

## Building cohesive communities through solidarity and volunteering #EURegionsWeek2018



**Participatory session:** Wednesday 10. October, 11:00 - 14 :00: Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU, Avenue de Cortenbergh 79, 1000 Brussels

**Organisers:** Aarhus Municipality, Slovenske Konjice Municipality, Guimarães Municipality, Košice Municipality and Sligo Volunteer Centre in collaboration with Central Denmark EU Office (CDEU) & European Volunteer Centre (CEV)

**Participants:** 45 participants from 12 countries representing volunteer centres, volunteer-involving organisations, regional & local authorities, and companies took part in the discussions.

### Introduction:

In 2016 EC President Juncker launched the European Solidarity Corps as a way to encourage, facilitate and promote solidarity in Europe, with a particular focus on the active engagement of young people. The organisers of the session have observed however that participation is becoming more informal as well as more short-term and case by case, and that this challenges the traditional ways and channels of participation. As such, it requires local and regional policy makers to think of new ways of reaching and involving young people, so they can play an active part in showing solidarity with others and contributing to building cohesive communities. On this basis the partners, candidates, winners and future candidates of the European Volunteering Capital competition, came together to organise the participatory session in the EU Regions Week 2018.

*The session began by three interventions:*

**Ms Petra Vargova**, Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador, Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU, welcomed the participants to the event recalling that from 1 July 2018 to June 2019 Slovakia holds the Presidency of the Visegrad Group which represents the regional cooperation between Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. She noted that the Slovak Presidency has three main priorities: Strong Europe, Secure Environment, Smart Solutions and that within the first priority, “Strong Europe” a particular attention is given to the civil dimension. *“Effective communication and engagement of citizens, in the V4 region, as well as all over Europe is one of the key pillars of strong and prosperous European Union.”* She went on to say that *“Volunteering is one of the crucial elements of an active civic participation and community development. Thus, it is essential that the culture of volunteering is promoted in all fields possible, and ignited among citizens from an early age throughout their life.”*

Ms Vargova also welcomed the good timing of the event given that on 27 September the European Council adopted a regulation on the European Solidarity Corps. She explained that the regulation

establishes a legal framework for the initiative, sets a budget of €375,6 million for the years 2018 to 2020 and builds on good practices of Erasmus+ and Youth in Action, in providing opportunities for young people to volunteer, train or work in order to engage in solidarity activities that will benefit communities all around Europe. She expressed her belief that the European Solidarity Corps will not only contribute to building cohesive societies and promote European values, but also enable young people to learn and gain a range of important skills.

**Mr. Matteo Bianchi**, Committee of the Regions Rapporteur on European Solidarity Corps and the European Youth Strategy was also present and stressed during the session that *"volunteering activities should match local communities' needs"*. Furthermore, Mr. Bianchi pointed out that *"we want to stress that the needs and demands of local communities should be an important quality criterion for identifying eligible projects"*. He also emphasised that the role of local volunteering needs to be strengthened, pointing out that many young people take part in local community projects whose contribution to civic engagement, social inclusion and countering migration from rural to urban areas should be highlighted.

**Ms. Szilvia Kalman**, Policy Officer from the European Commission (DG EAC) shared policy perspectives on volunteering and solidarity emphasising the importance of the future EU youth strategy and the new European Solidarity Corps initiative. She stressed that the new legal base and the increased budget of the European Solidarity Corps will provide even more opportunities to young people through a greater range of formats. Special attention will be paid to making the Corps inclusive and involve also young people with fewer opportunities. The Commission proposed to expand further the European Solidarity Corps post 2020, by integrating the EU Aid Volunteers programme, thus creating a real one-stop shop for volunteering. The implementation of the Corps will be supported by reinforced policy cooperation on volunteering and solidarity activities under the renewed EU Youth Strategy (2019-27) 'Engaging, connecting and empowering young people', which will be adopted by the Council in November. The Youth Strategy will be based on a strengthened participatory governance, a renewed Youth Dialogue, new instruments for peer learning and greater focus on implementation at the local level.



