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## The Guidebook "Pathways to Solidarity and Other EU Values"

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### Publisher

DKolektiv – organisation for social development

### Editors

DKolektiv – Organisation for Social Development (Croatia)

Volunteer Ireland (Ireland)

Slovene Philanthropy (Slovenia)

Centre for European Volunteering (Belgium)

Regional Volunteer Centre Gdansk (Poland)

### Proofreading

Stuart Garland, Volunteer Ireland

Published: July 2024

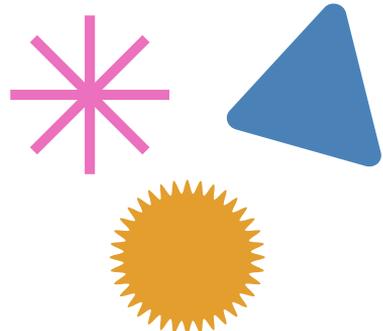
Print run: 500 copies

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# 1 Introduction



The purpose of the guidebook before you is to explore various methodological approaches to supporting youth in gaining and applying civic competences and to provide a methodological framework for youth volunteer programmes and projects. These initiatives focus on peace, solidarity, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue and human rights as ways to transform and bridge youth volunteering to civic engagement. Addressing concerns and reservations of the youth—such as not having enough time for volunteering, fear of repercussions for activist engagement, lack of interest and knowledge in community matters and not finding information or knowing how to get involved—as well as organisations' challenges in addressing these issues and engaging young people, this tool aims to develop a user-friendly to-do list for civic engagement.

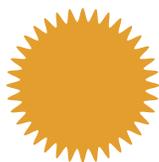
This guidebook strives to strengthen youth volunteering organisational sector capacities, promote democratic and value-based engagement and leadership and reaffirm EU values such as peace, solidarity, equality, social inclusion, human rights and sustainable development. It explores various methodological approaches to support youth in gaining and applying civic competences through volunteer programmes and projects, thereby transforming and bridging youth volunteering to civic engagement.

To strengthen youth volunteering organisational sector capacities with a guidebook for stronger and more impactful youth volunteer engagement underpinning EU values, this Guidebook will help organisations to better understand the potential and to develop volunteer programmes that support democratic and value-based engagement and leadership in affirming EU values such as peace, solidarity, equality, social inclusion, human rights, rule of law and sustainable development.

The guidebook “Pathways to Solidarity and Other EU Values” brings the context of the new reality of civic engagement and the urgent need to reaffirm our common values. It offers innovative content and approaches for volunteer-involving organisations and other youth organisations that promote youth engagement, youth leaders, youth workers and youth themselves. This guidebook contains different methodological approaches to supporting youth in gaining and applying civic competences, providing a methodological framework for youth volunteer programmes and projects focused on peace, solidarity, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue and human rights. As an integral part of the guidebook, a special chapter is dedicated to the framework for volunteers to apply civic competences through community projects.

The guidebook addresses the importance of creating an organisational environment that supports youth volunteer engagement, providing space for exploring innovative ways of applying civic skills through volunteering and other activities, fostering democratic thinking and behaviour

among young people, making EU values more common and closer to youth and raising awareness of the importance of equal opportunities and social inclusion. It also emphasises finding the know-how and resources that will support the development of organisational capacities.



## Glossary of Terms

# 2.

**VOLUNTEERING** refers to individuals willingly contributing their time, skills and effort to support causes, projects, or organisations without monetary compensation. The concept encompasses various forms of civic engagement and participation, aimed at fostering social cohesion, solidarity and community development across diverse cultural and social contexts in Europe.

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT** refers to individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. It includes a range of activities such as voting, volunteering, participating in community service, advocating for policy changes and being involved in civic or community organisations. Civic engagement aims to improve the quality of life in a community through both political and non-political processes. E.g.: organising public forums, participating in environmental cleanup drives, advocating for social justice causes, and contributing to public policy discussions.

**ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP** involves actively participating in the civic and political life of one's community. It includes being informed about civic issues, exercising voting rights, and engaging in dialogue about public policies. Active citizenship is characterised by a commitment to contributing to the common good and enhancing democratic processes. Volunteering in some forms can itself be a type of active citizenship. E.g.: voting in elections, volunteering for civic organisations and leading community improvement projects.

**INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE** is the open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds. It aims to foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among diverse cultures. Intercultural dialogue is essential for building inclusive societies, promoting social cohesion and reducing cultural conflicts. E.g.: Cultural exchange programmes, multicultural festivals, workshops on cultural competence and educational initiatives that promote cultural awareness.

**SOCIAL INCLUSION** is the process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society. It ensures that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully in social,

economic, and political life. Social inclusion involves removing barriers that prevent people from being involved in their communities, including discrimination, poverty and lack of access to education and healthcare. E.g.: implementing policies that promote equal access to education and employment, creating accessible public spaces for people with disabilities, supporting programmes for marginalised groups, and fostering inclusive community activities.

## From Volunteering to Youth Engagement



Volunteering, in any form, plays a crucial role in fostering civic engagement and active citizenship. Youth volunteering, in particular, is a powerful catalyst for this transformation. By engaging in volunteer activities, young people begin to understand the importance of their contributions to society. This understanding can inspire them to take on more significant roles in their communities, ultimately leading to increased civic engagement and activism. The concepts of volunteering, civic engagement, and activism tend to intertwine and overlap, each complementing and reinforcing the others, and together they form the bedrock and vital element of a vibrant and democratic society. Thus, the basic premise of the guidebook is that volunteering, any type of volunteering, and youth volunteering in particular, can be a meaningful stepping stone into civic engagement, active citizenship and possibly activism.

Volunteering acts as a bridge, connecting young people with their communities and enabling them to see firsthand the impact of their efforts. It provides a structured environment where they can develop essential skills, build networks, and gain insights into social issues. This initial point of contact often ignites a passion for more profound community involvement and sets the stage for sustained civic engagement.

