on benefits on their return home, and of people with disabilities not being able to continue to receive personal care allowances whilst they are abroad, often deters people from volunteering abroad. Moreover, too loosely defined or too rigid national, subnational or regional legal frameworks regulating volunteering leads to barriers and obstacles relating to an unregulated status for international volunteers, inadequate working conditions and undefined roles of volunteers.

### Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- There should be a common understanding (i.e. a European definition) of what is cross-border solidarity activities in relation to existing schemes
- Recognition of the legal status of cross-border volunteers should be ensured at national level, linked to a definition of what this term implies (e.g. in terms of time dedicated to the activity etc.)
- Information on the status of people engaging in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities should be provided on Youth Wiki
- Cross-border volunteers should have access to the host country's healthcare facilities and healthcare professionals, which is tailored to the profile of the participant
- Flexibility and portability of social security procedures and entitlements in the host country should be ensured
- There is a need for more information sharing, via for example Youth Wiki, of countries' social security systems regarding what is covered and what not, e.g. hospital stays, opticians, mental health services
- Cross-border volunteers should receive equal treatment and recognition in terms of benefits as national volunteers in the hosting country.
- Special consideration must be given to participants who lose their volunteers status through no fault of their own (e.g. in emergencies) and the consequences this may have on their legal status and financial situation.

### 4.5.1 Luxembourg: Legal framework for volunteering

A Law on Youth Voluntary Service was introduced in Luxembourg in 1999 (later modified in 2007) (Loi du 31 Octobre 2007 sur le service volontaire des jeunes). The Law covers voluntary activities taking place in Luxembourg, but also volunteers going from Luxembourg to other countries. The law explicitly covers national and international voluntary schemes. Organisations are offered various financial incentives, with the aim to encourage them to take up volunteers. The Law foresees that no taxes are to be imposed on volunteers' pocket money, food, accommodation or any other economic compensation granted to them. Every volunteer has to be fully registered in the national social insurance scheme, and is thus covered against sickness, accidents, professional illnesses, dependency and disability. These contributions are fully paid by the state. At the same time, the Law also defines a quality framework and obligations that the organisations have to fulfil.

A public administration, the National Youth Service (SNJ), oversees the monitoring of quality. Organisations that want to implement volunteering projects must be recognised by the ministry in charge of youth policy and sign an agreement with this. A commission composed of representatives of different ministries and presided over by the director of the National Youth Service provides advice regarding such agreements and evaluates an organisation's capacity and capability to fulfil certain requirements (e.g. in terms of criminal record, justification of the ability and capacity to organise a voluntary service, having the necessary human and financial resources etc.).

Agreements are fixed for a period of three years and define the maximum number of persons involved. However, an agreement can be withdrawn if an organisation fails to meet the requirements of the agreement. It can also be withdrawn if the organisation endangers the volunteer's security and physical or mental health. The organisation is required to send a copy of the contract with the volunteer, an annual report of the activities of the volunteers and a final report on every case of voluntary service to the National Youth Service. The National Youth Service is entitled to inspect the organisation at any time and to examine all accompanying documents.



## 4.5.2 Austria: Legal framework for volunteering

In 2011 a volunteering law was introduced in Austria, stipulating quality standards for national voluntary programmes and recognising high quality voluntary services fulfilling these standards as well as EU volunteering programmes as providers of non-formal learning/education. By establishing a legal framework, the recognition for volunteering has been significantly increased. Besides setting quality standards for full-time voluntary services, the law, among others, also ensures that participants are entitled to a financial state allowance at the same level as their peers participating in formal education (e.g. students in higher education), lowering the financial threshold for participation in international volunteering for participants who might not have a strong financial background.

Since 2016 international volunteering in the framework of Erasmus+ is recognised as a replacement for the compulsory national military services. This increased the number of young men in EVS considerably (up to 40% of all participants, whereas before, only about 25% of participants were male). To date, the Solidarity Corps has not yet received the same recognition.

<http://www.freiwilligenweb.at/de/downloadentry/federal-law-promotion-voluntary-engagement>



**5.0**

PROCESSES



## 5.0 PROCESSES

How can digital volunteering complement the physical mobility of volunteers? How do we incorporate environmental concerns into the activities of cross-border volunteering and solidarity? What are the benefits of participating in volunteering and solidarity activities, and how are these maximised? What is the role of research?

### 5.1 Digital forms of volunteering and solidarity

The concept of “cross-border volunteering” in the 2008 Recommendation referred to the physical mobility of persons only. However, new forms of volunteering and cross-border solidarity activities based on IT have since been gathering pace and by 2019/20 were an integrated part of the overall picture of European solidarity. “Digital volunteering” signifies the type of volunteering in which the internet (the use of an internet-connected device) plays a crucial role in recruiting volunteers and delegating and completing voluntary work. By 2019/20 it had become an established phenomenon (also in a cross-border context) that has been gathering momentum since the turn of the Millennium.

