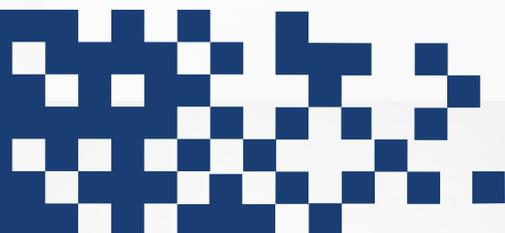


INEAR



Inclusion, Equality and Rights in Volunteering

WEBINAR



Empowerment Report

May 30th 2022



#BEV2030



Co-funded by
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Gabriella Civico opened the webinar with an introduction to the topic, a section on empowerment, and a presentation on the 4 sub-sections of this chapter from the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030; Enabling volunteering, Inclusion, Stability and Sustainability, and the Legal and Policy framework.



Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 Video

Alzbeta Brozmanova Gregorova - Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations (SK) “Enabling Volunteering through Civic Education and Service Learning”

Alzbeta focused on the first sub-section, enabling volunteering, making links between Service Learning programmes and their ability to enable and encourage volunteering for young people.

Civic education’s aim to develop critical thinking, cultivate values of freedom, democracy and responsibility, practical skills and competencies was highlighted. It was stressed that this is a goal commonly shared between volunteering, service learning, and civic education. As such, volunteering and service learning are strong tools in achieving a stronger civic education.

The implementation of service learning programmes in Slovakia was presented, where research and studies were conducted to inform how to achieve the best results from Service Learning programmes in formal education settings. From this research, it was concluded that it is important to develop service learning programmes both in formal and informal education.



It was also discussed that while volunteering in schools is present, issues arise both in the irregularity of volunteer involvement (1 or 2 times a year), and in the limited scope of activities (mostly fundraising or cleaning a public space), as well as the lack of meaningful integration of volunteering into the curriculum.

Service learning programmes help to bridge this gap between volunteering and schools, making activities more regular, integrated and meaningful. It was mentioned that, while service learning is useful in bridging this gap, providing an opportunity to teach and learn differently, it is not universally applicable for every subject/education. Care needs to be given in considering how and where it is integrated in schools.

3 current models of service learning were examined: the Latin American model, which stresses solidarity; the US model, which stresses community engagement; and the European model, which stresses connecting learning and civic engagement. Each of these models should be applied with contextual consideration.

This was followed by a discussion of the key components of service learning. Reciprocity between the community and students; a vertical model of helping whereby students work in cooperation with, not for, the community; and the importance of making young people the leaders in their own service learning experience.



Alzbeta Brozmanova Gregorova - Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations, Slovakia

Alzbeta then presented the preliminary results from pilot schemes of the service learning toolkit and teacher training. These results showed that service learning empowers teachers to make better connections with their students, that students were more motivated to engage with the school and their community, and that participation gave them a feeling of empowerment as they realised the impact they could have on their own communities and school environments.

Download [here](#) the presentation "Enabling Volunteering through Civic Education and Service-Learning."



A question was proposed regarding what differentiates service learning from social internships, to which Alzbeta responded that service learning is much more reciprocal, while internships are nearly always focused more on professional development. Participants also asked whether these schemes would be obligatory for students to participate in, to which Alzbeta replied that, while there is free choice within the programme, participation in the programme is usually obligatory. On this point, Gabriella highlighted that this raises an important issue in making the distinction between service learning and volunteering outside of school, due to this obligatory aspect.

Lucas Meijs - Rotterdam School of Management (Erasmus University) NL "Role-based and task-based volunteering / membership based formal and non formal initiatives - what are the trends and implications for Legal and Policy frameworks for volunteering in Europe"

Lucas began by identifying that volunteering is something that governments have wanted to promote since the International Year of Volunteering 2001, but an issue remains as to whether the current legal framework is suitable for enabling this. A further question lies in what types of volunteering governments might not want to promote. Lucas brought up the example of someone in China creating Chinese subtitles for movies which are otherwise banned in the country, as this is a form of social action and volunteering, but inherently goes against what the government would want.

Lucas presented that there are many different reasons why a government would want to get involved with volunteering, and that each reason would lead to a different perspective and legal framework. As examples, the following reasons were discussed:

- **Welfare:** This would concern the relationship between the state and citizens, leading to a framework more focused on volunteering involved in the provision of services.
- **Democracy:** This would involve citizens in decision-making and in shaping the political conduct of society, creating a framework which regulates individuals' roles in decision-making.
- **Economy:** This focuses on volunteering as a way for citizens to gain competencies which would be useful for the labour market.
- **Community:** This type of volunteering is more focused on the enhancement of neighbourhood relations, building an internal community, and presenting solidarity among citizens.



Lucas also discussed some trends in volunteering which present a challenge to the current legal frameworks. The first was the rise of third-party involvement, such as schools or corporations offering corporate volunteering schemes. Governments are challenged with figuring out how to regulate volunteering when there is third-party involvement making things more complicated.

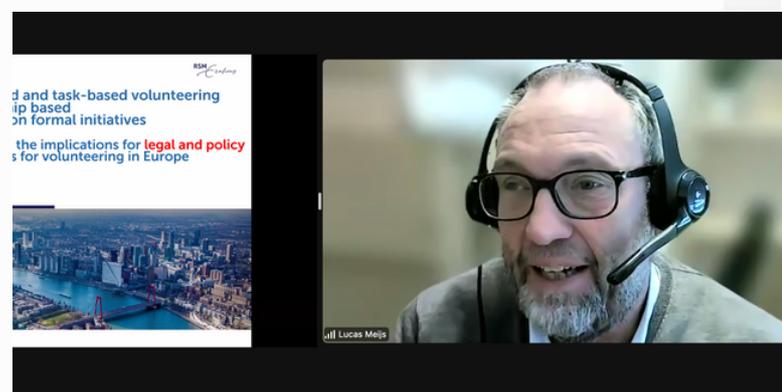
Secondly, the rise of spontaneous volunteering, such as crisis volunteering, is equally as complex to define and fit into current regulations. Governments often rely on volunteers in a time of crisis, but the current regulations in many countries are often too rigid and limited to allow this, particularly when it comes to the question of volunteer insurance.

