



POWERED BY **V**

**Policy Recommendations:
Youth Engagement
& Volunteering in
Strengthening EU Values**



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Introduction and Policy Context

The European Youth Strategy is the framework for European cooperation in the youth field for 2019-2027, it focuses on engaging, connecting and empowering young people including through promoting active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity¹. Youth volunteering opportunities are recognised as an important part of this process. Their role in enabling the expression of EU Values (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights) by young people forms a central component in the strategy. This is done through the European Solidarity Corps in particular that offers different formats and opportunities for young people from the age of 18 – 35 to engage with others and express solidarity, putting EU values into practice through volunteering. However, demand far outstrips capacity and the programme needs to be strengthened and extended to enable better, more and better-quality volunteering experiences for young people that strengthen EU values both in themselves and the wider community.

“The Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission EU Legislative Priorities for 2023/2024”² outlines the main focuses for EU institutions over the next two years. The goal of sustainable development which is a highly relevant policy context linked to the realisation of EU values is included throughout, with reference to the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Volunteering is an important vehicle for sustainable development³ and 2026 has been declared the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development. Despite this, there is no mention of volunteering in the joint declaration which is a significant shortcoming.

The Own-Initiative Opinion “Implementation of citizenship education actions”, was adopted by the EU Parliament (2021/22), and looks at the short-comings in citizenship education across the EU. It recognizes the contribution of the European Solidarity Corps but highlights the lack of research and comparative methodologies for measuring volunteer impact in Europe that, if existing, could lead to “systemic, lasting impact”⁴. It also highlights the lack of a comprehensive, European citizenship education programme in schools that would combine formal and non-formal learning opportunities focused on European values and active engagement in the community addressing common needs.

Volunteering has been shown to be a significant determinant for young people in many aspects of their lives and the way in which they engage with European Values. The recent research conducted by Dr Stuart Fox has found that volunteering is closely associated with an array of benefits, including “an increased capacity to vote in elections, improved employment prospects, improved educational performance in school or university, better mental health, broader social networks and an increased capacity to engage through volunteering including through protests and campaigning.”⁵

Research undertaken as part of the Powered by V project has identified several areas within the provision of volunteer opportunities for young people that need to be addressed by policy makers in order to more fully realise the potential

1 <https://european youth strategy.eu/>

2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022C1223%2801%29>

3 <https://www.unv.org/volunteerism-and-global-goals>

4 <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/summary.do?id=1700528&t=d&l=en>

5 [Stuart Fox_Research.pdf](#)



impact of these efforts for strengthening EU Values in Europe. It is clear that across Europe, solidarity is crucial for addressing societal changes, fostering a sense of community and promoting social justice and equality. The evidence gathered has demonstrated that amongst the five partner countries in the project: Croatia, Slovenia, Poland, Denmark and Ireland, commonalities exist in the understanding of solidarity such as, empathy, unity, community support, and a sense of shared responsibility. However, due to cultural context, political climate and individual experiences between the countries, differences also exist which can present challenges to policymakers when developing European youth policies focussed on youth engagement and volunteering in connection to EU values and solidarity. Whilst the data collected has identified barriers to solidarity across all the five countries, such as political polarisation and a reluctance towards certain groups e.g. migrants, it has also provided evidence of a shared fundamental understanding of solidarity. Young people in particular demonstrably recognised the importance of solidarity in volunteering as a way of standing together as a group, bringing people together and creating a sense of community regardless of differences.

In order for this potential to be reached, more enabling volunteering policies in Europe that engage policy-makers from European, National and local levels, need to be implemented. A more holistic approach in shaping youth volunteering policies needs to be established. The following recommendations aim for: an improvement of the volunteering legislative and strategic framework for youth volunteering; greater recognition of the value of volunteering as a way of actively engaging young people with EU values and solidarity; and increased support for organisations in developing high quality programmes that engage youth in strengthening the EU values, including an affirmation of youth contribution in crisis and a recognition of the importance of youth volunteering in strengthening society.

Recommendations for Policymakers in Europe:



CHALLENGE 1: Improvement of legislative and strategic framework for youth volunteering.

