

This report was compiled by Eleanor Radford, Turing Scheme trainee at the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) from the University of East Anglia (UEA). The report is based on information gathered from online research. This is a preliminary study to gather information about the barriers to access and the role of volunteering in promoting inclusivity within the arts across the European Union.

Access to the Arts via Volunteering: A Look at Accessibility and Exclusion in the European Union

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Abstract

The arts sector, especially within the museums and heritage, can often be seen as an elitist and closed-off sector. This is especially relevant for those who wish to volunteer their time to museums. This report, through desk-based research, seeks to look at examples of volunteer schemes that offer wider accessibility to minority or disadvantaged groups, and how they work. To start it will look at why this topic is important to both the European Union, but also the volunteering sector as a whole. Within this it will look at the need for broadening, increased educational skills, and an increased number of volunteers, in line with the European Union aim of combating social exclusion and discrimination, and principles of the EU Pillar of Social Rights. It will then go into looking at the key factors that make volunteering schemes inaccessible, such as strict eligibility criteria, lack of support and training, or only offering opportunities that require long-term commitments. The report will look at two key case studies of volunteering schemes that exemplify increasing accessibility in this volunteering sector and have made this into a successful scheme. From this, the report will suggest its findings and suggestions for the future of volunteering within the art museum and heritage volunteering sector, based on what can be learnt from these examples and common restrictions.

Introduction

Two case studies will be analysed to examine how volunteer schemes in this field could support low-income people or those disadvantaged by socio-economic factors. One case study looks at 'Multaka'¹, a volunteer scheme aimed at Arabic-speaking refugees based in Germany, and the second explores the Scotland 365 Project, aimed at transforming the way that young people aged 16-25 are engaged in historical collections, based in Scotland².

The ability to be able to volunteer often comes with a level of privilege. Those able to volunteer can often afford to take time out of their days, away from their income or caring for loved ones, to support others or events for free. Those from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to say they have never been involved in formal volunteering (more than once a month), and those who have are less likely to be in certain leadership or representative roles, like being a trustee³. Alongside this, the arts can be seen as an elitist area to partake in, with less people from minority groups or lower socio-economic backgrounds engaging in and with the sector. For example, in the EU [2023], only nine member states had over 50% of their 25-34

¹ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point. 2015.

<https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/collection-research/research-cooperation/syrian-heritage-archive-project/multaka-the-museum-as-meeting-point-refugees-as-guides-in-berlin-museums/>.

² National Museums Scotland. Scotland 365 Project: Main page.

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/about-us/our-work/communities-and-access/community-and-access-projects/scotland-365/>.

³ NCVO: "Time Well Spent" Survey. Concluding Reflections. 2019.

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-national-survey-volunteer-experience/concluding-reflections/>

population completing tertiary (university) education in 2023⁴. Meanwhile, 60.6% of those working in the museum sector across the EU had completed tertiary education⁵.

This has led to a lack of representation for minority groups across class, gender, age and race within art museums. For example, only 14% of UK 18-year-olds from low participation neighbourhoods were accepted to study a full-time undergraduate degree in 2012⁶. However, a 2017 report conducted in the UK found that nearly nine-tenths of the workforce in the British museum sector has a first-class degree and 59% hold a postgraduate degree⁷. This trend can also be found in most volunteer schemes, with those from the most deprived areas of the UK (IMD quintile 1) volunteering the least at 15%, and those from the least deprived areas (IMD quintile 5) volunteering the most at 29%⁸. While this data is in reference to the UK, we can see clear comparisons and trends in the EU regarding the over-representation of the highly educated in museum volunteering.

One of the core aims of the European Union is to combat social exclusion and discrimination throughout the member states⁹, as well as aligning with the pillar on social rights¹⁰. Therefore, this sector of volunteering should be looked at more in depth to develop a better volunteering framework that seeks to include and support as many people as possible.

