October 2025

Policy Statement on Volunteering and Service Learning[1]

CEV notes that:

1. Service-Learning - integrating community service with formal education - whilst not considered volunteering itself, serves as a pathway to volunteering and contributes to the fulfillment of essential components of European society such as promoting civic engagement and fostering active citizenship, social cohesion and solidarity among people from diverse backgrounds.

2. If societal needs are to be continued to be met, discrimination & marginalisation combatted, and human rights defended, more citizens from diverse realities and backgrounds will need to be empowered and supported for active engagement as volunteers to support themselves and others (BEV2030).

---

[1] Service-learning is a pedagogical strategy based on including community engagement in students' curricula. It is normally associated with higher education, where it provides academic credit for education occurring in a traditionally non-formal setting. That way, students contribute to society while they develop academically, civically, and personally, managing to reflect on their experiences in a systematic and critical manner. The three fundamental components of this reciprocal exchange of knowledge are "serving", "reflecting", and "learning". The underlying idea and main achievement of Service-learning is that students become 'whole humans,' with social and personal competences on top of solid academic skills, also encouraging them to become responsible and observer citizens. Service Learning is also a recognised pedagogical approach for primary and secondary level education.

3. This requires a more active, participatory and responsible citizenship committed to sustainable and global development and lifelong learning. To adapt to such demands, educational practices need to undergo a profound transformation.

4. Linking classroom-based learning with real-world community involvement, service-learning students can be involved in a wide range of projects and community organisations that provide a spectrum of services, including, but not limited to, social services, sports and recreation, arts and culture, education and research, and environmental causes.

5. Effective Service-Learning should be organised, needs-based, have meaningful student participation and authentic community partnerships. It should consist of established processes, including structured reflection and evaluation of the experiences and learnings from it, which would ultimately help students understand the meaning of service within a wide range of fields and areas of interests and needs.

6. Service-Learning development in European formal education is influenced by various policy contexts that reflect broader educational goals, social values and political priorities. However, despite efforts, there remains a lack of policies and strategic investment across Member States to support structured service learning opportunities.

7. The EU is increasingly recognising the importance, and promoting the benefits, of service-learning through initiatives such as the [European School Education Platform](#), in a [2022 Council recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development](#) and projects funded by the EU through programmes such as the Erasmus+ programme. [SLUSIK](#), [SLIPS](#) and [SlipStream](#) are notable recent examples.

CEV believes that:

1. Students need to be supported to become conscious, empowered citizens through educational innovation where education providers with the support of parents, guardians and the wider society, give them the necessary tools, values and skills to face current and future challenges and contribute positively to creating a more just, sustainable and equitable world.

2. Alongside other pedagogical tools, Service-learning is an excellent method to foster civic knowledge, empathy and participation from an early point in life, and create active citizens for the future. It should therefore be available and included in all levels of education including primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as adult learning.

3. What students will do as a service component will depend on the intended educational outcomes, the service-learning model used, and the needs of both the community and direct beneficiaries.

4. Quality matters. Effective service learning needs to be tied to the curriculum, clearly defined, reflective, participatory and community-based. The development of

service-learning therefore needs to involve actors from both educational and civil society institutions who together can provide coordination, guidelines and foster overall implementation.

5. Educators' capacity to actively engage service-learning is essential, providing them the needed time, proper training and institutional support to integrate service-learning well. All stakeholders involved in service-learning projects must address responsibilities like safeguarding, accessibility, insurance, risk management, and data protection. These factors should be a core standard in the design and delivery of projects.

CEV asks that:

1. The EU and its Member States make efforts to promote the wider understanding of the value and benefits of service-learning and offer more support for Service-Learning in order to promote inclusive practices, reduce fragmentation, underfunding, and lack of access, in this way creating more equal opportunities for personal and professional development through this innovative educational approach.

2. Civic Education, including a Service-Learning component, is embedded in education systems enabling a stronger focus on European values, solidarity and the role of the EU in promoting peace, increasing awareness of volunteering and civil society, not only for children and young people, but also their wider networks of families and friends. Budgets should be made available to education providers and CSOs to pilot small scale service-learning programmes

3. Quality standards for service-learning are adopted that protect the "free will" nature of volunteering as distinct from compulsory parts of formal education systems that have Service-Learning as a methodological approach. Education providers, civil society organisations and policymakers should have access to capacity building opportunities.

4. Education providers of service-learning are rewarded and supported to ensure that Service Learning programmes are organised in an inclusive way, ensuring that all learners regardless of personal circumstance or background can participate and recognise the effort of teachers and students and the impact of that effort in facilitating inclusive programmes with quality principles.

5. More comparative research and data collection on the impact of service-learning should be gathered to guide policy development and demonstrate its contribution to the EU's social, educational, and economic goals.

Further Reading

CEV Projects:

SLipstream: Handbook with quality standards for SL

SLIPS: National and European Context Reports

SLUSIK: State of the Art Report on Service Learning in Europe

Annex:

European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE)

European Association of Service Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE) - Policy Brief

Europe Engage - Report

LAVTS Understanding Service Learning - Report

Examples of Countries that have incorporated SL to their curriculum:

Croatia - Curriculum for the cross-curricular Topic Civic Education for Primary and Secondary schools

Italy - Civic Education as a compulsory subject (Law 92/2019) and the Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation

Netherlands: Maatschappelijke diensttijd

Portugal: Curriculum subject Citizenship & Development includes Volunteering.