The lack of up-to-date volunteering policies that address the changing landscape present a key challenge to young volunteers and those people and organisations active in providing these opportunities for them. Current volunteering policies lack the versatility to adapt to the changing modern day volunteering landscape. For example, growing trends such as ‘micro-volunteering’ and the shift from “role” volunteering to “task” volunteering are not sufficiently addressed or considered. At the EU level, a solid and common framework with a common methodology for measuring volunteering and its impact across Europe is missing. This common approach is needed to ensure that implementation across all member states is done within the same parameters and in this way ensures a good basis for comparative research and data collection.

Outcomes:

1. Review and adapt volunteering policies at European, National and local levels to address the changing landscape, in this way providing more suitable opportunities for young people to engage in volunteering expressing EU Values.
2. Foster collaboration among local, national, and EU stakeholders to create a holistic approach to promoting EU values and solidarity. Involve decision-makers, including politicians and local authorities, in shaping policies and initiatives aligned with these values.
3. Provide a solid, common framework for comparative, regular research on volunteering so that trends in youth volunteering can be better monitored and future necessary changes in European, National and local policy frameworks made in a timely manner that reduce barriers and facilitate youth volunteering as an expression of EU values.
4. Actively engage youth in decision-making processes about the future of volunteering and the legislative and strategic needs for it to meet its full potential from local to European levels.

CHALLENGE 2: Greater recognition of the value of volunteering as a way of active engagement of youth with EU values and solidarity.

Volunteering is essential for upholding and strengthening EU values and needs to be encouraged especially for young people in an increasingly polarised, individualistic and commercialised environment which they are growing up in. The current lack of high profile promotion of volunteering that links its contribution to EU values and solidarity is contributing to preventing its full potential to be reached. Young people and volunteering organisations stress the importance of increased communication, accessibility and transparency from European decision makers in the creation and promotion of volunteer opportunities.

The current lack of awareness and education from a young age concerning volunteering, civil society, and its contribution to EU Values, is a weakness in Europe. Volunteering promotes not only EU values as referenced in the EU treaties but also a wider set of human values that are also embraced by the European Union, including solidarity, diversity and unity. Volunteering also creates a conscious social attitude that promotes democracy and is integral to promoting democratic principles. Volunteering is essential for addressing gaps in society, creating social inclusion and supporting vulnerable groups. Solidarity is both fostered by and a prerequisite for the profile and characteristics of a volunteer. By helping others without expecting anything in return, volunteers are exhibiting solidarity which is vital for the promotion of EU values. Unity is also promoted through volunteering opportunities that include teamwork and collaboration, creating a sense of belonging and communal unity for participants. Through active participation, young volunteers become contributing members to society, implicitly involved in civic engagement based on the EU values which is essential for a functioning, thriving democratic society.

Outcomes:

2. 1. EU values should be integrated into EU member states' education systems via school curricula and non-formal learning provisions from an early age, emphasising diversity, inclusivity and critical thinking. Service Learning is a relevant educational approach to foster EU values, solidarity, unity and democratic principles leading to increased social inclusion.

2. 2. Communication around young people's "place" in society should be adapted to include not only jobs and paid employment as a core component of independent living, but also other forms of engagement without a clear personal economic benefit such as volunteering. Through this, young volunteers become contributing members of a society based on EU values through active participation. By expanding the perspective around young people's roles in society to include volunteering and other non-economic forms of engagement, we may foster a more inclusive, empathetic, and engaged generation that values both personal success and community well-being.

2. 3. The European Solidarity Corps should be strengthened to at least three times as much budget as it currently has, maintaining its unique identity as the only EU programme focused on embedding solidarity into a thriving European democracy and increasing the quality of the opportunities provided. This also extends to the diversity of participants and causes it can support, leading to an even greater impact.

CHALLENGE 3: Increased support to organisations in developing high quality volunteering programmes and opportunities that engage youth in strengthening EU values.

The contribution of young volunteers in crisis situations is essential in Europe and they also play a crucial role in strengthening resilience and a more sustainable society in the field of crisis prevention. Many volunteer opportunities aimed at young people however fail to be fully accessible and therefore lack effectiveness in engaging the widest range of young people in volunteering. There is also a lack of sufficient and fully transparent funding opportunities for volunteer-involving and volunteer infrastructure organisations. This reduces the capacity in the sector to promote EU values and

solidarity amongst, for, and with young people and ensure the maximum impact of scarce resources available. Many organisations also lack the human resources to engage with administratively demanding projects (red tape).