Lucas highlighted that the legal systems are often slow to adapt to changes, and with the volunteering field changing so rapidly to accommodate new challenges and technologies (such as with the rise of micro-volunteering), more needs to be done to ensure the legal framework is fit for enabling, not restricting, volunteering. Furthermore, it was noted that the legal idea of “counting hours” that someone was volunteering is becoming less and less useful because of how flexible, spontaneous, and adaptable volunteering is becoming.

Similarly, it was explained that within a government, different departments will have different approaches to volunteering. For example, the Dutch tax ministry could have a very different perspective to the Dutch social ministry, highlighting the need to unify an interpretation of volunteering.

Participants noted many similar issues in their own countries, particularly relating to the ongoing debate of wanting more/less regulation from governments in the voluntary sector. It was also discussed among participants that there is a difference between volunteering and social engagement, which is incredibly tricky to define but has a big impact on the legal framework.

Download [here](#) the presentation.



Lucas Meijs - Rotterdam School of Management



Nina Arwitz - CEO Volunteer Ireland - “The importance of National Volunteering Strategies for stability and sustainability in the volunteering sector”

Nina, having been involved heavily in achieving and implementing the Irish National Strategy for Volunteering, offered her perspective on whether these strategies can help achieve a more stable and sustainable environment. She began by stating that the strategy has achieved this, however there are some areas of doubt in the specific Irish context. For example, the rising cost-of-living crisis and the risk of recession presents a challenge, as the volunteering sector is at risk of funding cuts if austerity measures are used. Furthermore, the strategy is only mandated until 2025, which presents uncertainty in what will happen when the current strategy ends, and if volunteering will become less of a policy focus after this period.

As for the actual process of achieving the strategy, Nina highlighted that they made three main arguments to the government to show that this strategy would be beneficial. The first being that Volunteer Ireland already does lots of good work and reporting on the impact of volunteering policies, which would be strengthened by an input from the government on what exactly they want from Volunteer Ireland, bringing a benefit to both parties. Secondly, despite the high number of volunteers in Ireland, there are many challenges facing the sector which the government will need to understand and take action on if they want to maintain Ireland's strong volunteering reputation. Thirdly, Volunteer Ireland argued that they should be directly accountable to the government, to ensure they are delivering strong values from the funding they receive. Nina stated that Volunteer Ireland had to work hard in the creation of the strategy, even alongside the government's involvement. For example, the creation process started with a government public consultation, yet Volunteer Ireland simultaneously held their own consultation with 5 workshops across the country, the results of which fed into the government's own consultation.

The strategy itself was presented and discussed. The strategy consists of an opening text outlining the government's commitment to volunteering, then proceeds with strategic aims and actions, including details of who will lead each step and how, and a general timeline for implementation.



Regarding implementation, the strategy has an overall leading group which meets twice a year, and sub-groups that follow specific actions. The complex relationship between these groups and different government departments can create some issues, only compounded by the different levels of engagement between departments.

Fortunately, it was identified that the strategy has helped achieve a lot, including funding for volunteering days, development of volunteering standards, and communication strategies which amplify the sector's voice.

Participants asked about how closely Volunteer Ireland had contact with government departments. Nina responded that their main point of contact was the newly-created rural and community development department, whose small size gave Volunteer Ireland bigger visibility and more opportunity to work closely with the government.

One participant highlighted that the strategy for volunteering in Flanders is often lacking visibility and funding, and there are issues relating to decisions being made between different government departments. Nina responded that this has not happened so much in Ireland's context, because one element of the strategy allows Volunteer Ireland to ask for impact assessments before policies related to volunteering organisations are implemented. In closing, Nina stressed that one issue lies in receiving funding to research the social return on investment for volunteering policies.



*Nina Arwitz - CEO
Volunteer Ireland*



Anna Czaman - "Inclusion in volunteering"

Anna Czaman offered her perspective on inclusion in volunteering, as a person with a physical disability herself. Anna began by stating that there are often misconceptions relating to volunteering, such as volunteers being seen as simply fundraisers, as well as misconceptions about what exactly inclusion means. Her experience as an European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteer in an organisation in Antwerp supporting people with learning disabilities helped her gain an understanding of what inclusion is, and brought to her a strong sense of belonging.

It was stressed that, while there were barriers to overcome, including language barriers, meeting each other halfway brought value to both the volunteers and the participants, including exchanging food and culture and creating trips together to see the country. Anna expressed that it is important to ensure people with disabilities feel that their opinion is listened to, and for volunteer managers to give them a sense of mutual support and safety. Furthermore, showing people who usually are on the receiving end of help that they have lots to offer and can help others, can bring a hugely positive impact to people with disabilities.

The importance of communication was put forward as a key factor to inclusion. Volunteer managers should ensure they ask questions and make sure everyone is on the same page, that access to the correct tools are given to everyone, and that specific needs are met. There should also be an understanding that some volunteers might be hesitant to disclose their needs, but that it is important to ensure they feel safe to share these needs. To close, the importance of hearing directly from people with disabilities, rather than making assumptions about their abilities or needs, is crucial to any truly inclusive volunteering activity.



*Anna Czaman -
"Inclusion in
volunteering"*

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