The importance of this report and wider issue is threefold, namely; widening of representation, education and increasing participation. Firstly, having a larger section of society represented in volunteer schemes allows for a broader set of opinions, views and understanding. This can be directly at the community level, or by empowering individuals who are separately engaged. As previously mentioned, a key aim of the European Union is to combat social exclusion and discrimination. This widening of participation can help towards this aim. There is also an interpersonal aspect at play, by having a larger section of society represented in volunteer schemes, it gives the chance for increasing tolerance through contact with other views, the chance to form communities, to touch on the broad range of benefits linked to diverse perspectives. This interpersonal aspect can be seen in schemes like 'Multaka' in Germany.

⁴ Educational attainment statistics 2023

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics

⁵ Cultural employment - Figure 3: Cultural dn total employment by sex, age and educational attainment, EU, 2023

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Culture_statistics_-_cultural_employment#Some_other_characteristics_of_cultural_employment

⁶ UCAS 2021 End of Cycle report. 2021.

<https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-sector-level-end-cycle-data-resources-2021>.

⁷ Character Matters: Attitudes, behaviours and skills in the UK Museum Workforce. September 2016. Page 2.

https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Character_Matters_UK_Museum_Workforce_full_report.pdf

⁸ Community Life Survey Focus on: Diversity 2016/2017

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5af3270fed915d0df1968fc2/Community_Life_Survey_Focus_Report__Main_Report.pdf

⁹ European Union. Core Aims and Values of the European Union.

https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/aims-and-values_en.

¹⁰ European Pillar of Social Rights, 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1226&langId=en>.

Secondly, volunteering schemes can help towards educational skills, as well as broadening an interest and care for democracy. This can be seen already in practice when looking at schemes like the European Solidarity Corps¹¹. For example, the corps promotes participation of young people in democratic processes and civic engagement. With volunteering at its heart, the programme engages and empowers young people to be active in society and addresses the Europe-wide trends of youth limited participation in democratic life and the low levels of knowledge and awareness about European matters that have an impact on the lives of all European citizens¹². Regarding education skills, the European Solidarity Corps can play a role by supporting Europeans, regardless of their gender, age and background to live and thrive in the digital age through projects and activities that aim to boost digital skills, foster digital literacy¹³.

However, schemes that are limited in diversity can limit these educational benefits to a small few. For example, the ESC has limits on the support it provides to those with learning disabilities or those who need further adjustments¹⁴. Therefore, a more accessible arts volunteer scheme would allow for those interested in art & those typically excluded due to elitism to gain additional skills. These more accessible avenues could easily be applied to current volunteer schemes such as the ESC. As the report on Volunteers with disabilities within the new European Solidarity Corps (ESC): Guide for sending organisations mentions, the ESC already outlines that “the sending organisations should design accessible and inclusive activities, taking into account the views and needs of participants with fewer opportunities, including people with disabilities in order to promote equal opportunities and access, inclusion and fairness to all volunteers¹⁵”.

Thirdly, creating more accessible volunteer schemes would allow art museums to access a higher number of volunteers for their galleries. Current statistics show a drop in numbers for those volunteering the arts. For example, of 2,339 volunteers surveyed in England, only 7.7% had volunteered in the art sector between 2019/20. This was a drop from 2018/19, which saw 8.6% had volunteered in the art sector¹⁶. Also, hours contributed by existing museum volunteers has declined 37% on pre-pandemic levels¹⁷. Therefore, there is a clear need for museums to have access to a larger group of volunteers.

¹¹ Kamil Oleszkiewicz, EuroPeer. 2024. Conversation on the Future of the European Solidarity Corps Programme (online conference). <https://www.youtube.com/live/DCSBnvXAf6s>.

¹² ESC Guidebook, page six, 2024.

https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/European_solidarity_corps_guide_2024_en.pdf

¹³ ESC Guidebook, page seven, 2024.

https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/European_solidarity_corps_guide_2024_en.pdf

¹⁴ Volunteers with disabilities within the new European Solidarity Corps (ESC): Guide for sending organisations:

Recommendations for sending organisations: 3. Target your Message (page 15). 2023.

<https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2022/02/RL-Guidelines-Volunteers-with-disabilities-within-the-new-European-Solidarity-Corps-ESC.pdf>

¹⁵ European Solidarity Corps Guide: Part B – Volunteering Projects. Page 21. 2021.

https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/european_solidarity_corps_guide_2021.pdf

¹⁶ Share of voluntary work connected to the arts sector in the last year in England from 2005/2006 to 2019/2020

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/419999/arts-volunteers-uk-england/>

¹⁷ Annual Museum Survey. 2022.

