

FINAL REPORT
Policy Conference
VOLUNTEERING IN EUROPE:
MORE THAN A CHALLENGE
5 - 6 October 2017
Vienna, Austria

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INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the Austrian Volunteering Act, the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection and the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) jointly organized a conference on current issues for volunteering in Europe.

Co-financed by the Europe For Citizens Programme, the European Conference on Volunteering (Vienna) (ECVV 2017) was held on 5 - 6 October and gathered 180 participants from across Europe representing the different volunteering stakeholders (e.g. volunteering organisations, public administrations and universities).

The three panels of the conference were developed in English, German and French (with simultaneous interpretation) with three different methodologies in order to involve the audience and promote the participation of all the attendees. The conference also counted with a Conference App that allowed additional participation via mobile devices.

The conference was opened by Mr. Alois Stöger (Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection - Austria) and Ms. Cristina Rigman (President of the European Volunteer Centre) who welcomed the participants and set the scene for the subsequent debates and discussions concerning the actual situation for volunteering in Austria and across Europe and the future perspectives and potential future developments.

Panel 1 was focused on the relation between volunteering and employability, analyzing risks, threats and opportunities in this field with the participation of different speakers from academic, public and associative sectors (this multi stakeholder approach was present in all the panels).

The conference participants had the opportunity to go a little bit further into the relation between volunteering and employability in **Panel 2 focusing on the promotion and development of employability** via voluntary engagement, whether that be full-time voluntary service or free-time and part-time volunteering opportunities.

Panel 3 focused on reflecting about the future of volunteering: challenges, trends, risks and solutions, new profiles of volunteers in a more communicated and digital world, mobility, non-formal education, all complex issues that need to be explored and understood in order to engage citizens as volunteers in the most appropriate way in order to get the best impact on society's needs.

The full digital report with photos and videos can be found online here:
www.freiwilligenweb.at/de/service/ecvv-2017



PANEL 1

VOLUNTEERING, EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY

The Chair of the session, Ms. Eva More-Hollerweger (Senior Research at NPO-Institute, University of Economics, Vienna), started by putting the focus on **the risk of instrumentalization of volunteers** (when they are underpaid substitutes for regular staff, for instance). She also affirmed that volunteering is firstly about motivation, stimulating people who are no longer employed in taking a first step into the labour market.

The Keynote Speaker, Mr. Theo Wehner (Researcher at the University of Science and Technology, ETH Zurich) analyzed the difference in values between volunteering commitment and paid work and how **volunteering is a social capital element**, compensating what paid jobs can not give to people (studies at European level show that people having high-grade jobs find a sense of "fulfillment" in volunteering, while people having low-grade jobs are more oriented in finding "compensation" in the volunteering activity).

After this intervention several different points of view from different speakers were shared. Ms. Doris Rosenkranz (Researcher at the Technische Hochschule Nürnberg, Germany) analyzed the intrinsic **connection between volunteering and commitment**. Studies conducted in the context of the German volunteering services show that more educated people are more willing to volunteer. Young people (14-29 years old) are more committed and they look at the volunteering experience as a "non-formal" way to acquire competences to be used in education and then into the labour market.

She agreed with Mr. Wehner in that volunteering creates social capital but also social skills (e.g. ability to work in team) helping people with lower formal educational attainment or socially excluded to **access the labour market**. She highlighted that we need a better communication between the non-profit and the for-profit sectors and that employers should also give more attention to the issue of "social responsibility".

What about **changes in volunteering structures**? Mr. Joost van Alkemade (CEO at Association of Dutch Voluntary Effort Organizations) presented the progressive changes in the volunteering structures from the '60s until the present day in The Netherlands. Since the '60s volunteering action has been community-based and financially supported by the government. Today, the contribution from government is decreasing and communities are asked and, sometimes obliged, to provide services at their own costs. In this context volunteers (who are around 1 million in NL) are considered as interchangeable with staff in providing different kind of social services (excluding health) but they cannot directly substitute them as an element of cost savings.

An example on how volunteering helps in creating social capital and, therefore, in improving the **democratic settings** of a country was provided by Ms Anna Snell (Communications and Corporate Partnerships Manager at National Forum For Voluntary Organization, Sweden). In Sweden more than 50% of the population volunteer and the major reason that drives their choice is growing as a person.

The Forum acts as a platform to help people and non-profit organizations in finding each other. It is an online tool for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to find volunteers in different areas and it provides training for capacity building in volunteers' management.