During the Covid-19 crisis, digital volunteering has become the major – if not only – mechanism for implementing cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities. However, it is important not to see digital volunteering only as a self-standing activity, but also in connection with physical mobility. In this sense, it can be a tool to strengthen cross-border solidarity activities, in particular in supporting returning volunteers and providing opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities (YPFO).

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- Digital forms of volunteering and cross-border solidarity activities should be acknowledged as an opportunity to strengthen cross-border solidarity activities. Moreover, it is an alternative way of including participants who are not in a position to travel physically (e.g. due to severe physical disabilities, mental health difficulties, caring responsibilities, etc.)
- Digital forms of volunteering can be fostered during a crisis that prevents cross-border mobility from occurring
- Digital forms of cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities can also be used in connection with physical mobility of volunteers as a means for motivation and preparation
- There needs to be a precise definition of what digital volunteering and cross-border solidarity activities is, and what it implies in the European solidarity context
- Funding possibilities for cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities should be extended so that digital activities can also be covered.

### 5.1.1 E-volunteering handbook

In Poland, a handbook on e-volunteering was prepared by the Fundacja Dobra Sieć (Good Network Foundation, which is the leading organisation in Poland that promotes online volunteering since 2009). The Handbook covers five parts:

- PART I: E-VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR ORGANISATION (introductory level): This part focuses on working with an online volunteer on everyday tasks: How can e-volunteers assist in a project? How can they be motivated and managed? What software and resources will help in communicating with them?
- PART II: YOUR E-VOLUNTEERING PROJECT (advanced level): Managing an internet-based social action or civic project using the help of e-volunteers. Practical tips for implementing projects of various types and objectives.
- PART III: EMPLOYEE E-VOLUNTEERING: For people in regular employment, it can be hard to find time for volunteering that requires physical presence. E-volunteering is a way of harnessing this potential – it can be done from anywhere at any time. Many e-volunteering tasks may take no more than a few minutes to complete, making it possible to fit it into even the busiest of schedules.
- PART IV: ONLINE SECURITY: Security rules in using the internet.
- PART V: USEFUL RESOURCES: An index of software and tools.

The handbook is available both in Polish and English: [http://e-wolontariat.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/GNF\\_E-volunteering\\_Handbook\\_2.pdf](http://e-wolontariat.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/GNF_E-volunteering_Handbook_2.pdf). It was created within the project financed by “Region in Transition” – RITA Program of the Polish – American Freedom Foundation.

### 5.1.2 Cibervoluntarios

Cibervoluntarios is a Spanish NGO of international scope, set up in 2001 by a group of dedicated young people in order to promote the use and knowledge of technology as a means to: alleviate social inequality; generate social innovation; and promote the empowerment of citizens to ensure that they have the opportunity to access, learn about and use technologies as a means to improve their life and environment. The organisation has six main lines of action:

- Digital appropriation and empowerment
- Entrepreneurship and employability
- Cybersecurity
- Social innovation
- New forms of participation
- The 2030 agenda for sustainable development.

In 2020 the organisation had a network of 1,500 e-volunteers and more than 500 organisations with which they regularly collaborate, and activities are estimated to reach 30,000 people annually at both a national and European level.

There is a strong international dimension to the work of Cibervoluntarios, and they have initiated, or participated as partners in, a number of European projects and initiatives.

<https://www.cibervoluntarios.org/en>

### 5.1.3 TuDu

TuDu is a crowdsourcing platform that facilitates online cooperation between Polish civil society organisations and volunteers from across Poland. This is a tool for virtual volunteering, which significantly simplifies online cooperation between organisations and volunteers. TuDu is a community of volunteers who have registered on TuDu and are willing to offer support on a variety of tasks (writing, design, web development, promotion, searching for information, brainstorming, translations, counselling, etc.). On the platform, there are built-in features that support the whole process of cooperation, namely:

- planning and creation of tasks (e.g. tasks can be grouped within projects);
- recruiting volunteers (e.g. sending automated notifications to volunteers that have required skills; sending invitations to chosen volunteers; publishing invitations on Facebook);
- working on a task solution (e.g. few volunteers can work together on one task, so they can inspire each other and work as a team; there is a space to have an online discussion; volunteers post their solutions on TuDu, so there is no need to use additional tools like e-mail or an online cloud storage); and
- acknowledgement and assessment (e.g. organisations can send volunteers the “thank you” notes and rate their help; volunteers can also rate the organisation’s cooperation with them).

The platform offers a wide array of online volunteering possibilities: translation, proofreading, graphic design, teaching. The offer of volunteering possibilities related to teaching, coaching and training is especially rich. Many of the registered volunteers are young people aged 15-18 who help others out, for example by providing online courses for pupils struggling in the school system. The platform has also been active during Covid-19 by linking psychology students with young people having difficulties coping with the lockdown. TuDu was launched in 2015 and is widely used by Polish organisations. As at May 2020 the platform had 2,916 registered volunteers and 1,081 volunteering tasks that were being performed by them.