<https://mduk.org.uk/2022-annual-museum-survey-for-england/>

Volunteering, especially in the arts, has long been seen as an elitist and inaccessible avenue for many young people. As seen with the educational levels of those who work in the arts, this can be especially true for those from minority groups or disadvantaged socio-economic groups. However, volunteering across any sector can provide incredible benefits for both those involved and the organisations that host them, such as the three mentioned above. Therefore, stakeholders should consider making volunteering in the arts, specifically museums, more accessible to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to gain those benefits for all.

What makes a scheme inaccessible

This section aims to look at factors that can contribute towards a volunteering scheme's accessibility or lack thereof. Firstly, we can look at the issue of educational factors, and the huge barrier they can place on accessibility. The issue of obtaining a diploma or qualification in the field is less of an issue, with many volunteer schemes in the arts or programs like the European Solidarity Corps, not requiring any previous studies in the area.

However, there are still educational factors that create a barrier to participation. For example, those who require support due to special educational needs, or those who do not meet language proficiency requirements can be discouraged or stopped from participating. For example, groups such as the European Disability Forum have pushed recommendations to use accessible 'Easy to Read' formatting for all sending organisations¹⁸. Still, these stay as recommendations and there is no policy in place from the ESC to their sending organisations to have an 'Easy to Read' format for their documents.

Secondly, by only offering opportunities that require long-term commitments, such as having to volunteer for at least a year or longer, museums can lose out on many applicants who need more flexible timings to be able to volunteer in. This should mean also offering shorter time periods such as two to six weeks, or volunteering that is part-time to work around people's schedules. For example, the European Solidarity Corps offers two options for those wanting to volunteer. Either 'Individual Volunteering' which can range from two months to a year, or 'Team Volunteering' which can last two weeks to two months. While having a shorter option does make the ESC program more accessible, both of these options still require the participant to volunteer full-time¹⁹. For young people working towards their education, and often working in their term breaks, many will lack the time to volunteer full-time. The NCVO's "Time Well Spent" survey found that full-time workers, which include many young people balancing work and study, are less likely to have volunteered recently compared to those working part-time or who are retired. There is also the added time taken up regarding medical appointments and therapy, especially for those who are part of vulnerable groups.

¹⁸ Volunteers with disabilities within the new European Solidarity Corps (ESC): Guide for sending organisations: Recommendations for sending organisations: 3. Target your Message (page 15). 2023.
<https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2022/02/RL-Guidelines-Volunteers-with-disabilities-within-the-new-European-Solidarity-Corps-ESC.pdf>

¹⁹ Volunteering Activities https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/young-people/volunteering_en

They also found that there is a risk that too much pressure to do more or to continue, is placed on some volunteers, especially those who are giving their time on a frequent basis. These frequent volunteers are more likely to feel the positive benefits of volunteering but also more likely to report negative experiences, including feeling like too much of their time is taken up. Generally, volunteers who feel this way are less likely to continue with their volunteering²⁰. Therefore, volunteering schemes should offer opportunities that are both short-term and part-time, as well as offering long-term and full-time roles.

Within the European Solidarity Corps there is also another aspect of exclusivity, if you do one long term project (more than six months), you are excluded from any future long term or short-term projects, stopping individuals from mix and match opportunities in different fields/countries for short term projects after.

A final barrier we can look at is the potential lack of support or training for new volunteers. This barrier can lead to volunteers feeling underprepared or unsupported, leading to high turnover. This could also lead to a lack of want to participate in further or new volunteer schemes in the future. We can see in all sectors, that poor onboarding and training can lead to high turnover, a sense of disconnection from the organisation, as well as confusion surrounding what their role actually pertains to²¹. This issue only grows when considering those volunteers who are disabled or vulnerable, as they may require specific support in a new environment. In this case, staff may lack proper training to support these volunteers, leading to similar problems. Therefore, volunteering programs should have a strong training program in place for all new volunteers. This training should cover all areas that may be a concern for the volunteers, as well as introducing them to the role. Following on throughout the time they volunteer, there should be regular check-ins to ensure they are not feeling left behind or not having their concerns addressed.