### **Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030, Centre for European Volunteering**

*Volunteering is playing a key role in the lives current and of future generations by providing opportunities to express solidarity as well as intercultural exchange, non-formal learning and skills development, while, and in this way, supporting rights such as active citizenship and social inclusion.*

*Volunteering is a main agent of a true social transformation. It supports social inclusion and solidarity; it underpins active citizenship, community resilience and social engagement; and it promotes shared responsibilities & European values. Around the world, we are witnessing the increase of activism and volunteering crossing borders and connecting people motivated to respond to global challenges such as climate change, ageing socie-*

*ties, migrations and the COVID-19 pandemic. All of that has reaffirmed the importance of solidarity beyond borders as a way to address common challenges and inequalities, as well as protect and support vulnerable people.*

*Volunteering contributes to the European Social model, to security, peace, cohesion and prosperity. It provides a framework for a constructive narrative for the Future of Europe as an alternative to extremist and populist views, ideologies and actions, and can contribute to their prevention.*

*Volunteering can actively prevent Hate Speech, promotes inclusion and tolerance, contributes to an intergenerational approach and enables citizens to be directly active in developing the Europe they strive for.*

Volunteering is often the first step towards more extensive civic participation. For many young people, their journey into active citizenship begins with organised volunteer activities. These experiences can include participating in community clean-ups, assisting in local shelters, or helping with events. These initial engagements help youth to develop a sense of responsibility; build empathy and social awareness; and gain practical skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication, and problem-solving.

Volunteering in its institutionalised, organised and formalised form is often the initial point of contact for young people, they must be made aware of the possibilities of upscaling and developing their volunteer engagement. Besides the basic service and volunteer training of youth volunteering organisations should provide their young volunteers with insights into the impact their volunteering engagement can have not only on the direct beneficiaries of their engagement and themselves, but on their community and consequently on the society.

It is in the knowledge of the power of volunteering that lies the potential of transforming simple acts of volunteering, of helping others into civic engagement in the fullest sense of the term. Involving youth in one type of volunteering activity or another, for instance, making a collection for an animal shelter or providing company for the elderly, may seem an end in itself – and in the strictest sense of accomplishing a task, this is true. But understanding that by implementing volunteer tasks we are also expressing solidarity and slowly changing the world around us for the better, is quite another matter. One step further still is the realisation that yes, even the simplest acts of kindness can have earth-shattering ramifications and are all part of being an active, mindful and engaged citizen and human being.

Youth organisations and volunteer programmes play a crucial role in this development. By offering training and resources, these organisations help young volunteers understand the broader implications of their engagement. They highlight how individual efforts contribute to societal change and encourage volunteers to view their actions as part of a larger movement towards social justice and equity.

The progression from volunteering to civic engagement and activism is natural and often seamless. Volunteer activities provide the foundation, civic engagement builds upon it, and activism pushes the boundaries to advocate for systemic change. The key overlaps include:

- **Shared goals:** All three aim to improve community well-being and address social issues.
- **Active participation:** Each requires individuals to take an active role rather than remain passive observers.
- **Community impact:** The ultimate goal of volunteering, civic engagement, and activism is to create positive change in the community.

To effectively encourage youth to transition from volunteering to civic engagement, several strategies can be employed:

- **Raising awareness:** Educate young people about the broader impact, power and importance of their volunteer engagement on the community and society. Highlight stories of individuals who have made this transition successfully.
- **Listening to youth:** Consider and truly listen to the initiatives, ideas and proposals of youth. Create platforms for young people to voice their ideas and concerns. Involve them in decision-making processes. Foster and support their initiatives, encouraging them to grow and expand, without striving to contain them in pre-existing frameworks and models of established institutions and past generations.
- **Providing support and resources:** Offer training, mentorship, and resources to help young volunteers develop their skills and expand their impact. Ensure that they have access to information and opportunities for further engagement.
- **Encouraging peer networks:** Foster a sense of community among young volunteers by encouraging peer support and collaboration. Peer networks can provide motivation and help sustain engagement over time.
- **Highlighting the importance of civic engagement:** Emphasise the significance of active citizenship and its role in a democratic society. Show how individual actions can contribute to systemic change.

By implementing these strategies, youth organisations and volunteer programmes can help young people see the full potential of their volunteer efforts and inspire them to become active, engaged citizens who contribute meaningfully to their communities and beyond. In practice, however, this approach requires skills, knowledge, and most importantly time, empathy and patience.

In conclusion, volunteering is more than just an act of engagement; it is a pathway to greater civic engagement and active citizenship. By understanding and leveraging the overlap between volunteering, civic engagement, and activism, we can empower young people to become proactive members of their communities. Through strategic support and encouragement, we can help them transition from volunteering to becoming leaders and advocates for positive change.

## EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)

*The strategy identifies three core themes – engage, connect and empower – and sets out measures Member State governments and the European Commission could take.*

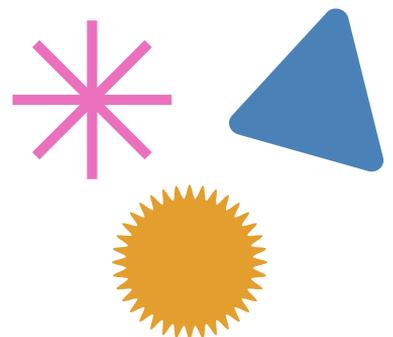
- **Engage:** *Engaging young people is a cornerstone of the strategy to ensure meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation.*
- **Connect:** *Young people should be able to experience cultural, civic and other exchanges with peers in the EU and other European countries. Such exchanges already exist thanks to Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.*
- **Empower:** *Youth work can develop key personal and professional skills and be a catalyst for empowerment.*

On the following pages, the guidebook strives to outline methods and approaches that have proven effective in encouraging youth engagement, bridging the gap between volunteering and civic engagement, and providing a step-by-step framework for organisations aiming to support youth in their civic engagement and active citizenship.

# 4 Strengthening Communities through Youth Initiatives

Youth initiatives are pivotal in fostering community resilience and promoting social cohesion. These initiatives empower young people to address local challenges, create positive social change, and build a sense of belonging and purpose within their communities.

This chapter explores the various frameworks and strategies that support youth-led initiatives, highlighting successful case studies from across the EU partner countries. It also provides practical guidelines for civil society organisations (CSOs) and volunteers to enhance the impact of their community projects.



