
Volunteering and Youth employability: It's easy!

New approaches to recognize and measure soft skills developed while volunteering abroad



A European perspective on youth international volunteering as a resource for the Youth to acquire competences useful for life.

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Greetings to you all.

On behalf of CEV, the European Volunteer Centre, based in Brussels, I thank the organizers of this event for the invitation.

It's a great pleasure to be here and share some thoughts with you regarding volunteering, recognition of skills and competences and youth employability.

Before that, however, allow me a brief presentation to introduce CEV.

The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) is the European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to promote and support volunteers and volunteering in Europe, at regional, national and European levels.

We work together and through networking to promote and support volunteering, advocating, sharing knowledge, training and empowering.

CEV's vision is a Europe in which volunteering is central in building a cohesive and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship.

Our mission is to contribute to the creation of an enabling political, social and economic environment in Europe where the full potential of volunteering can be realised.

CEV promotes the European Dimension by reaching out to the many thousands of volunteers and volunteer organisations in Europe as a source of support bringing the European dimension to their work.

We build bridges. CEV channels the collective priorities and concerns of its member organisations to the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

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During the preparatory talks I've been given the mission of presenting CEV's and European perspectives on youth international volunteering as a resource for the Youth to acquire competences useful for their life, including work life.

It's a fact, commonly accepted by every actor of this play called «Volunteering» – volunteers, volunteering organizations, volunteer centres, businesses, unions, authorities & governments



at all levels, society in general –: the practice of volunteering is relevant both to volunteers and their organizations and to the beneficiaries of the volunteer action.

Through volunteering action, especially if it is done on a regular basis, volunteers acquire a certain number of skills and competences, normally called ‘soft skills’: personal skills, leadership skills, relational skills, technical skills and interpersonal skills.

(My colleague from CPV, the Portuguese Confederation of Volunteering, Susana Amaral, will address this with a bit more detail.)

As you know, volunteering is all about motivation: the will of doing a good deed to others, fulfilling needs where neither the State (at different levels), nor the community (as such) and the beneficiary are able or available to do.

This is the positive motivation, free of reward either financial or material. The motivation that keeps the volunteers going on and on. It comes from the heart!

On the other hand, there is another kind of motivation, the one that makes people enter volunteering because they have other interests, besides doing something for the common good.

This interest can be translated in the will of acquiring a certain number of skills and competences in order to get a job or to improve the personal professional ones.

I believe that the beneficiaries will thank these volunteers for their work as they do to the first mentioned volunteers, but there is a difference nevertheless.

So, what we are facing here is how to balance these two kinds of motivation to volunteer, regardless the fact that both will basically lead to the same results by the volunteers: acquisition of skills and competences and improvement of the quality of life, generally speaking, of individuals and communities.

The European Year of Volunteering 2011 put volunteering in the European and national agendas, and boosted the impact and recognition of the volunteer action throughout Europe.

A final document, called “PAVE – Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe”, developed by European Volunteer Networks, members of the EYV 2011 Alliance, was released afterwards and constitutes the reference to deal with volunteering and volunteers in Europe. CEV continues its legacy taking in charge a kind of a motto: ‘PAVE - Let’s not forget it’.

Unfortunately, since then, we have seen a decrease of visible interest about volunteering, at all levels across Europe, although some initiatives have seen the light of day, not only from EU’s side but also from the civil society’s.

Regarding EU, I will consider two major documents with impact on us all:

- a) The Council Recommendation of 20.Dec.2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning; and
- b) The Council Recommendation of 22.May.2018 on key competences for lifelong learning.

In the 2012 recommendation, the member States of the European Union should take a certain number of actions, and I quote, «with a view to offering individuals the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned outside formal education and training – including through mobility experiences – and to make use of that learning for their careers and further learning, and with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity», end of quote.



On the other hand, the first paragraph of the 2018 recommendation declares that, and I quote, «Member States should support the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning and ensure opportunities for all to develop key competences by making full use of the ‘Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework», end of quote, being this document an annex of the Recommendation.

There are many more documents, from different EU agencies, namely the “European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning”, dealing with these subjects. Also the European Youth Forum has released a document called “Validation of non-formal education in the youth sector: Key success factors and recommendations”.

However, I just keep the first two as main references.

Regarding civil society, there is an important work done by CEV in collaboration with the Lifelong Learning Platform, in preparing and implementing a peer learning activity (PLA) to debate “The role of non-governmental stakeholders in implementing the 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning”.