<https://tudu.org.pl/>



## 5.2 Environmental context

Since the 2008 Recommendation was written, concern for the environment has risen to a large level, especially amongst young people. Cross-border activities are a source of greenhouse gas emissions, especially when it involves air transport, and it is therefore important to consider the climate when implementing cross-border activities. Of course, it is not feasible to cut out flights entirely, since this would negatively affect the possibility for young people from some destinations (e.g. islands and very remote areas) to participate in activities. However, all volunteering and solidarity projects should incorporate an environmental dimension in their activities and consider how the carbon footprint they leave behind can be made as little as possible.

Many volunteering projects for young people explicitly incorporate concerns for the environment or are directly engaged in this context, and these play an important role in creating and strengthening an awareness among young people of the need to look after our planet better.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- All actions in a volunteering project should take into account the environmental impact (e.g. travel, resource consumption, food etc.)
- Participants should be involved in these reflections to ensure that they develop a consciousness of environmental issues
- Funds should be available to offset additional costs for making environmentally-friendly choices (e.g. travelling by train rather than by air)
- Volunteering projects concerned with the protection of the environment should be given specific attention, as actions to protect the environment and combat climate change can constitute a form of solidarity.

### 5.2.1 The Voluntary Ecological Year

The Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr (FÖJ - Voluntary Ecological Year) is a voluntary scheme that offers young people in Germany and Austria the possibility of participating in projects and activities that aim to strengthen the sustainable use of nature and the environment and to develop environmental awareness. It is available to all young people who left school and are between the age of 16 and 27 years.

The training and guidance of young participants of the Voluntary Ecological Year in Germany is funded by the Federal Government. The Year is a period of education and orientation, instructed and guided by pedagogues.

The FÖJ lasts 12 months. During this time a volunteer will be active in a hosting project concerning the protection of nature and environment, landscape and forest management and environmental education. At five seminars distributed over the year the volunteer will meet

FÖJ participants from the other projects and deal with various environmental topics as well as receiving pedagogical support. The volunteer will receive pocket money, full social insurance and 26 days holiday. In some (but not all) cases the volunteer receives free board and lodging or an allowance for accommodation and nurture.

The FÖJ is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth as well as the other relevant ministries of the federal states. The FÖJ is organised at state level by 52 FÖJ organisations. These organisations provide the pedagogical support of the volunteers and cooperate with appropriate agencies. The FÖJ can also be undertaken abroad. <https://foej.net/>

In Austria, a similar in-country scheme exists for volunteering in the environmental field: <https://www.jugendumwelt.at/de/programme/freiwilliges-umweltjahr>

### 5.2.2 Hästekasen Farm

Hästekasen Farm is an association that runs a self-sustainable traditional homestead established outside of Göteborg in Sweden, based on ecological permaculture principles. The overall aim of the association is to spread knowledge and skills regarding nature, ecosystems, small-scale food production and natural building of small structures by offering young people from all over Europe the possibility to do a placement on the farmstead.

The activities include:

- developing small scale permaculture farming principles;
- developing small scale natural eco-building knowledge/skills;
- courses, workshops and study visits;
- supporting the creation of a future small eco-village;
- activities that develop the understanding and appreciation of nature; and
- adventures and experiences that lead to personal development.

Every year, the association receives a growing number of volunteers from abroad through the European Solidarity Corps who stay on the farmstead for 1-9 months, where they learn about principles of self-sustainability by helping out with practical tasks in relation to water, food, sewage, recycling, compost, heating, shelter etc.

<http://hastekasen.se/en/erasmusplus-volunteers-2/>

### 5.2.3 Guidelines on environmental sustainability in cross-border volunteering events

The Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations is an International non-governmental youth organisation comprising 53 national organisations, mainly Europe-based, that promote intercultural education, understanding and peace. This happens through the organisation of international workcamps, where volunteers from many countries gather to carry out projects that promote the aims of the Alliance.

The Alliance provides its members with capacity building opportunities for youth workers' peer learning, as well as with detailed reference guidelines for activities, covering a number of issues concerning cross-border mobility of volunteers. The Alliance set up an Environmental Sustainability Working Group that created a toolkit in support of all Alliance organisations. The toolkit was intended to provide practical instruments and methodologies to improve the sustainability in workcamps and volunteering projects.

The toolkit contains, among other things:

- *A blueprint for a workshop on sustainability issues* that can be used to train leaders of youth workcamps and other events to create awareness of the issue of sustainability
- *An Environmental Sustainability Handbook* that contains a collection of recommendations on good ecological practices that can be implemented during workcamps and events
- *A Sustainable Transport Info-sheet* containing a list of low-impact travel options in a number of European countries.