# 1. Framework for Youth Volunteer Programmes Focused on Peace, Solidarity, Social Inclusion, Intercultural Dialogue, and Human Rights



## Research and Methodology

To analyse various methodological approaches from partner countries in creating and implementing youth volunteer programmes focused on peace, solidarity, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue and human rights, partners conducted two-fold research. On the one hand, the partners collected relevant examples of youth engagement, information about the institutional framework and formal support for engaged youth volunteering through desk research that served as a basis for analysis of the institutional support environment in a cross-section of EU countries. In the second phase, the partners selected two cases each and conducted a short interview on their practices and experience in engaged youth volunteering, be it in the form of formal, institutional support, informal youth-led initiatives or pre-organised youth activities.

### Different Methodological Approaches:

#### Supporting Youth to Gain and Apply Civic Competences through Volunteer Programmes

The analysis reveals a diverse range of methodological approaches across partner countries and the EU to support youth in gaining and applying civic competences through volunteer programmes. The common elements include a strong emphasis on mentorship, educational resources, and structured support to empower youth. Each country leverages its unique social, institutional, and cultural context to foster active citizenship and community engagement among young people. The EU framework further enhances these efforts by providing funding, coordination, and recognition for youth-led initiatives, thereby promoting a comprehensive approach to youth civic engagement across Europe.

### Social Context - Research Studies and Reports

On the level of the European Union, several reports show high levels of civic engagement through informal methods like petitions and boycotts, though formal political engagement remains lower. These studies highlight the importance of supporting youth-led initiatives and the potential of digital engagement.

*Allianz Foundation Next Generations Study 2023*<sup>1</sup> shows that support for direct action (informal, or formalised) through protest is high (from 55.7-67.6%) although the percentage of those who have taken part in this is lower (23-38%). Civic engagement on an individual and personal level is high, 42-53% have boycotted products, and 46-65% have signed online petitions. Formalised engagement is less popular, joining/working with a political party or movement below 20% in

1 [https://3ec99c80-6d53-4doe-97b6-b82e4272fcb7.usrfiles.com/ugd/3ec99c\\_a09efoc4a6cb42e68d20566ef6505846.pdf](https://3ec99c80-6d53-4doe-97b6-b82e4272fcb7.usrfiles.com/ugd/3ec99c_a09efoc4a6cb42e68d20566ef6505846.pdf)

all samples, and political event organising below 24% across the board. *Eurostat Young People in Europe 2022*<sup>2</sup> edition shows that statistics on civic and political engagement through digital methods, which needs no organisational support, many digital activities and volunteering can be ad hoc, personal, and far more informal when compared to other methods of volunteering, where some coordination or resources from an organisation might be needed or beneficial.

Across partner countries (Slovenia, Ireland, Croatia and Poland) research studies emphasise the significant impact of volunteering on youth engagement and civic participation. These studies highlight common barriers such as lack of time, cost and information, while also demonstrating the positive effects of volunteering on personal development and community well-being. The importance of fostering values and addressing social inequalities is a recurrent theme, as is the need for robust support systems to enhance youth participation.

In Slovenia, *Youth active citizenship case study: "So you think you know it all?" project*<sup>3</sup> reveals the shortcomings of traditional educational approaches and the importance of sustainable, engaging methods for youth empowerment. The focus of the study is youth political engagement, active citizenship, youth participation, and youth activism. *Aktivno državljanstvo mladostnikov (Social Protection Institute of Slovenia; final report)*<sup>4</sup> offers an in-depth analysis of the situation and policy recommendations to encourage active citizenship of the youth. It also highlights several best practices from abroad.

In Ireland, studies like *"Making a Difference"*<sup>5</sup> by University College Cork and *"Higher Education Student Volunteering in Ireland"*<sup>6</sup> show that student volunteering significantly contributes to civic engagement. Barriers identified include lack of time, cost and information, which need addressing to enhance volunteer participation. *The Civic and Political Engagement Among Young Adults study*<sup>7</sup> adopts a multidimensional approach to examining civic and political engagement in urban and rural areas. The report focuses on the civic and political engagement of young people the differences between urban and rural Ireland and the connection between volunteering and political engagement.

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2 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4031688/15191320/KS-06-22-076-EN-N.pdf/7d72f828-9312-6378-a5e7db564a0849cf?t=1666701213551>

3 <https://repositorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=86287&lang=slv>

4 <https://guidebook.kpk-rs.si/sl>

5 <https://guidebook.ucc.ie/en/civic/governance/researchreportonstudentvolunteering/>

6 [https://guidebook.studentvolunteer.ie/reports/The\\_Value\\_and\\_Impact\\_of\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Student\\_Volunteering\\_in\\_Ireland.pdf](https://guidebook.studentvolunteer.ie/reports/The_Value_and_Impact_of_Higher_Education_Student_Volunteering_in_Ireland.pdf)

7 <https://guidebook.esri.ie/publications/civic-and-political-engagement-among-young-adults-in-ireland%20or%20https://guidebook.youtube.com/watch?v=bxCvGjwOokI&t=17s>

In **Croatia**, several relevant studies have been conducted in the past few years. The results of *General research on Volunteering in Croatia*<sup>8</sup> show that one-quarter of the population of the Republic of Croatia over the age of 16 (25%), had at least one volunteering experience in their life. Furthermore, 11% of citizens were active in volunteering from 2020 – 2022. *The National Research on Volunteering and Values of Youth*<sup>9</sup> showcases the evidence that civic activism and general participation are more pronounced among young people who are more inclined to public activities and who show more pronounced liberal values. The research also shows that civic activism, though not exclusively volunteer activities, but also activities aimed at informing the public about a certain problem or boycotting certain products and services, can serve as a powerful tool in understanding the broader structure of individuals who decide to volunteer. Research findings, facts, and figures from *Volunteering for More Value Research*<sup>10</sup> support the potential that volunteer engagement can have on active civic participation, social inclusion, quality of interpersonal relationships, resilience, and social capital, however, volunteering is still not recognised and profiled as a powerful energy to promote the value and as a constructive force to meet the challenges of the future. *Research on Youth in Croatia 2018-2019*<sup>11</sup> showcases that young people's attitude towards politics is characterised by low interest and poor knowledge of politics, moderate engagement in some segments of formal politics and relatively weak involvement in various civil actions and initiatives. Civic and political participation of youth activism and youth engagement points out the importance of the content of education for democracy and human rights in the formal education system and encourages discussion on the necessity of quality introduction of the same (*From subjects to citizens: development of civic competencies in youth*).<sup>12</sup>