Finally, Ms. Hanna Christensen (Expert in Projects on Validation, Qualifications and Policy Analysis at European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) asked how visible links can be made **between non-formal and informally acquired competences and the labour market**. She suggested that we need top-down, bottom-up and cross-sectoral cooperation and Life-Long-Learning approach for all ages, especially considering the "Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning" (2012) European Members States should have in place, no later than 2018, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to: have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated; obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences. Validation arrangements can vary from national circumstances and include involvement of different stakeholders.

In the interventions that followed, the audience brought some other ideas into consideration. Notably, the different level of motivation between employed and unemployed people and the need to stimulate motivation from the earliest age in order to have more autonomous citizens who are more creative and able to take responsibility, achieving greater work-life balance and overall quality of life also impacting on a more positive in performance in their professional life. The belief that Civil Society Organisations are fundamental to avoid the **instrumentalization of volunteers** was also shared, as was the fact that there is a different perception of the value of volunteering in **Western and Eastern European countries**.

As someone not previously connected to European-level initiatives the opportunity to interact & share expertise with other representatives at the CEV event was amazing.

I really appreciated taking pride from sharing the same purpose with other organizations from different parts of Europe contributing to the same vision.

The event has delivered more opportunities and tools for building partnerships among members for EU grants and exchange of good practices.





PANEL 2

FULL TIME VOLUNTARY SERVICE

The panel was introduced by Ms. Gabriella Civico (Director of the European Volunteer Centre, CEV) who talked about **the promotion and development of employability** via voluntary engagement. It was noted that in many cases, the special form of voluntary engagement (full-time voluntary service) takes place during the transition from school to further and higher educational opportunities or employment, and can be within a specific legal framework different to those relevant for free-time and part-time volunteering opportunities. These forms of voluntary service opportunities are intended to accelerate the personal, social, civic, educational and vocational development of young people. The learning outcomes of such experiences can greatly enhance the employability of those who participate whether as a result of formal, non-formal or informal learning.

The frame of the panel was set by the Keynote Speaker, Ms. Gisela Jakob (Professor for Theories of Social Work in the Department of Social Work of the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences) who presented the involvement of Germany within Long-Term Volunteering. The definition of **Long-Term Volunteering** was created in 1964 and saw immediately a huge engagement of volunteers. She highlighted that when the military service was no more mandatory, volunteering for young people was considered a valuable option; so voluntary service increasingly expanded and was affected by a huge development concerning its structure in order to deal with the increasing participation of young people.

In the present situation of Long-Term Volunteering in Germany there are three kinds of volunteering:

1) Youth Voluntary Service regulated by law

(Organized by NGOs, Voluntary Social Year, International Voluntary Service)

2) Other youth volunteering programs

(eg. European Voluntary Service/ European Solidarity Corps)

3) Federal Voluntary Service (organized by the state authority). Ms. Jakob exposed the view that the Federal Voluntary Service has a negative aspect such as the State access to the volunteer services and the civil society, causing sometimes interferences with the work of the Civil Society Organizations. Indeed, **the relationship between State and Civil Society** is crucial in order to assure the development of voluntary service. For this reason, Ms Jakob suggested to keep in mind that if the state is involved, it wants also to regulate and control and this goes a bit against the basis of the voluntary nature of organizations and the way that they organize the voluntary service and collaborate between themselves. However, Ms. Jacob also noted that the Voluntary Service is a possible way to establish a strong and fruitful balance between the two actors; it is possible to find a connection between commitment and education (both areas touching and crucial for the work of the State and of Civil Society organizations); volunteers assume responsibilities for the society, they get committed in different areas and they are also involved into the development of policies and processes; their education should not only be vocational but also part of a broader plan.

Mr. Marcello Mariuzzo (President of the Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations) talked on the **motivation and benefits** for developing and implementing full time, long-term volunteering opportunities for young people. He explained that

Alliance network is an International Non-Governmental Youth Organization that represents national organizations which promote intercultural education, understanding and peace through voluntary service.

Their workcamps program is addressed to young people (group of 10-20 volunteers) from different countries who, during two or three weeks bring new ideas and experiences into isolated communities (remote areas, in regions where local people may have minimal opportunity for meeting others from different countries), providing a stimulus for ongoing work, active citizenship and intercultural learning. He answered a question from the audience regarding the **recognition of competences** in order to be evaluated in their professional career; he explained that from his point of view the key is developing capacities and providing useful tools to volunteers that allow them share the experience and competencies acquired during the camp.