The Alliance has also created a document containing reflections and comments about the link between Covid-19 and the climate crisis. All this (and more) can be downloaded at:

<http://www.alliance-network.eu/environmental-sustainability-tools/>

## 5.3 Learning

In addition to benefiting communities, participation in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities also benefits participants. This can be by enabling them to acquire essential competences that contribute to their personal and socio-educational development and foster their active participation in society, thereby improving their employment prospects and strengthening their role as active citizens. The learning potential of transnational mobility activities is well documented from research in both formal and non-formal/informal contexts. However, this research also shows that this learning potential does not necessarily unfold by itself, but needs to be supported both before, during and after the activity to take effect.

The close association between participation in volunteering activities and learning is epitomised in the concept of “service learning”, which involves formal education as an actor in volunteering contexts.

Specific messages from the Expert Group:

- Participation in cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities offers a significant learning potential for participants
- Before, during and after the activity, organisations should seriously consider accompanying and documenting learning outcomes together with the participants
- To support learning processes, outcomes should be underpinned by structured preparation, mentoring/supervision and debriefing interventions
- Additional focus should be given to language learning in view of the transnational context of the activities
- In emergency situations, where participants have been forced to end their stay abroad through no fault of their own, participants should be considered for participation in complementary or later activities that can allow them to complete their learning journey.

### 5.3.1 IJFD

The International Youth Voluntary Service (German abbreviation: IJFD) is a cross-border volunteering scheme run by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, enabling young people up to the age of 27 living in Germany (including young non-German nationals) to do a voluntary service abroad, to gather intercultural, socio-political and personal experience in a different cultural environment as volunteers abroad. An integral part of the scheme is an accompanying pedagogical support that ensures that the full potential of learning processes and learning outcomes of participants can develop.

Generally, the duration of a placement under the IJFD is 12 months. The minimum duration has to be 6 months and the maximum is 18 months. Volunteers receive an educational programme which varies in length, from 15 days over 6 months to 25 days over 12 months. Moreover, the International Youth Volunteer Service also provides vocational guidance, since the volunteers gain insights into their specific field of choice and can discover skills and competences they perhaps never knew they had.

<https://www.ijfd-info.de/ijfd-in-english-language.html>

### 5.3.2 The VOYCE-project

VOYCE – Volunteering Youth: routes and tools for Competence Emergence – is an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership for Innovation project, involving organisations from France, Spain, Italy, Poland and Portugal. The goal of VOYCE is to enhance the learning outcomes of young volunteers and thereby promote their employability.

The project finished by the end of 2018, and produced the following outputs as a result of the activities:

- A guide for mentors of pathways of learning
- A self-evaluation questionnaire for volunteers to identify learning outcomes
- A questionnaire for external evaluators
- A manual for the validation of learning outcomes in volunteering projects
- A guide for tutors to prepare the end of the volunteers' experience
- A certificate template.

These outputs are available in English (as well as in the languages of the participating Member States) on the website of the project.

<http://voyceproject.eu/english-resources/>



### 5.3.3 Cross-border volunteering in times of crisis

Aarhus, the second-biggest city of Denmark, was appointed European Capital of Volunteering in 2018. With grant-aid from the European Solidarity Corps, European volunteers are regularly welcomed in municipal institutions where they carry out complementary tasks in cooperation with municipal employees.

When Covid-19 struck in 2020, three European volunteers were in the middle of their placement at a municipal nursing home, where they helped out with various tasks in relation to the wellbeing and care of the elderly residents. This became impossible due to the lockdown. But rather than breaking off their stay and returning to their home countries, the three volunteers decided to stay on and continue their mission through a number of activities that to a large extent came about as a result of their own initiative:

- The volunteers started editing a weekly “happiness paper”, a letter with riddles, jokes, songs and messages, which was sent to the nursing home where it was printed and distributed to the residents
- The volunteers started recording virtual reality movies of places in Denmark for the residents, aiming at reviving memories
- Using on-line resources, the volunteers kept interacting with the residents e.g. by playing games with them
- The municipality organised short concerts taking place in the garden or outside areas of the nursing home. The volunteers got involved in this initiative by recording these concerts and editing them into a film, so that the residents could later revisit this moment
- Finally, they created a toolkit for coming volunteers. In that document, future volunteers can find information and tips that prepare them for their placements at the nursing homes in Aarhus.

Through the flexibility of the municipality, the National Agency of the European Solidarity Corps, and not least the volunteers themselves, it was possible to continue the stay, show solidarity, have a positive impact on the local community and complete an enhanced learning trajectory, even though the original programme could not be followed.

<https://frivillig.aarhus.dk/nyheder/2020/frivillighed-i-coronaens-tid/> (information in Danish and English)

## 5.4 Recognition

It is important that learning outcomes arising from participation in volunteering and solidarity activities do not remain in the tacit domain, but that they are made visible, documented, and - where feasible - validated and recognised in relation to formal learning trajectories.