The project partners presented their local volunteering policies on short poster presentations:

**Aarhus**

- Key values;
- Acknowledge and respect
  - Dare to give responsibility
  - Give them a clear voice
  - Create a sustainable organizational framework

**THE YOUTH CITY COUNCIL**



A wealth of activities that increases participation and the sense of ownership

MEETINGS WITH AARHUS CITY COUNCIL Denmark's political festival on Bornholm

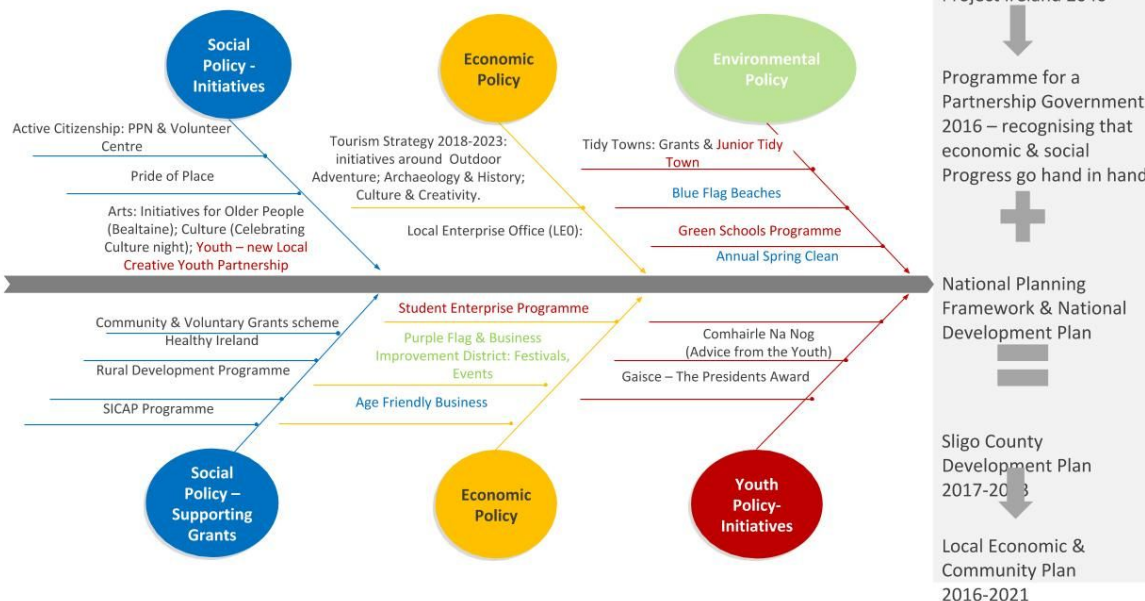
SCHOOL VISIT ELECTION CAMPAIGN

EUROPEAN YOUTH CONSENSUS 2017 (EYC)

STUDY TRIPS

**Sligo**

**Ireland & Sligo – Local Policy Making meets Volunteerism**



**Guimarães**

Local Policies to the Promotion of Volunteering and Social Cohesion- Municipality of Guimarães



**Košice**

**KOŠICE – OUR WAY TO INCREASE ACTIVITY, PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING OF YOUNGSTERS**

<p>EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2013</p>	<p>INFRASTRUCTURE 2 central and 13 local sites for cultural and community-based activities</p> <p>CULTURAL GRANT SCHEME brings regular financing of activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youngsters who have created and run the ECC project i.e. now young leaders who have experience in changing their city, country, world...</li> <li>• Thousands of youngsters taking part as volunteers and having experience can become an important part of our team, they are able to participate, they can help to do great and unique things.</li> <li>• Thousands of youngsters use the infrastructure and experience freedom of creativity, team work and participation.</li> </ul>
<p>EUROPEAN CITY OF SPORT 2016</p>	<p>SPORT GRANT SCHEME funding activities for people not registered as sportsmen</p> <p>NUMBER OF PILOT ACTIVITIES more than 400 activities, more than 300.000 participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All these young people may be successful in reaching their goals.</li> <li>• Number of young volunteers participating in sport events is increasing every year, too.</li> <li>• All these youngsters are having experience to be an important part of team, they can participate, they can help to do great things</li> </ul>
<p>EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING CAPITAL 2019 &amp; MORE...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All these unique experiences we're offering to youngsters, have only one important goal – to build our participation and feeling of solidarity: „I am KOŠIČAN = an active citizen of KOŠICE“</li> <li>• Thanks to all this activities we manage to reduce our brain drain from 70% to 30% during last 10 years, we stimulate systematic creativity and creative industry development and boost the feeling of cooperation, participation and solidarity, including the significant increase of volunteering</li> <li>• And we want to do more ... EVC 2019 = participation and solidarity in social sector, environmental sector, ...</li> </ul>	

The session continued with rounds of facilitated small group discussions to address questions that could shed further light on how to build cohesive communities through solidarity and volunteering.