The meeting was held in Lisbon, in September 2017, and produced a final report which is available from the Platform or from CEV. This report summarises the discussions that took place during the peer learning activity, aiming to support the work of the European Commission, PLA participants, European Qualification Framework members and other stakeholders in developing follow up actions.

Also from the civil society side, there is an Erasmus Plus project called **LEVER UP (Valuing informal learning and transversal competences experienced in the voluntary service to increase employability, social responsibility and mobility), where CEV is a partner**. This project exploits the legacy from the previous project ‘LEVER’ (2014-2016). **LEVER UP** pursues two main objectives:

- Enhancing the **mutual trust area**, based on a common model and tools to value transversal competences in full transparency and transferability between vocational education and training (VET), Volunteering and labour market.
- Implementing a **dedicated service**, able to foster the whole system at international and national level and to run at full speed

The project outcomes include:

- the enhancement of the model, coherently with the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET), European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and EU Passport systems;
- the e_LEVER Space, including the infrastructure and the content for an easy access of the toolkit, the training and validation services;
- the pilots to test in each country the obtained products and the set up of a valuable triangle system among the labour market, VET and the volunteering.

This is just another example of CEV’s involvement in finding solutions for the good practice of volunteering.

Let’s go back a little to tackle the issue of international volunteering as a resource for the Youth to acquire competences useful for both their personal and professional or work life.



It is known that the new European Solidarity Corps programme promotes, amongst other, the opportunity of experiencing international volunteering, like the previous European Volunteer Service.

With this programme, volunteers, in addition to expressing solidarity and having a positive impact on needs in society, they can acquire, besides life experience, a new set of skills and competences, than in national territory, related to multiculturalism, language experience, to name but two very important ones.

About the ESC, CEV GA of October 2016 approved a policy statement in which declared to believe, and I quote, «that the European Solidarity Corps should be developed in close collaboration with volunteer infrastructure organisations to ensure that the potential of the volunteer opportunities offered in this scheme are fully realised and complement existing provision whilst meeting properly identified needs other than those of the volunteers themselves», end of quote.

Another possibility to live youth international volunteering is the participation in voluntourism projects, which has become a good business for travel agencies and other entities that arrange these programmes.

However, we should be careful regarding voluntourism, so that the beneficiaries really benefit from it.

Once again, CEV GA took a stand about this subject during the same GA. In other words, and I quote, «CEV should endeavour to ensure that renewed interest in volunteering, and in particular cross-border volunteering, from the European policymakers maintains a focus on non-fee paying volunteering opportunities that are truly grounded in responding to local challenges and an expressed need for additional human resources in the form of volunteers coming from another country, avoiding all job substitution situations», end of quote.

A word of caution: youth international volunteering is essentially good, but it needs to be led from the community perspective and not primarily a learning or simply enjoyable experience for the young person.

All this gives us a general picture about what is being done around Europe.

But the very concept of Europe – in this case the European Union – is not a single one. Although it has some common ground – the common policies – that could allow us to talk about ‘union’, the EU is still an addition of 28 different realities – the very best treasure of the EU –.

These realities do not facilitate to take a single decision about the matters of this seminar, to define one single solution to apply to all countries in the same way.

That is why the debates about the recognition, the validation, and the measurement of the value of volunteering will be an ongoing process.

Plus: there are voices that say that neither of this should be done or necessary, because we would be creating a process similar to the formal education...

Nevertheless, CEV as a platform and me personally believe that this is the proper way to address this subject, although we might never reach a final and satisfactory conclusion to every actor involved.

All this said, I believe that we might conclude by saying:

1. Volunteering is open to all but it is not for everyone;



2. All clear and transparent opportunities of national or international volunteering should be taken by those interested, and State, businesses, communities and individuals should work together to make this succeed, for the benefit of all;
3. Young people with volunteer experience, hopefully a continuous and from the heart one, will be better prepared for life, meaning for getting a job and start a professional life, thanks to the skills and competences they have acquired through their volunteer action;
4. Finally, that a skillful and competent young person will be a great resource to the community, especially if he or she has been or still is a volunteer.

Then the potential to change the world – something that every volunteer wants to do – will be more visible and may become effective... positively.

So, is youth employability easy because of international volunteering practice?
It is not that easy... but it is possible.

Thank you.

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