The term “validation” is defined as a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard. The term “recognition” is used with a variety of meanings. Basically, we can talk about four forms of recognition of learning outcomes of non-formal/informal relearning processes:

- *formal recognition* (crediting learning outcomes in relation to formal qualifications);
- *political recognition* (recognition as reflected in legislation and/or political strategies);
- *social recognition* (the acknowledgement of social actors – e.g. employers – of the value of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal settings); and
- *self-recognition* (the assessment of learning outcomes by the participant/learner, and the ability to apply them in other contexts).

There are many methods for validating and recognising youth work and non-formal learning/education at the European and national level. A number of European-level compilations of practices and validation tools have been produced namely:

- Council of Europe's mapping of tools and good practices for better recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education at European and national levels from 2014 (<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/mapping>);
- The Erasmus+ Competent in Volunteering, Competent in Life (CIVCIL) Project's validation tools compiled between 2015 and 2017 (<http://www.civcil.eu/>);
- CEDEFOP's European Inventory on Validation from 2018 (<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>); and .
- ImproVal's compendium of validation tools for volunteers (ongoing) (<https://www.improval.eu/results/tools-collection>).

Specific messages from the Expert Group:

- Organisers of cross-border solidarity activities should ensure that learning outcomes of participants are adequately identified, documented and – where feasible – validated, recognised and made visible
- Maximum use should be made of existing European-level tools and processes serving this purpose e.g. Europass and Youthpass, and the process following up the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal learning.

### 5.4.1 Youthpass

Youthpass is a tool to document and recognise learning outcomes from youth work and solidarity activities. It is available for projects funded by Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps programmes. It is a part of the European Commission's strategy to foster the recognition of non-formal learning, putting policy into practice and practice into policy.

While creating their Youthpass certificate together with a support person, project participants are given the possibility to describe what they have done in their project and which competences they have acquired. Thus, Youthpass supports the reflection upon the personal non-formal learning process and outcomes. As a Europe-wide recognition instrument for non-formal learning in the youth field, Youthpass strengthens the social recognition of youth work, as well as supporting active European citizenship of young people and of youth workers by describing the added value of their project. It also aims at supporting the employability of young people and of youth workers by raising their awareness of and helping to describe their competences, and by documenting their acquisition of key competences on a certificate.

The certificate does it itself not constitute any formal qualification. However, through the process, reflection on learning becomes more structured and the educational value of the project is strengthened. It makes the learning of the participants more conscious, and, being more aware of their competences, it gets easier for the participants to make use of them in the future.

The Youthpass is widely used, and over 1 million certificates have been issued so far.

<https://www.youthpass.eu/en/>

## 5.4.2 AKI

AKI is a European project, developed by a consortium of French, German and Belgian partners, that contributes to the identification and the recognition of transversal competences, developed by young people in international mobility projects in a non-formal context.

The project builds on the rationale that technical competences, whether specific or linguistic, can be formalised with reference to a professional skills base or on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).<sup>9</sup> The task is harder when it comes to transversal competences, such as the ability to adapt or the ability to get involved in a group. Starting from this point, the partnership has developed a guidebook covering the identification and validation of five transversal competences acquired in international mobility experiences (open-mindedness, adaptation to change, interpersonal relations, sense of responsibility, and self-confidence). This guide features a sheet for each transversal competence that allows those who need it to understand how a competence can be developed during cross-border mobility and how it can increase employability and active citizenship.

A toolkit complements the guide in order to provide practical support. It includes tools to enable the participant to reflect on his or her mobility experience and to validate it with the help of a participant's questionnaire, a tutor's record sheet, and an individual feedback sheet.

[www.aki-mobility.org](http://www.aki-mobility.org)

## 5.4.3 Volunteering as “score-reinforcement” for entry into higher education

The Department of Youth Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania developed a national volunteering scheme along the lines of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) model known as the Youth Voluntary Service. Young people aged 14 to 29 can participate for six months, doing a minimum of 40 hours per month of volunteering service at an accredited hosting organisation. During that time, they also participate in a mentoring process once a month (individually or in a group, using digital badges). If successfully accomplished, volunteers are provided with additional score reinforcement for their school grades which they can use for entering programmes of higher education.

In total, 350 young people have participated in the programme since December 2018. 89 participants have already used the scores to enter university or college. Presently three volunteering programs are recognised: the European Solidarity Corps (at least three months of full-time volunteering); the national “Discover yourself” scheme (three months with not less than 80 hours); and the Youth Voluntary Service.

Youthpass is used as a tool to facilitate learning processes of participants and to generate a certificate, which serves as documentation for the score-reinforcement.