Current museum schemes across Europe

One key program that has had success is the ‘Multaka: Museums as Meeting Point’ which has taken place in Germany. This program has been conducted through four different museums: Museum for Islamic Art, the Vorderasiatisches’ Museum, the Museum of Byzantine Art and Sculpture Collection, and the German Historical Museum. This program has supported refugees, typically teenagers and young adults, from Syria and Iraq to become museum guides, providing tours in their native language. Since August 2018, the program has also expanded to cover tours in English²². Through this

²⁰ NCVO: “Time Well Spent” Survey. Concluding Reflections. 2019.
<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-national-survey-volunteer-experience/concluding-reflections/>

²¹ 2023 Global Culture Report O.C. Tanner Institute. Page 108. 2023.
<https://res.cloudinary.com/oct-corp/image/private/s--pTdZnnhF--/v1687983491/website/octanner-global-culture-report-2023.pdf>

²² Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point. 2015.
<https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/collection-research/research-cooperation/syrian-heritage-archive-project/multaka-the-museum-as-meeting-point-refugees-as-guides-in-berlin-museums/>.

program refugees are able to access skills and education, as well as increasing their participation in the public sphere.

There is also a clear link to broadening of knowledge and experience. Since March 2016, the program has also offered workshops aimed at bringing Arabic-speaking refugees and German-speaking public together in schools and cultural centres. The aim from this is two-fold, to both allow participants to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds, but also to strengthen cultural awareness and sensitivity²³.

We can see how this program can also

create a sense of belonging and involvement in the history and culture of the country. National museums are part of an ensemble of public institutions that form a system of cultural representations of community, and perform, suggest, or act on national identity.

As such they can stabilise but also change that identity²⁴. This sense of participation in the identity and culture of a country could be easily achieved through schemes like 'Multaka: Museums as Meeting Point'. This stake in the country's history and culture can lead to a sense of connection, and less social exclusion for those in vulnerable groups, such as the immigrant community.

This program has seen much recognition, with an international network spanning across five countries, 29 museums, and over 100 volunteers trained as guides²⁵. It has also been recognised with four different awards from 2016 to 2019, including the 'Special Recognition: International Award' for the London Museum and Heritage Awards²⁶. This scheme therefore is a good example of making volunteering, especially in the art sector, more accessible for minority and disadvantaged groups. Firstly, it provides educational skills to its volunteers and allows volunteers to gain confidence in their presentational and leadership skills via leading the tours and the workshops. This will work towards gaining the education and skills linked to their volunteering, as well as combating social exclusion and discrimination. Secondly, it broadens diversity and perspectives. By ensuring an environment for discussion and understanding, via the workshops, those who may have previously not interacted have a space in which to do so. This will help to ensure schemes that work with disadvantaged groups are properly integrated, aiming towards combating social exclusion and discrimination. Thirdly, it will increase the number of volunteers available for museums. As previously mentioned, there has been a drop in volunteers in museums from 2018/19, which saw 8.6% of those surveyed

²³ Stephan Weber, Director of the Museum of Islamic Art. April 2016. 'It is not about religion, but about cultural identity'. https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/news-detail.html?tx_news_pi1%5Bday%5D=11&tx_news_pi1%5Bmonth%5D=04&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1618&tx_news_pi1%5Byear%5D=2016&cHash=121d1b3255f2f05d7d38978c3543523c.

²⁴Final Report Summary - EUNAMUS (European national museums: Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen), 2024, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/244305/reporting>.

²⁵ Multaka international network. June 2019.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240515001945/https://www.amirproject.com/multakainternationalnetwork>.

²⁶ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. 2018. Syrian Heritage Initiative.

<https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/museum-fuer-islamische-kunst/collection-research/research-cooperation/syrian-heritage-archive-project/>.

had volunteered in the art sector²⁷. Also, hours contributed by existing museum volunteers has declined 37% on pre-pandemic levels²⁸.

Another example of a volunteer scheme that seeks to make the museum sector more accessible is the 'Scotland 365' program. This program ran from 2018 to 2022 and sought to transform the way young people aged 16-25 engaged with National Museums Scotland²⁹.