The situation in **Poland** seems to offer less ground for optimism, as several surveys and research show general mistrust in community and interpersonal relations, young people not feeling comfortable in their own country, as well as not having time for community-oriented activities (such as volunteering) because they are compelled to prioritise gainful employment to support themselves. *The Social Commitment of Young Poles*<sup>13</sup> research shows that 60% of young Poles engage in some form of social activity. Volunteering is the most common, with 35% participating in it. Political engagement is less prevalent, with only 15% involved in political activities. The report also highlights that 70% of respondents believe social engagement positively impacts personal development and community well-being. *State of Volunteering in Poland 2020*<sup>14</sup> statistics focusing on organised volunteering show that out of five male and female volunteers

8 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D41YWV3riplvfLSobZ8PdAYdExoxdmN8/view>

9 <https://guidebook.docdroid.net/bCSjp6z/volontiranje-i-vrijednosti-mladih-docx>

10 <https://guidebook.docdroid.net/jMuEp7H/volunteering-for-more-value-pdf#page=5>

11 <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kroatien/15291.pdf>

12 <http://idiprints.knjiznica.idi.hr/507/1/Od%20podanika%20do%20gra%C4%91ana.pdf>

13 <https://guidebook.biostat.com.pl/zaangazowanie-spoleczne-mlodych-polakow.php>

14 statistics focusing on organised volunteering shows that out of 5 male and female volunteers who are active in the organisation, 2 engage regularly, i.e. at least once a month.

who are active in the organisation, two engage regularly, i.e. at least once a month. The "*Youth 2020*"<sup>15</sup> report highlights various aspects of the social engagement and activism of young Poles:

1. Activism and Social Movements (particularly those addressing climate change and LGBT+ rights);
2. Challenges and Mental Health (including depression, self-harm, and suicidal tendencies);
3. Impact of Technology (the hybrid lifestyle impacts how they consume media, engage in social interactions, and participate in cultural events);
4. Social Isolation and COVID-19 (the lack of physical interaction has led to weakened social ties and increased loneliness);
5. Environmental Concerns (young people actively participating in environmental activism). The report paints a picture of a generation deeply engaged in social issues but also facing significant challenges that require robust support systems and policy interventions.

*The Mission Participation 2022*<sup>16</sup> report highlights the fact that in Poland, even though for over three decades children and young people have had the right to freely express their thoughts, and their own opinions on matters affecting them and, above all, to participate in decisions on issues affecting them, it is not uncommon for their needs and opinions to continue to be overlooked.

### Infrastructure, Institutional and Policy Frameworks in Partner Countries

On the EU level, there are projects and formal initiatives, focusing on promoting youth engagement, digital engagement (through volunteering and activism), training and education. Some are direct, and others are less so connected to EU citizenship and civic engagement. The EU actively promotes and encourages youth initiatives and active participation in various types of projects at all stages of project development and implementation.

Institutional and policy frameworks in partner countries provide a supportive environment for youth volunteering and civic engagement. These frameworks include government support, national youth councils, and educational initiatives aimed at promoting democratic values and active citizenship.

On the level of the **European Union**, besides the already mentioned *EU Youth Strategy 2019 – 2027*, the *Report on Implementation of European Citizenship Actions*<sup>17</sup> states that the European Solidarity Corps devoted a small part (0.2%) of its 2018-2020 budget to "citizenship education" projects. However, this fails to consider the fact that actions on other topics naturally feed into citizenship, e.g. promotion of eco-friendly lifestyles within the local community is a citizenship action while not being the sole focus.

<sup>15</sup> [https://guidebook.batory.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Mlodzi\\_2020.pdf](https://guidebook.batory.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Mlodzi_2020.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [https://agereaude.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/eBook\\_Misja\\_Partycypacja\\_2022.pdf](https://agereaude.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/eBook_Misja_Partycypacja_2022.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [https://guidebook.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0060\\_EN.html](https://guidebook.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0060_EN.html)

In **Slovenia**, there is some institutional framework and directives to support youth engagement. It seems the largest part of activities goes on within the NGOs and there's a tendency to involve young people in formalised activities. There are, however, several youth-led initiatives/collectives that operate outside the institutional framework and are supported by youth NGOs. *Youth Volunteering*<sup>18</sup>, an official programme document of the Slovenian Youth Council highlights two types of youth volunteering: activism and volunteering in organised groups, highlighting its role in fostering active citizenship and informal learning. It highlights the significance of youth volunteering and its impact on society, stressing the importance of a supportive environment in the fast-changing world. The Slovenian Ministry of Education supports youth volunteering through the *portal Mlad.si*<sup>19</sup>, promoting active citizenship and democratic values.

In **Ireland**, The National Youth Council of Ireland, through initiatives like Young Voices, supports civic engagement by facilitating dialogue and empowering youth to participate in democratic processes. *Young Voices Report: Engaging Together for a Sustainable and Inclusive Europe*<sup>20</sup> provides information from young people on the sort of actions and empowerment they want to see (explicating activism about inclusivity and sustainability, general information on civic engagement). In terms of infrastructure, alongside organised student volunteering programmes, the first-ever student volunteering online platform StudentVolunteer.ie provides additional opportunities for youth engagement of students.

**Croatia** adopted *The National Youth Programme 2023 – 2025*<sup>21</sup> in which one of the important measures is youth participation through enhancing active participation, EU Youth Dialogue, youth councils, young UN delegates, creative and artistic expression, environment protection, etc. Unfortunately, the Programme does not recognise volunteering as one of the key elements of empowering the civic competences of youth. Nevertheless, many CSOs are very active in advocating through policy recommendations that stress the importance of civic education and developing civic competencies through both formal and informal educational methods, including volunteering as a first step for young people.