<https://jrd.lt/informacija-jaunimui/savanoryste/svo-akreditacija>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>



## 5.5 Quality assurance

Cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities are becoming increasingly popular with young people in Europe, both within Europe and to target countries outside of the European context. So popular, in fact, that it has given rise to a phenomenon named “voluntourism” – i.e. commercial companies or NGOs offering volunteer stays abroad for young people and against a fee. Whilst this may be perfectly defensible, the introduction of fee-paying and a profit motive places an added emphasis on the concept of quality to ensure that activities are made transparent so that young people make informed choices. This also means, inter alia, that it becomes transparent whether efforts benefit genuine causes based on real local community needs and that participants are not exploited as free labour to the detriment of local employment opportunities.

Specific recommendations by the Expert Group:

- Cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities should be based on a needs analysis to ensure that they are in support of an identifiable need and lead to beneficial outcomes
- Organisers must have a clear notion of what they want to achieve with their project and develop indicators that can help them determine whether these objectives have been met. These indicators should reflect the target group and the circumstances
- Projects should be properly evaluated to ascertain the degree of success and to identify important lessons that can help improve future activities
- In the quest for quality, organisers should draw on existing knowledge and tools already developed and strive for a common understanding of what quality is and entails and create indicators to measure this.

### 5.5.1 EVS Realm

EVS Realm – Masters of the Learning Path was a project for improving the quality of cross-border volunteering implemented by Pro Vobis (the National Resource Centre for Volunteering in Romania) together with its three partners: Politistiko Ergastiri (Cyprus), ANAWOJ (Poland) and the European Volunteer Centre (Belgium), under the Strategic Partnerships strand of the Erasmus+ Programme.

The project aimed to increase the quality of EVS/European Solidarity Corps projects, implemented throughout Europe and especially in the four partner countries by developing the organisational capacity of volunteer-involving organisations in relation to European Solidarity Corps projects, with a special focus on the mentoring dimension, which is seen as a crucial intervention area for assuring the quality of volunteering projects.

The projects produced the following results:

- *EVS Strong Houses Mastery Class*: A training design for European Solidarity Corps hosting organisations – focused on organisational management in relation to quality European Solidarity Corps project design
- *Mentors Initiation Journey Itinerary*: A training kit for European Solidarity Corps mentors, including a curriculum, agenda, methods – focused on generating understanding of the mentoring role and defining an individualised mentoring process for each volunteer and the overall support-role to be offered in an European Solidarity Corps volunteering project;
- *TreasureBox for Mentors and other support-persons in European Solidarity Corps Volunteering projects*: a set of 26 working tools and mentoring techniques for European Solidarity Corps mentors and other support-persons, structured in four support-categories (Building relationships within the project team; Personal, emotional and mental wellbeing; Problem Solving; Personal Development and the Learning Process) for different mentoring needs and phases in a mentoring relationship;
- *Policy Paper – Recommendations on Improved European Solidarity Corps Quality*: policy proposals for the improvement of the mentoring dimension in European Solidarity Corps transnational volunteering programmes, based on evidence gathered throughout the project.

The outputs are available in English, French, Flemish, Greek, Polish and Romanian on the European Volunteer Centre’s website (<https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/evs-realm>) and in English and Romanian on Pro Vobis’ website (<https://www.provobis.ro/publicatii/>).

## 5.5.2 A Framework for Quality in Learning Mobility

In 2015, the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth launched the work on developing a *Quality Framework for Learning Mobility in the Field of Youth* under the aegis of the European Platform for Learning Mobility (EPLM). The aim was to come to a clear and shared understanding of what this elusive concept of “quality in mobility” (including cross-border volunteering) actually is and to develop concrete guidelines and definitions that can help practitioners across Europe to achieve an even higher quality in the projects they are undertaking.

The work Quality Framework was carried out in three phases, each of which produced a concrete deliverable that was used to develop the next step:

- A set of overarching quality principles for mobility, which constitutes a tool for reflection to frame the overall discussion of what “quality in mobility” is
- A set of 119 quality indicators that function as a targeted check-list for practitioners for use in the planning phase to ensure that learning outcomes of the project, as well as issues linked to inclusion, health and safety for participants, their active participation in the process etc. are safeguarded
- A quality handbook that underpins the principles and the indicators with more extensive explanations and references to relevant resources that provide further information, relevant tools, or examples of implementation in practice.

On the basis of this work, the EPLM also developed an app (Q!App) operationalising the contents of the handbook in a project management context. Both the Handbook and the Q!App were published in 2019.

Handbook: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/materials-and-download?inheritRedirect=true>

Q!App: <https://www.qualitymobility.app/>

## 5.6 Research

Cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities remain an under-researched phenomenon. Moreover, much of what is undertaken in a national context is not systematically translated and disseminated across borders.

In the 2008 Recommendation, the word “research” was not mentioned. Instead, the Recommendation included text on the need to “improve the level of knowledge of voluntary activities” and “exchange information”. Even though some progress in this respect had been made up to 2019/20, there was still an important gap in our understanding of the phenomenon of cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities, especially of activities that are undertaken outside of the European programmes. Research, therefore, needs to be actively encouraged in order to fill the many gaps in our knowledge and provide the necessary basis for the development of policies and practices.