This scheme was funded by Cashback to Communities; a program targeting young people experiencing disadvantage³⁰. Through this the program was able to run training opportunities, volunteer placements³¹, summer residencies and programs such as Impact Arts and 'Wild and Majestic' Summer Programme³². This project successfully allowed young people, roughly 160-520 per residency, from disadvantaged areas of Scotland to gain access to museums. They were also able to work with musicians and artists as part of free creative workshops. This shows a clear example of helping increase creative educational skills that otherwise may not have been available to these young people. One participant, Jamie, highlighted this saying "Thank you for the laughs, the ideas, the inspiration, and the motivation you gave me over the past few weeks. I really enjoyed myself. Thank you!"³³ There is also an element of increasing numbers for museums both during the project, but also headed into the future, with young people feeling more involved in the sector.

Both of these successful schemes show clear possibilities for a more accessible future for volunteering in the art museum sector. They incorporate aspects of broadening viewpoints, increased educational opportunity and a larger number of volunteers available to museums. These schemes ensure that volunteers receive the support and training they need as well as breaking down potential barriers such as lack of specific education, or only offering long-term commitments.

It is clear that the specific targeting and outreach to disadvantaged groups led to an increased participation and accessibility, offering opportunities to those who may otherwise be missed. From this we can learn that other programmes should create opportunities for different groups to meet and engage, such as the workshops mentioned by 'Multaka: Museums as Meeting Point'. These workshops allowed for productive conversations regarding concepts such as identity, and what it means to belong. Future schemes could also create something similar to the workshop activities

²⁷ Share of voluntary work connected to the arts sector in the last year in England from 2005/2006 to 2019/2020
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/419999/arts-volunteers-uk-england/>

²⁸ Annual Museum Survey. 2022.

<https://mduk.org.uk/2022-annual-museum-survey-for-england/>

²⁹ National Museums Scotland. Scotland 365 Project: Main page.

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/about-us/our-work/communities-and-access/community-and-access-projects/scotland-365/>.

³⁰ Cashback for Communities <https://inspiringscotland.org.uk/fund/cashback-for-communities/>.

³¹ Community and access projects - National Museums Scotland

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/about-us/our-work/communities-and-access/community-and-access-projects/>

³² National Museums Scotland. 2018. Impact Arts.

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/about-us/our-work/communities-and-access/community-and-access-projects/scotland-365/s365-timeline/>.

³³ National Museums Scotland. Community and access projects: Scotland 365. Year Section: 2022.

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/about-us/our-work/communities-and-access/community-and-access-projects/>.

created by the 'Scotland 365' program. These workshops allowed participants to connect with art that they may have missed otherwise. To summarise, both of these schemes created spaces for conversation, firstly about art, but also touching on important conversations around identity and learning.

Recommendations and Conclusion

From looking at both the potential restrictions in the sector, as well as case studies of the area the following recommendations to create a more accessible volunteer sector are as follows:

1. Ensure schemes have robust and correct training and support systems for volunteers: Through strong training volunteers are able to feel supported by their institution, as well as gain the education and skills linked to their volunteering role and responsibilities.
2. Ensure schemes that work with disadvantaged groups are properly integrated, aiming towards combating social exclusion and discrimination. This should come in the form of creating conversations on identity and learning from each other, as previously highlighted in the exemplar schemes.
3. Ensure schemes have the opportunity of both long-term and short-term volunteers. This will allow those who need more flexibility to be able to still participate.

To conclude, this report used desk-based research to look at the art museum sector in regard to its volunteering schemes. It pushed for more accessible schemes for three main objectives: firstly, broadening of opinions and views, secondly, promoting education and skills, and thirdly, increasing the number of volunteers available to museums. These objectives link in with the European Union aim of combating social exclusion and discrimination, as well as promoting democracy through learnt educational skills. Three clear factors that detriment accessibility were highlighted, namely: requiring previous education, only offering long-term commitments and lack of support and training. It then covered two key examples of schemes within this volunteering sector that exemplify a push towards a more diverse sector. From this we can make three main recommendations towards creating a volunteer sector that is more accessible for art museums.

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