In **Poland**, the *"Polityka Młodzieżowa 2023-2024"*<sup>22</sup> document outlines various aspects of youth policy, including social engagement. It illustrates the comprehensive approach of Poland's youth policy in fostering social engagement and supporting young people through various programmes and initiatives:

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18 [https://mss.si/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2012-04-23\\_MSS\\_-PROSTOVOLJSTVO\\_MLADIH\\_web.pdf](https://mss.si/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2012-04-23_MSS_-PROSTOVOLJSTVO_MLADIH_web.pdf)

19 <https://guidebook.mlad.si/informacije/kaj-je-aktivno-drzavljanstvo/>

20 <https://guidebook.youth.ie/documents/young-voices-report-2023/>

21 <https://mdu.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Direktorij%202/Slike%20od%2011.23/Dokumenti%20od%2011.23/Nacionalni%20program%20za%20mlade%202023-2025%20A4%20HR%20web..pdf>

22 [https://issuu.com/frse/docs/polityka\\_mlodziowska\\_2023\\_2024](https://issuu.com/frse/docs/polityka_mlodziowska_2023_2024)

1. Diverse Youth Work (activities within non-formal education aimed at social development and supporting young people at risk of social exclusion, carried out by state institutions like the Ministry of Education, NGOs, youth organisations, schools, and ad-hoc youth initiatives);
2. Support for Vulnerable Youth (young people in difficult life situations or at risk of social exclusion receive support from social economy entities);
3. Youth Organisations (a growing activity among civic organisations, including youth organisations, which has led to increasing professionalism in the sector);
4. Youth Work Funding (various funding sources, including the newly established Youth Fund for 2022-2033, support organisations and youth councils);
5. Educational and Support Programmes (youth work includes educational, rehabilitative, leisure, sports, and civic engagement activities).

On the EU level, as well as in all four countries, a variety of organisations and initiatives actively involve youth in community development and civic engagement. These range from NGOs and cultural centres to university programmes and grassroots movements. Common activities include environmental projects, human rights advocacy, and creative arts initiatives, all designed to empower young people and provide them with opportunities to lead and implement their ideas. The focus is on creating inclusive and supportive environments that encourage youth leadership and active participation.

### **Understanding Europe (EU Youth Parliament, Belgium)<sup>23</sup>**

Civic education & EU education project implemented by the European Youth Parliament, focusing on education and training. The project collaborates with schools to provide crash courses in English, French and Dutch for school pupils in EU-specific civic education, integrating informal methods into a formal learning environment.

### **European Youth Forum - "European Youth Capital" competition <sup>24</sup>**

The European Youth Forum is the biggest platform of youth organisations in Europe, representing over 100 youth organisations, both National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations from all across continental Europe, which bring together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe. It works to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives and advocate for their rights.

A wide-ranging initiative promoting youth empowerment and engagement within local municipalities, recognition of youth policies in support of engagement of youth in co-decision-making with policymakers, and dissemination of local/municipality events, activities and

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<sup>23</sup> <https://guidebook.eyp.be/projects>

<sup>24</sup> <https://guidebook.youthforum.org/topics/youthcapital>



best practices. The Forum's activities are broad in the sense that it focuses on the priorities of the youth as co-defined with municipality policymakers – The method of volunteering can vary but, in this context, the most relevant would-be event volunteering, and institutionalised volunteering through an organisation or association in cooperation with the municipality. Municipalities can also create and facilitate new groups of informal volunteers specific for certain activities as defined in the ten-year report.<sup>25</sup>

### **Young European Federalists (JEF Europe) - Cooperation Youth Vote project** <sup>26</sup>

Project targeting specifically civic engagement and political participation of youth, focusing on expertise, training, creation of toolkit/guidelines, and social media awareness campaigns. The scope of the support is targeted towards organisations working directly with youth, on the general delivery of training to organisations who act as multipliers to their volunteers. Promotion of engagement through grassroots, local or national organisations, but within the context of a European-wide campaign.

### **Confederation of European Senior Expert Services (CESES)** <sup>27</sup>

CESES activities centre around providing intergenerational support and mentorship to young people, to develop both soft and hard skills, and offer orientation in the labour market. CESES works with member organisations across Europe to support their direct activities with young people, by providing support and resources for these organisations to improve their work.

CESES organises regular meetings and discussions on the topic of intergenerationally and supporting young people through senior mentorship, which offers the chance to share best practices and thus contribute towards a stronger sector overall.

CESES's "SENT: Senior Experts Nurturing Talent" awards, hosted since 2023 annually, give recognition to initiatives and organisations which have made exceptional contributions towards supporting young people and raising the profile of intergenerational approaches across Europe. Through these elements, CESES has supported and contributed towards youth initiatives, and offered support and resources, indirectly.

More directly, CESES is the coordinating partner of the MAB Mentoring Across Borders project, which has created and implemented an online matching platform to enable and foster intergenerational, cross-border mentorship to support the personal development of

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<sup>25</sup> [https://guidebook.youthforum.org/files/EYC\\_ten\\_years\\_report.pdf](https://guidebook.youthforum.org/files/EYC_ten_years_report.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> <https://jef.eu/project/co-operation-youth-vote-enabling-future-active-european-citizens-coyv/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://guidebook.ceses.eu/>

young people, with a particular focus on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The mentorship is offered freely and at the request of a young person, they can define themselves what they want to take from the mentorship and what topics they would like to focus on. Through this Erasmus+ project, CESES has also developed a training manual for best practices in supporting young people through mentorship, gathering the knowledge of the 13 partners within the project.

### **Eko kolektiv (as part of the Institute of Ecology), Slovenia <sup>28</sup>**

An informal coalition of students, focusing on climate change, ecology, and active citizenship through education and expertise.

### **SpunOut, Ireland <sup>29</sup>**

SpunOut is a youth information and support platform that offers all young people support and thrives to empower them. The platform was home to many youth-led initiatives and engagements.

### **GOOD initiative, Croatia <sup>30</sup>**

Gathers and presents various materials and publications on civic education, active engagement and volunteering. Its purpose is to offer support to civic education by providing organisations, volunteer mentors and managers as well as volunteers themselves with practical materials and manuals on different dimensions of civic education.