Specific recommendations of the Expert Group:

- Research is needed to ensure that policy priorities as well as practices are based on solid evidence rather than on anecdotal information
- The Commission is uniquely placed to undertake comparative research on the state of cross-border solidarity activities in the EU27
- Activities should be constantly monitored by research in line with the youth indicators
- A priority should be placed on research that is undertaken in direct contact with practice and with the involvement of practitioners, and where results are available within a reasonable timeframe (e.g. action research, accompanying research)
- There needs to be research on the impact of cross-border solidarity activities, especially longitudinal and tracer studies that can identify outcomes in a long-term perspective (e.g. impact research, summative evaluations)
- Research outcomes should be made accessible to all those concerned, including across national borders.

### 5.6.1 Europa für alle

The Strategic partnership “Europa für alle” (Europe for All) is a European cooperation project involving partners from Germany, Bulgaria, Italy and the UK. It is pursuing the aim to make a contribution towards a more inclusive European Solidarity Corps programme, as young people with fewer opportunities are still underrepresented here, even though the integration of this target group has been one of the major priorities of the EVS and European Solidarity Corps programmes from the beginning. The partnership has the aim to explore the conditions necessary to include this target group through the implementation of 15 cross-border volunteering projects between the involved Member States.

Throughout the lifetime of the project, activities are followed by the research unit “Nonformal Education” of the University of Applied Science Cologne which will investigate practices and evaluate them from both a formative and summative perspective. It aims to integrate research and practice by carrying out an ongoing dialogue between researchers and practitioners, so that findings can be ploughed back into the activities and improve these while they are still ongoing.

<https://www.europeforall.net/>

### 5.6.2 Service Civique

The *Service Civique* is a large youth engagement and volunteer programme set up by the French State. It is aimed at all young people between the ages of 16 to 25 (up to 30 for people with disabilities), and offers a voluntary experience of between 6 to 12 months in France or abroad consisting of at least 24 hours service per week in a non-profit organisation recognised by the state.

In the law from 2010 setting up the programme, the tasks of the Agency are not merely restricted to administrative duties, but also one of systematically gathering and analysing developments. The programme is regularly monitored by researchers, and annual evaluations are made about participation and impact. A particular focus of interest is inclusion, where the law explicitly tasks the agency with “implementing and monitoring the conditions ensuring social diversity of Service Civique volunteers”.

<https://www.service-civique.gouv.fr/>



### 5.6.3 Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes (RAY)

The RAY Network is an open, self-governed European research network of National Agencies of the Erasmus+: Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps and their research partners. The main aim of RAY is to contribute to a better understanding of international youth work and youth learning mobility and thus to an evidence-based policy development in the youth field in Europe as well as to the development of international youth work and learning mobility practice.

The focus of research within RAY is on research-based analysis and monitoring of Erasmus+: Youth in Action and the European Solidarity Corps, including all its key actions. At the beginning of 2014, the RAY Network launched a process in order to develop its mission, research approaches, activities and structure for Erasmus+: Youth in Action. This process resulted in a commonly agreed programme of RAY research activities between 2014 and 2020, involving presently 36 RAY Network partners (National Agencies for the European Youth Programmes and their researcher partner) in 34 countries.

RAY Network partners adhere to common standards of social and educational research, complying with internationally accepted ethical standards. In this respect, RAY aims to promote the dialogue between research, policy and practice. A special feature of the RAY network is its European dimension as well as the transnational, multilingual, intercultural and interdisciplinary research approach

<https://www.researchyouth.eu/>





**6.0**

CONCLUSIONS



## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 The context

The mandate of the Expert Group took its point of departure in the 2008 *Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers* in Europe and the need to review and revise this to bring it into line with the current situation. Already in the initial phases of the discussions it was established that this was not because provisions of the existing text were obsolete – in fact, apart from a few minor, technical points, the issues raised were still valid in the context of 2019/20, and were deemed necessary to include in subsequent policy documents. Rather, the task was one of addressing some new developments that were not on the agenda in 2008.

A very direct one was to ensure that the revised Recommendation covered all activities of the European Solidarity Corps, which superseded the European Voluntary Service from 1996. Whereas the EVS was only about the physical mobility of volunteers, the European Solidarity Corps also includes other types of cross-border solidarity activities. Further significant developments within the field itself are concerned with the emergence of volunteering as a commercial activity (“voluntourism”) and the growth in volunteering via IT-platforms (digital volunteering). At the same time, volunteering is becoming increasingly widespread among young people, and even being incorporated into formal education as a vehicle for learning (“service learning”). Concerns for the environment, which have now reached the top of the political agenda in the EU, need to also be reflected in activities that involve cross-border travel.