The question of **how to adapt to the change of youth involvement as volunteers in society as a part of the Cohesion Policy** towards the development of a cohesive Europe was reflected upon and participants stressed that it was important to ensure equality in access, paying particular attention to disadvantaged groups and demonstrating proactivity in reducing barriers. The important role of civil society organisations to channel youth priorities and needs to policymakers in order to be able to lead the necessary changes was emphasised, as was the need for better links between formal, informal and nonformal learning settings.

Responding to the question **how to promote solidarity in times of crisis and which tools can be implemented, including for refugees and asylum seekers**, the conclusions reached stressed the need to give people room for discussion - to inform and listen. The importance of increased local dialogue and keeping it simple was also emphasised. It was felt that there should be more cultural awareness and solidarity messages informing the general public, especially through social media. Further conclusions were that NGOs and Governments should be relied on and supported to give the true picture of the situation and counteract fake news and that there should be partnerships with the media. The role of celebrities was also discussed and whether solidarity is voluntary or compulsory?

The need for organisational structures to be transparent was highlighted and that they should engage with young people in particular and be a reference for volunteers. The need for volunteer centres to be supported and provided for by local authorities and councils was also stressed, as was their crucial role in collecting information about needs and sharing and spreading the information to citizens. The need for solidarity to be spoken about in schools was another topic and the lack of confidence in institutions was felt to be an issue that should be addressed. It was agreed that co-operation between actors from different fields and sectors should be supported and encouraged.

**How to facilitate the voluntary involvement of diverse groups of young people in local Youth City Councils**, as the representative voices and active actors in the development of Municipal Policies, was also a point of discussion and various proposals were shared. The need not to 'talk down' to young people who engage in democracy and to 'dare' to give the responsibility to young people, for example budgetary control over some policies and programmes, was acknowledged by many participants who also recognised the importance to show that it is important not only to vote but also to engage.

On the question of **protecting young people from engaging in potentially harmful activities and 'educating' them to become active European citizens as volunteers** that take responsibility in social development several examples were discussed such as volunteering opportunities being provided and encouraged for students who are suspended from school or working through sports groups to target people at risk of exclusion, for example training them as volunteer. Other ideas included summer personal development programmes with a volunteering element to build confidence with young people. It was agreed that there needs to be a focus on grassroots and that working at the most local level gives young people possibilities to see their strengths. The fact that civil society will often hold the key to engaging hard to reach young people was shared and that more education about Europe in schools is needed and that this is likely to convince young people that their voice will be heard and participation in EU elections will increase. Participants agreed that young people need to be involved in youth councils and decision making at all policy levels including feeding in to the EU Youth Structured dialogue.

Participants also reflected on the fact that the biggest challenge is reaching the hard to reach young people and they will often have the most valuable experience to offer. The need for a wide discussion for all people as to what Europe they want and the fact that sometime young people don't know where to look for information were further conclusions. Targeting youth workers and those who

engage with the hard to reach communities was stressed as a way to target and to reach a wider demographic and National citizens service and other grassroots programme were commended as good approaches. How to targeting loneliness amongst young people and how volunteering can combat this and the role of volunteer centres were also discussed.

The session also provided the opportunity to address the question of **how to build a more systematic cooperation among Volunteering Capitals candidates and winners** in order to address a wide range of questions on youth social participation, solidarity and volunteering.

**Some of the ideas were the following:**

- ❖ Development of partner agreements and/or memorandums of understanding with winner and fellow applicants.
- ❖ Development of co-ordinated and linked festivals of volunteering
- ❖ Develop structured and regular ways to share best practice, also with an online database.
- ❖ Identify different sports events that need volunteers as a way of uniting volunteers from all the municipalities and countries involved.
- ❖ Implementation of joint conferences, seminars etc
- ❖ Send and receive volunteers for short term study visits or long term placements.
- ❖ Produce footprints of best practices.
- ❖ Exploit funding available for town twinning
- ❖ Acquire the quality label for ESC so that ESC projects between participating municipalities can be implemented.
- ❖ Include civil society organisations and their networks in the collaboration.

The session concluded with CEV Director Gabriella Civico drawing attention to the Volunteering Ecosystem, [The Developing European Volunteering Strategies \(DEVS\)](#), [Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe \(PAVE\)](#) and the [“Helping Hands” report](#).