## **Type of Youth Engagement Programmes and Activities**

Youth engagement activities in Slovenia, Ireland, Croatia and Poland encompass a wide spectrum, including volunteering, activism, creative arts, and policy advocacy. Common engagement methods include structured volunteer programmes, workshops, digital campaigns, participatory budgeting and various community service projects. These activities aim to address local and global issues such as climate change, health issues, human rights, and social justice, fostering a sense of responsibility and civic awareness among young people. Initiatives focus on both direct action and awareness-raising through media.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://guidebook.eko-kolektiv.si/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://spunout.ie/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://goo.hr/good-inicijativa/>

## **EU Citizens panels<sup>31</sup> , Citizens' Engagement Platform, European Commission**

Panels focusing on specific topics and questions that also function as a mechanism for engagement - so far used on virtual worlds, food waste, and learning mobility. The panels do not necessitate logistical and financial support aside from meeting participation costs; the facilitation team provides support, coordination and meeting/discussion moderation, logistics/arrangements for the meetings organised by the EU. They do not target youth specifically and the selection of topics is random, but still present a potential medium for attracting targeted youth engagement.

## **The European Youth Capitals <sup>32</sup>**

The European Youth Capitals are a perfect example of grassroots-level youth engagement with governmental authorities. We provide the space, funding, knowledge and support to youth councils that hold the European Capital of Youth every year. During that year there is a focus and commitment to foster youth policies at the local and national levels and create opportunities for youth participation, democratic engagement and capacity building. The whole year is organised and implemented by young people from the selected locality, in collaboration with the government and other relevant stakeholders.

## **Jasno in glasno - participacija za mlade, Slovenia <sup>33</sup>**

Jasno in glasnost (Loud and clear) is a campaign led by Zavod PIP (NGO), to increase youth participation in community matters through participatory budgets in municipalities and local communities. The approach assumes that participation on the local level might be a gateway to the youth, as the results can be directly seen and felt in their immediate local environment.

## **Mladi za zeleno aktivno državljanstvo (Youth for green active citizenship), Slovenia <sup>34</sup>**

A project that provided workshops and training relating to political ecology, cases of active participation in co-shaping eco-policies. Youths transfer knowledge to other young people; through peer-to-peer workshops. Content-wise, the focus was on climate change, ecology, and active citizenship, and the main methods used were education, expertise, knowledge sharing and formally involving youth within existing institutions.

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<sup>31</sup> [https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/index\\_eŋ](https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/index_eŋ)

<sup>32</sup> <https://guidebook.youthforum.org/topics/youthcapital>

<sup>33</sup> <https://zavodpip.si/project/novi-mladi-demokrati/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://acfslovenia.si/podprti-projekti/mladi-za-zeleno-aktivno-drzavljanstvo/>



## Type of Support Provided to Youth or Youth Workers and Volunteer Managers

Support for youth volunteers in Slovenia, Ireland, Croatia and Poland includes mentorship, training, funding, and infrastructure. Organisations and institutions provide comprehensive resources to help young people navigate their volunteer experiences and develop essential skills. Similarities include the provision of educational resources, logistical support, and platforms for peer-to-peer learning, ensuring that volunteers and youth workers have the necessary tools and guidance to succeed in their initiatives. Valuable learning resources and tools can be found in almost all partner countries, they were prepared either for young people or those working with youth (youth workers, volunteer managers, youth leaders or even teachers).

### **YouPart (digital tool kit for youth workers) <sup>35</sup>**

This particular tool kit emphasises civic participation and education, providing useful tools and accessories for youth workers.

### **Kaj pa če bi mi...? (guidebook on how to encourage youth initiatives, Inkubator 4.0 project) <sup>36</sup>**

The publication "What if we ...?" focuses on fostering and encouraging initiative amongst youth primarily to increase their employability. However, it replaces the conventional school-like approach with youth work techniques and places great emphasis on listening, understanding and accepting the personal potential and vocations of young people.

### **Znam, razmišljam, sudjelujem (Manual for teachers on civic education) <sup>37</sup>**

The manual focuses on civic education, active engagement and volunteering, outlining structural dimensions of civic education and elaborating on participatory methods and methods of working with youth, collaborative learning experience and cooperation with NGOs.

### **Volunteering for More Value Booklet, Croatian Volunteer Development Centre <sup>38</sup>**

This publication is all about values and volunteering in Portugal, Italy and Croatia. In the first section of the booklet, you will find a reflection on how volunteering has been changing in recent years. Although the situations in the three countries are different, the trend toward more liquid, guidebook extemporaneous volunteering with a strong emphasis on values is found almost

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<sup>35</sup> <https://guidebook.mreza-mama.si/digitalni-toolkit-youpart-za-mladinske-delavce/>

<sup>36</sup> [https://socialna-akademija.si/wp-content/uploads/inkubator40\\_prirocnik\\_compressed\\_compressed.pdf](https://socialna-akademija.si/wp-content/uploads/inkubator40_prirocnik_compressed_compressed.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> [https://guidebook.cms.hr/system/publication/pdf/80/GOO\\_prirucnik\\_za\\_nastavnike\\_Prerizid\\_SCREEN.pdf](https://guidebook.cms.hr/system/publication/pdf/80/GOO_prirucnik_za_nastavnike_Prerizid_SCREEN.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> <https://guidebook.docdroid.net/jMuEp7H/volunteering-for-more-value-pdf#page=4>

everywhere in Europe. The second section presents the results of the research conducted to explore both the attitudes of young people as beneficiaries of volunteer programmes and the attitudes of organisations that implement volunteer programmes. The third section reports some of the best practices of both organisations and events that are particularly interesting because of how the values of volunteering are felt, experienced and promoted. In the fourth section, there are some tips for organisations to improve their volunteer programmes and make them more value-oriented. The section stems from what young people reported during the focus groups but also from the content that emerged during some of the sharing meetings with the associations about the content reported in this text and presented to them beforehand.

## Volunteers Value Diary, Croatian Volunteer Development Centre <sup>39</sup>

Volunteers Value Diary is a useful tool for young volunteers that can be used to evaluate their expectations and volunteering experiences, putting both in perspective.

### Building Civic Competences of Youth

The EU promotes civic competences through formal and informal education, cross-border initiatives and digital engagement. Programmes like the European Youth Capitals provide practical experiences in democratic participation and community leadership.

Building civic competences among youth is a key focus in Slovenia, Ireland, Croatia and Poland. Common approaches include integrating civic education into both formal and informal settings, promoting critical thinking and encouraging active participation in community projects. Programmes aim to develop leadership, communication and advocacy skills, with an emphasis on fostering empathy, social responsibility and a deep understanding of democratic processes. The shared goal is to equip young people with the competences needed to become active, engaged citizens.