The Covid-19 crisis, which struck in early 2020, radically changed the landscape of European cross-border volunteering and solidarity, temporarily disrupting the cross-border physical mobility of volunteers. The Expert Group took these circumstances into consideration in drafting their recommendations by including this unparalleled dimension in their work.

## 6.2 Future implications

The inclusion of the concept of solidarity has implications that go beyond the European Solidarity Corps, as a Recommendation covers a policy area, and not an individual programme. In relation to the 2008 Recommendation, which focuses strongly on participants and their learning outcomes, “solidarity” signifies a shift in emphasis, where notions of community impact and community involvement need to be reflected to a higher degree than before. Still, the increased focus on community benefits of volunteering should not happen at the expense of access and inclusion, which remain important issues. For many young people with fewer opportunities, participation in a cross-border volunteering project may constitute a crucial learning experience, but special efforts need to be made to involve them. Digital volunteering may, in fact, offer an additional way of including target groups that are, for a variety of reasons, not able to contemplate a longer-term stay abroad, or be used to pave the way for later volunteering experiences involving physical mobility. In times where physical mobility is impossible (like during the Covid19-crisis), it becomes the main vehicle for cross-border cooperation.

The growth of commercialised volunteering highlights issues of quality in all aspects of the activities as a form of “consumer protection”. Offers must be transparent so that young people are able to make informed choices, and adequate support and protection must be safeguarded here as well as in the activities in not-for-profit organisations.

## 6.3 The actors

Cross-border volunteering and solidarity implicates actors and stakeholders at the local, national and European level and involves practitioners, policymakers and researchers. It is important at the level of practitioners and front-line organisations implementing activities to ensure that they constantly maintain and build up their capacity to carry out quality projects, e.g. by providing platforms where knowledge and experience can be shared, and networks established. Policy-makers provide the right framework conditions by ensuring, where relevant, the social and legal status of participants and clearing away administrative obstacles that may otherwise complicate cross-border projects – e.g. by facilitating fast-track visa application procedures for participants coming from countries outside of the EU.

Research has a special role to play in this by providing valid knowledge and evidence that can be used to improve practices and underpin the policy-making process. However, cross-border volunteering and solidarity remains an under-researched phenomenon.

## 6.4 European cooperation

Many issues related to cross-border mobility cannot be tackled at national level alone, since the activities involve both sending and hosting countries. But traditions for volunteering and the framework conditions can still be quite different from Member State to Member State, which is why coordination and the efforts to create a common understanding across the EU remain as important as ever.

Moreover, many Member States have their own, national schemes for cross-border volunteering and solidarity that run alongside the European programmes (notably the European Solidarity Corps and the EU Aid Volunteering), sometimes offering very similar opportunities for young people. It is important to exploit the synergies and complementarities of these and prevent risks of overlap and competition that may otherwise affect recruitment or even threaten the existence of schemes.





# Annex 1

LIST OF INVOLVED EXPERTS

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- AT- Ms. Melanie Jacobs/Ms. Christine Keplinger
  - Befr – Ms. Stephanie Nowakowski
  - BEnl –Dr. Amoury Groenen/Mr. Jan Vanhee
  - BG – Ms. Alexandra Vasileva
  - CY- Ms. Evangelia Mechanikou
  - CZ- Ms. Adela Linhartova
  - Co-chairman (and DE)- Mr. Uwe Finke-Timpe
  - DE- Mr. Manfred von Hebel
  - EE – Ms. Reet Kost/Ms. Anett Manniste
  - ES- Mr. Raúl Puerta Lorenzo
  - FR – Ms. Janaina Paisley/ Ms. Fabiola Rivas
  - HR – Ms. Andrea Krznar
  - HU- Ms. Tímea Szőke
  - IE – Ms. Roisin Barr
  - IT- Ms. Serena Angioli
  - LT- Ms. Milda Lukoševičiūtė
  - LU- Mr. Charles Schiltz
  - LV- Ms. Maija Kolberga
  - MT- Ms. Maria Borg, Mr. Ryan Borg
  - NL – Ms. Hanske Mulder/ Ms. Jojanneke de Waal
  - PL- Mr. Mateusz Jezowski
  - PT- Mr. Luis Alves
  - SE- Ms. Lotta Jarvenius Rössner
  - SI- Mr. Uros Skrinar
  - SK – Ms. Michaela Šidová
  - UK- Mr. Simon Chambers/ Ms. Fumie Izaki<sup>10</sup>
  - Rey Europe- Ms. Sarah Hitchcock
  - European Youth Forum- Mr. Alfonso Aliberti/Ms Judit Lantai
  - European Volunteer Centre – Ms. Gabriella Civico

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10) Members of the expert group up until 31 January 2020 when the UK left the EU.





# Annex 2

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- Youth in Europe Offenburg Talks, 'Solidarity and Young People Today Report', 2018, available at: <https://www.jugendfuereuropa.de/ueber-jfe/projekte/YouthInEurope-OffenburgTalks/>.