The conference also had the chance to analyze the role of **Long-Term Volunteering** through the example of the Civic Service Agency in France, that facilitates volunteering opportunities both in France and abroad. Mr. Yannick Blanc (President of the Civic Service Agency - France) stated that the unemployment rate pushes young people closer to volunteering opportunities, the example is the Civil Service: it is not a job, but very important for the future career of young people in order to acquire knowledge and experience; it is a way for young people to **fight unemployment** while doing something good and valuable for the others, their society and themselves. Particularly the Civil Service offers the opportunity to go abroad but, however, according to the 2016 analysis results, youth applying to Civil Service had to overcome two obstacles: first, only 2% of the 92000 volunteers of that year wanted to go abroad because organizations were looking for high skilled volunteers and, second, the incapacity of young people with less opportunities to even be selected. Mr. Blanc underlined that after this analysis, different methods were implemented in collaboration with the EC in order to include those young people having less opportunities, trying to overcome the majority of obstacles young people face in being involved in such kind of opportunities.

The audience asked about the **role of CSOs** and Mr. Blanc answered that there is a commitment of CSOs in order to guarantee the comprehensive education, assuring valuable experiences where

solidarity is the basis and the goal of the Civil Service. Indeed, thanks to the full-time voluntary service, it is possible to see an increasing level of civic education, of the perception of active citizenship of volunteers and society involved and of the validation of skills acquired during the voluntary service period through non-formal and informal learning processes (NFIL).

What about the **top-down approach** to the organization of volunteerism? Why not have a bottom-up approach and let civil society to organize the volunteering actions?

Mr. Anton Hörting (Head of Department, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria) offered the example of the "Voluntary social year" a state-funded voluntary programme based on the **bottom-up process**.

In the recent period the State has felt the urgency to guarantee a concrete legal basis, including family and social benefits and for this reason the Austrian Voluntary Act was created, where the conditions of volunteers are regulated. The Voluntary Act has positive effects because defines the voluntary service as training relationship, giving the advantage that volunteers know what to expect and young people become more active, having received a clear explanation about the deployment framework. It has also caused an increasing involvement into the voluntary service: 90% of the volunteers are very satisfied with their experiences and the number of volunteers has doubled: more than 1000 people has been involved in 2017. According to Mr. Hörting, it is necessary to foster the willingness to further develop the Act by increasing the dialogue between state and service providers.

Finally, the participants got to know a bit more about **the European Solidarity Corps (ESC)** initiative. Mr. Jimmy Jamar (member of the European Solidarity Corps Coordination Team, European Commission) explained the timeline of the ESC (the European Commission launched the initiative in December 2016 and the legal basis will be delivered at the beginning of 2018), and the hope that it will be able to contribute to providing solutions to the issue of the increasing number of unemployed young people willing to be part of Europe and combining solidarity activities with the existing youth programs. The ESC offers in-country and abroad experiences, above all considering that only 6% of young people had the opportunity to do a volunteering experience abroad and it is addressed especially to young people with fewer opportunities.



PANEL 3 NEW TRENDS AND PROFILES OF VOLUNTEERS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

The debate started with **the necessity of analysing the new trends in volunteering**, as the Chairperson, Mr. Mirko Schwaerzel (Head of the European Department of the German National Network for Civil Society, BBE) explained, in order to develop new strategies. So far, the new volunteering trends seem to be influenced by:

a) fundamental social changes effect of an ageing society; change in the relation between work and income; the role of employers and their support in terms of volunteering;

b) effects of digitalization and how new initiatives use information technology;

c) shift in political priorities from long-term to mid and short-term, which means less public money available for the civil society sector; there is also a strong political focus on the promotion of social enterprises;

d) the instrumentalization of the voluntary organizations & activities; and

e) the profile of volunteers, there are changes in the motivation and interest towards volunteering activities: observed trends emphasize short term commitment, micro-volunteering and motivation connected to a personal gain.

The challenge for Civil Society is to identify the meaning and application of these trends and emphasize the sharing of basic values, mission and visions, to promote volunteering as an expression of active citizenship, based on values such as solidarity and democracy.

Regarding the effects of digitalisation Mr. Anton Alsander (Project Leader at the Forum for Voluntary Organizations, Sweden) stated that one of the most important trends in Sweden is the effect of **digitalization** on the new online forums for

organizing volunteering.