In **Slovenia**, civic competences are built through informal education, peer learning and active participation in community projects. Emphasis is placed on critical thinking, responsibility, and active citizenship.

In **Ireland**, the programmes aim to develop leadership, communication and advocacy skills. Initiatives like Young Voices foster a deeper understanding of democratic processes and civic responsibilities.

**Croatian** youth develop civic competences through project planning, implementation and community engagement. The focus is on fostering empathy, social responsibility, and leadership skills. Civic education programmes and youth initiatives in **Poland** aim to enhance political literacy, advocacy skills and social engagement. The importance of addressing mental health and social isolation is highlighted also in different reports and research.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://guidebook.docdroid.net/HNKiTxF/volunteers-value-diary-pdf>

## Case Studies: Examples of youth solidarity projects and activities from Slovenia, Ireland, Croatia and Poland.

### **Mladinski kulturni center Maribor<sup>40</sup> (Youth cultural centre Maribor), Slovenia**

MKC Maribor is a public institution focusing on youth, involving youth in structured activities as well as offering support to youth initiatives (mentorship, infrastructure, logistics). The main areas of work include human rights, active citizenships, art, providing training and education, workshops, supporting activism and artivism, and organising public events.

MKC Maribor has been providing support to the youth-led initiative for organising the Pride Parade in Maribor. The first parade was organised in 2019 when young volunteers took on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the event (with the support of a youth worker). Youth prepared the overall graphic design, took care of promotion, organised a charity event, applied for permits, contacted speakers and decision-makers on the local and national levels, and organised supporting activities ... MKC empowered them to implement this advocacy action, based on civil rights (right to protest, freedom of speech, freedom of expression). The action promoted the development of social, cultural, legal and political competencies as well as discovering one's own identity and placement.

### **MKC Kotlovnica<sup>41</sup> (Youth Cultural Centre Kotlovnica), Slovenia**

MKC Kotlovnica is an NGO that involves youth in structured activities, offers support to youth-lead activities and initiatives, including infrastructure, mentorship and logistics, encourages youth activation within the organisation and provides expertise on several topics, focusing mainly on active citizenship, ecology and environmentalism, arts and culture. The modus operandi includes direct action, training and workshops, educational activities, and public events.

One of the youth initiatives MKC Kotlovnica supported was the revitalisation of the former powder room Barutana, which is currently transforming a creative-socio-cultural neighbourhood providing youth infrastructure. The project "Creating the creative Barutana neighbourhood" included dialogue with decision-makers and the local community, a study visit to Pula, and creating the website Barutana.si (where ideas for the development were collected and a base of knowledge established), a round table on what the neighbourhood is and what it will be, presenting the youth vision of the neighbourhood development with guidelines for decision-makers, and a survey to determine what are the needs of youth organisations in term of public social infrastructure.

The youth got a chance to familiarise themselves with youth and project work, learned how to take responsibility in developing and advocating for their ideas, obtained useful skills and

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<sup>40</sup> <https://mkc.si/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://guidebook.kotlovnica.si/sl/program>

competences, forged connections to other NGOs and established paths for the transfer of knowledge and good practices. Youth also created their vision of the Creative neighbourhood of Barutana.<sup>42</sup>

### **Island on Fire Climate Campaign<sup>43</sup>, Ireland**

Island on Fire was a youth-led climate initiative funded by the Youth Climate Justice fund in Ireland. It was a conversation series on climate, climate justice and biodiversity, designed by SpunOut volunteers aged 16-25 which was shared on Spunout's social media platforms. The overall aim was to shed light on different aspects of climate change including what climate justice is, why we find it hard to care about climate, and how biodiversity and climate change are interlinked. They interviewed the chair of the Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity and encouraged other young people to have their say on why biodiversity is important. Part of the project also interviewed three young activists on how they got into climate activism and their advice to other people on getting involved.

The group of 8-11 volunteers was set up through an application process and worked on the project over several months, brainstorming ideas, writing TikTok scripts, working with an illustrator and filming content. They were supported throughout by the SpunOut digital content team to help them create the pieces of content. For example, our Head of Multimedia set up the interview shoots and filmed the content. The volunteers then got to see the filmed content and helped decide what pieces should be kept for the final edit. The pieces were then published on SpunOut social media platforms, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. Funding from the project was used to promote these through social media ads, set up by the SpunOut Digital Marketing team.

### **Under the Sheets Campaign<sup>44</sup>, Ireland**

Under the Sheets was a media campaign sharing the lived experience of sexual health for young people in Ireland. It was chosen, designed and led by SpunOut volunteers, aged 16-25, who are members of the SpunOut National Action Panel.

**Under the Sheets** is made up of online articles written by Ireland's youth describing their own experience of sex education and sexual health issues they've faced. It aims to draw on aspects of sexual health that may not have been covered in the classroom, but are integral to everyone's physical, social and mental wellbeing. Under the Sheets shed light on a wide range of sexual health experiences of young people. It featured pieces written by young people which you can read on their website.<sup>45</sup> The Our Voices Editor worked closely with the panel to lead and develop the content, work with an illustrator to develop campaign images, write social media posts for the content and speak on the radio

42 <https://barutana.si/sl/baza-znanja/mladinska-idejna-vizija-razvoja-kreativne-cetri-barutana>

43 <https://guidebook.tiktok.com/@spunout.ie/video/7164824239231601926;>

<https://guidebook.tiktok.com/@spunout.ie/video/7164419827057118469;>

<https://guidebook.youtube.com/watch?v=CPv5i-HfZ8I>

44 <https://spunout.ie/voices/under-the-sheets/>

45 <https://spunout.ie/voices/under-the-sheets/>

to promote the campaign. This happened in the form of weekly or bi-weekly meetings online. Each member of the group had a specific role, for example, editorial lead and creative illustrations lead. These volunteers were the main point of contact for each aspect of the campaign which worked well.

### **DrONE<sup>46</sup>, Croatia**

Drone is an association focused on social development and non-formal education, providing a platform for youth to plan, organise, and implement their initiatives. Through mentoring, education, and resource support, DrONE empowers young people to actively engage in their communities, fostering a sense of co-ownership and sustainability. DrONE's projects are driven by volunteer efforts, emphasising the importance of mentorship, resource provision, and youth empowerment. By involving young people in every step, DrONE ensures that initiatives are sustainable and have a lasting impact on both the participants and the broader community.

