



## September 2023 Policy Statement on Volunteering & European Civic Service

### CEV notes that:

1. The intention to establish a European Civic Service was put forward in an opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee in 2009, supporting transnational exchanges as a reinforcing element for European citizenship.
2. The idea of adding Civic Service to existing EU exchange and solidarity programmes, was included in the conclusions from the Conference on the Future of Europe to foster European identity ([Proposal 48.1 Culture and Exchanges, CoFoE Report on the Final Outcome](#))
3. The already-existing European Solidarity Corps programme bears many similarities to the proposed European Civic Service.
4. Many EU Member States have national Civic Service programmes. In some EU Member States, it is possible to use these programmes to undertake placements abroad.
5. The [Council Recommendation on mobility of young volunteers across the EU](#) recommends that the European Commission and the Member States should promote transnational volunteering in the EU and beyond through EU youth programmes, as part of the [EU Youth Strategy](#). It also emphasises that cooperation, information and accessibility to volunteering between member states should also be reinforced.
6. The [European Commission is working on a legislative initiative on cross-border activities of associations](#) to overcome administrative and registration barriers non-profit organisations face and that affect EU democratic space.

**CEV believes that:**

1. Volunteering needs to be a permanent element of European policies. As proved by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, volunteering organisations and volunteers of all ages play a pivotal role for community resilience.
2. Volunteers are essential components of EU democracy, as they embody and spread EU values through their activities and that civic service programmes also play a big role in this regard.
3. Democratic and inclusive cross-sectoral structures for collaborative networking between volunteers of all ages are essential to reinforce European civic space.
4. An open European Civic Space is a vital element for a stronger democracy, enhancing active participation and citizenship and strengthening the feeling of belonging to the EU.
5. New EU solidarity programmes should bring added value and complement already existing ones. It is crucial that a situation with too many multiple youth opportunities that can create confusion and mistrust in decision makers amongst young people and society as a whole is avoided.
6. Volunteering is based on recognised and essential principles. Some are shared with Civic Service programmes, but there are also some significant differences:
  - a) The voluntary aspect is missing for Civic Service programmes of those countries where Civic Service is mandatory.
  - b) National Civic Service programmes are usually only accessible only for young people, normally aged between 18 and 30 years old, whereas volunteering is open to people of all ages.
  - c) While civic education is integral to Civic Service programs, where it's considered an essential component and pre-defined learning outcomes are mandatory, its role in volunteering is different. It is certainly beneficial and plays a significant role in enhancing democratic engagement and solidarity, but it is not a mandatory prerequisite for participation.
7. If a European Civic Service is established, then it has the potential to become the main European solidarity programme for young people (18-30 years old). In this case, the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) could become a complementary solidarity programme to the European Civic Service, and could be easily converted into an intergenerational programme, with no age restrictions, enhancing accessibility and inclusivity of volunteering, including cross border volunteering in Europe.

1.

**CEV asks that:**

2. The European Union institutions and the Member States help maintain volunteering as a values based activity based on free will and as a contribution to solidarity and the common good based on clear ethical principles (as described in [BEV 2030](#)). In this way ensuring that volunteering is not exploited or instrumentalised.
3. Policymakers ensure that clear distinctions are made between: compulsory civic service e.g. as part of employability or penal programmes; optional civic service programmes that are typically aimed at young people; and volunteering.
4. The [European Commission legislative initiative on cross-border activities of associations](#) encompasses the creation of a European Civic Space, reinforcing transnational European values sharing and, thus, strengthening European democracy.
5. The European Union Institutions and the Member States recognise the importance of volunteers actions in the protection of EU values and acknowledge the role volunteers have played, play and will play for EU society resilience.
6. The European Union Institutions and Member States recognise the role of non-formal and informal learning, including volunteering, in developing civic skills and shaping active European citizens and provide greater recognition and support to it, also through better funding schemes.
7. The European Union Institutions and Member States develop a European Civic mobility program encompassing both formal and informal learning activities, including volunteering, to promote European values and enhance European democratic and social engagement among young people, as presented in the [European Parliament Report on the implementation of citizenship education actions](#).
8. If a European Civic Service Mobility programme is created then the European Solidarity Corps is reviewed and any adaptations are made to both programmes to ensure complete complementarity with the new programme and avoiding confusion and/ or repetition and inefficiencies.