Outcomes:

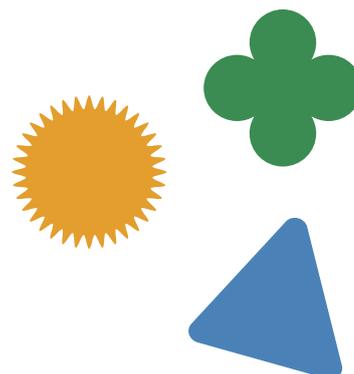
3. 1. Properly fund volunteer-involving and volunteer infrastructure organisations by allocating funding transparently and ensure the financial means necessary to be able to provide quality and inclusive volunteering opportunities to young people.

3. 2. Ensure organisational support for youth volunteering by other means such as capacity building and reduction in the administrative burden. Support should also be provided to ensure that new young volunteers are helped to understand and interpret the importance of solidarity as the motivating power at the heart of their actions.

3. 3. Ensure that the role of young people as volunteers in crisis prevention and response is developed in a way that actively avoids and protects against the risk of instrumentalisation of volunteers as part of essential social service and welfare delivery and crisis prevention and response in a disproportionate way. In order that responses can be efficient and effective the structures for the coordination and support needed for episodic emergency volunteering need to be ready in advance with adequate and suitable support and funding that take into account the specific needs of young people. Such structures and processes should be developed alongside other initiatives that build a sense of community in a more cross cutting manner.

Appendix

Plain language descriptor of this document



Youth Engagement & Volunteering in Strengthening EU Values: Key Policy Recommendations

Introduction

The European Youth Strategy (2019-2027) aims to engage, connect, and empower young people through active citizenship, social inclusion, and solidarity. Volunteering is crucial in promoting EU values like dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights. The European Solidarity Corps offers opportunities for young people to volunteer and practice these values, but more support is needed to expand and enhance these opportunities.

Key Points

Sustainable Development Goals:

The EU's priorities for 2023-2024 emphasize sustainable development.

Volunteering is vital for sustainable development, but this is not highlighted in the EU's current plans.

Citizenship Education:

EU Parliament's 2021/22 opinion stresses the need for better citizenship education.

More research and comparative studies on volunteering impacts are needed.

Schools should integrate formal and non-formal learning about EU values and active community engagement.

Benefits of Volunteering:

Volunteering enhances voting, employment prospects, education, mental health, social networks, and civic engagement.

Solidarity Across Europe:

Research shows common understandings of solidarity (empathy, unity, community support) among young people in different countries.

Barriers like political polarization and reluctance towards migrants exist but a fundamental understanding of solidarity is shared.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Challenge 1: Update Volunteering Policies

Current Issue: Existing policies don't adapt well to modern volunteering trends like micro-volunteering and task-based volunteering.

Solutions:

- Update policies at all levels to better support new forms of volunteering.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to create a unified approach to promoting EU values and solidarity.
- Develop a common framework for regular, comparative research on volunteering.

Challenge 2: Recognize Volunteering's Value

Current Issue: Lack of awareness and education about the importance of volunteering in promoting EU values.

Solutions:

- Integrate EU values into school curricula and non-formal education from an early age.
- Promote volunteering as a vital part of society, not just paid employment.
- Increase the budget for the European Solidarity Corps to enhance its impact and reach.

Challenge 3: Support Volunteer Organisations

Current Issue: Insufficient funding and resources for organisations that provide volunteering opportunities.

Solutions:

- Provide transparent funding and support for volunteer organisations.
- Reduce administrative burdens and build capacity in these organisations.
- Develop structures for effective volunteer coordination, especially in crisis situations, with adequate support and funding.

Conclusion

To harness the full potential of youth volunteering in promoting EU values, policies must be updated, the value of volunteering must be better recognised, and support for volunteer organisations must be increased. Implementing these recommendations will foster a more engaged, inclusive, and resilient European youth community.