With the 2015 Refugee Crisis, Civil society in Sweden had a very important role in welcoming refugees and a lot of the initiatives observed were formed on social media, since it is a tool that is highly adaptive, effective in communication, especially for short-term initiatives needing speedy responses and is driven by passion and personal interests.

From the point of established organizations it was noted that this was a challenge, since the guidelines and responsibilities were different. In order to be more efficient, it is expected that volunteer organizations increasingly use digital means to meet the needs of the modern type of volunteer and that the short-term engagement evolves into a longer term perspective.

Ms. Lejla Šehić Relić (Board Member of the Croatian Volunteer Development Centre and vice-president of CEV) highlighted the relation between **ideology and volunteering trends** in European post-communist countries: as opposed to the massive and collective volunteering actions controlled by the State, now the emphasis is on individual and proactive activism, with advocacy work towards the development of volunteering at local and regional level. She stressed that there should be a redefinition of the role of values in volunteering and that Civil Society must be a leader of this **modernization** of volunteering trends.

For Ms. Elsbeth Fischer-Roth (Project Staff Member at Benovol Switzerland) volunteering trends in recent years appear to be connected with four elements:

a) online volunteering actions

b) skills-based type of volunteering (especially young volunteers)

c) spontaneous commitment and proactive behavior

d) punctual engagement. Civil society organizations must, therefore, rethink their offers and attempt to respond to the trends efficiently. Finally, attention was paid to the **crisis-response** aspect of volunteering notable witnessed during the so-called 'refugee crisis'.

Ms. Nicole Sonnleitner (Head of the Independent Volunteering Centre, Upper Austria) stated that there is a need to develop better volunteering infrastructures in order to be able to be more co-ordinated and ensure a greater impact. It was highlighted that the main challenges include language barriers, but emphasis on cultural acceptance is key when developing better volunteering infrastructures and that it is very relevant for volunteer centres to have an open mindset and be inter-culturally open.





Being a member supported our advocacy achievements. CEV has inspired the development of the volunteering infrastructure in eastern countries and helped the transfer of good practices from west to east.

It's an important moment for all of us to come together and evaluate our activities against what we had planned to do and develop further plans for the future according to our common needs and priorities.

Participation in the European Volunteering Capital has enabled us to achieve even greater outreach to our local organisations & involve some volunteers and their organisations in European level activities for the first time.



Members like us can take the work of CEV and adapt it and use it locally/nationally, translating in our own languages etc

I have really enjoyed being able to be part of sharing knowledge about volunteering in Europe & hearing more about how it contributes to peace and solidarity in Europe through building a European identity & a socially cohesive society.

Participation with CEV connects, inspires, strengthens and builds our capacity to express solidarity and put EU values into action, in the full knowledge that this is a shared endeavour across the EU.



Volunteering is part of the community, not separate to it, participation in CEV events makes it easier to link NGOs, government, companies and schools as separate actors in society.

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CEV strengthens our daily work, as we use the work (e.g. the VI publication) as a reference to our policymakers to impact the change we need on the local level for volunteers.

CEV is an important platform for the exchange of new ideas, tools and organisational models.

CEV is very important for the national level, bringing multi-sector cooperation.

A European network, putting Volunteering on the EU as well as the National Policy agendas is necessary. We have seen that the efforts of CEV to have influence on EU policy-making level is more than considerable.

Being in CEV events and sharing with the other volunteers gives a positive meaning to volunteering (especially for countries where volunteering doesn't always have a positive meaning).



CEV has helped contribute our ideas towards the implementation of EU policies & recommendations especially about the European Solidarity Corps.

The presentations at CEV events helped to increase our awareness of the diversity in Europe and to develop a greater sense of unity and common history since volunteering takes place all over Europe for similar and common causes by people of all backgrounds, realities and ages.

CEV has always been a source for new insights, development of vision, building up experiences and good practices. The strongest asset having CEV is according to us the fact that it's possible to connect easily with professionals in the volunteer sector to gather ideas, experiences, good practices and opportunities to join European projects.

Participation in the CEV events and sharing with other members like our's gives our national volunteer body a stronger voice when lobbying on these issues.

Regulation can create obstacles especially for small volunteer-led organisations like our's. There is a growing trend across Europe of higher burden of regulation with no funding / resources to accompany it. CEV is helping raise awareness of this issue across Europe