Key Initiatives:

**“GOO srijedom”**: Started with a young member proposing to write a critical review on a certain topic, which was posted on DrONE's social media. The programme expanded to various topics, with mentoring provided during the writing process. The initiative, rebranded as “GOOSKA”, continues to engage young authors and foster community discussions.

**“IDEnTitet”**: Two members, experts in mental health, proposed voluntary individual counselling during the COVID crisis. They secured grants to support online tools and office equipment. The project expanded to promote youth mental health, educate local youth workers, and conduct research. Ongoing counselling sessions have supported at least 30 young individuals.

**“Rado bih da znaš...”**: A participant suggested increasing DrONE's focus on LGBT+ human rights. With mentorship, the participant developed a project that created safe spaces for the LGBT+ community, including public discussions, workshops, and media campaigns. This initiative significantly improved safety and awareness in Karlovac.

**“RODni kraj”**: The same individual from the previous initiative proposed addressing gender-based () equality in the local community. The project included discussions, workshops, and media campaigns to raise awareness about gender equality. It successfully engaged diverse stakeholders and promoted respect and equality in the community.

### **Association Prizma<sup>47</sup>, Croatia**

Young ARTivists is an activity in which young people with fewer opportunities coming from different socio-cultural backgrounds are raising awareness about animal rights through creative arts. In the first edition of the activity by using illustration and storytelling youth created four illustrated stories addressing animal protection. The second edition built upon the first, incorporating street art and emphasising the issue of stray animals and pet adoption by creating an illustrated story and eight murals in Camara de Lobos, Madeira including a digital map of

<sup>46</sup> <https://udruga-drone.hr/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://guidebook.udrugaprizma.hr/>



mural locations. Activities encourage active participation of youth in community issues, specifically animal rights, and welfare, and increase the number of creative workshops and activities for young people in local communities that focus on the protection of animal rights and raise awareness of animal rights in local communities. They foster a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement and increase empathy and respect for living beings.

Empathy is a critical aspect of citizenship because it promotes compassionate and ethical behaviour of youth in the local communities. By planning and implementing their ideas, youth increased their sense of initiative, and the transition from the first to the second activity demonstrated leadership, as original participants took the lead in expanding the activity's scope. Using art as a medium for advocacy, youngsters improved their creative expression and communication skills, which are crucial for effective civic participation and raising public awareness on important issues.

Young ARTivists created many interesting, illustrated stories<sup>48</sup> and a mural map<sup>49</sup>.

### **FUNDACJA WIDZIALNE<sup>50</sup>, Poland**

This is a foundation based in Gdańsk which was established by a few young women who wanted to make significant change in their local society. Their mission is to advocate for the rights of marginalised and systematically discriminated individuals, particularly based on gender and origin. They aim to amplify these individuals' perspectives, making them visible in the public sphere and empowering them.

Fundacja Widzialne mobilised significant efforts to support individuals affected by the conflict in Ukraine:

- They provided transportation for 360 people from Hrubieszów to Gdańsk and Kielce, ensuring accommodation and necessities.
- Organised humanitarian aid collection and delivery, including medical and psychological support for refugees.
- Supported 70 individuals with housing from March 2022, with ongoing financial assistance and integration support.
- Facilitated accommodation for 250 people in collaboration with the Pomeranian Voivodeship.

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48 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KoYqQHknxbENr5r2o3kpSuqnDNgvWe4P/view?usp=sharing>  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tYdgf2IE6azaFDcNOqXjwGtTOSrsVtTO/view?usp=sharing>  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bnovHMuEKSiLC4nqq239ITQnZFMrtcIR/view?usp=sharing>  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nO2RnAy5eLcxAQJiHiD4Txxh5ZPTu3aw/view?usp=sharing>

49 [https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/c79a26a8-b2d1-474e-b714-60d2f33bcfc2/YoungArtivists2\\_QRCode\\_document.pdf](https://uploads.strikinglycdn.com/files/c79a26a8-b2d1-474e-b714-60d2f33bcfc2/YoungArtivists2_QRCode_document.pdf)

50 <https://guidebook.widzialne.com.pl/>

### Fight Against Menstrual Poverty

- Established 6 menstrual assistance points across the Pomeranian region, collaborating with the "Menstruation Action" initiative.
- Conducted educational campaigns and provided material support to combat menstrual poverty.

### Educational and Awareness Initiatives:

- Organised conferences and workshops addressing taboo topics such as health, sexuality, feminism, and religion.
- Facilitated film screenings and expert discussions to promote dialogue and understanding of these issues.
- Provided Polish language lessons and legal and employment consultations to facilitate integration for Ukrainian individuals.

### Political advocacy:

- They monitor the activities of politicians, especially by creating several debates with MEPs and frequent campaigns on social media.
- Organise and take part in protests.
- They fight for an inclusive policy that counteracts discrimination.

### WAŻNE SPRAWY<sup>51</sup>, Poland

The "Ważne sprawy" youth initiative was established by several youngsters from different parts of Poland who found a lack of youth perspective in general mainstream debate. They aim to empower young people by providing a platform for them to address important issues affecting their lives and communities. Through this initiative using different methods like TikToks, graphics, and Reels their audience is encouraged to identify pressing issues, propose solutions, and take action to create positive change. The initiative emphasises the importance of youth voices in decision-making processes and seeks to foster leadership skills among young individuals. By engaging in meaningful dialogue and collaborative efforts, "Ważne sprawy" aims to inspire youth to become active citizens and advocates for social justice and sustainable development.

- 1. Issue-based Campaigns:** Organising campaigns focused on specific issues such as climate change, mental health awareness, or gender equality. These campaigns could involve awareness-raising activities, workshops, and community events.
- 2. Policy Advocacy:** Engaging with policymakers to advocate for youth-friendly policies on education, employment, or healthcare. This could include writing policy briefs, organising meetings with lawmakers, or participating in public consultations.
- 3. Youth Empowerment Workshops:** Hosting workshops and training sessions aimed at developing leadership skills, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement among young people.
- 4. Research and Advocacy Reports:** Researching issues affecting youth and publishing advocacy reports to raise awareness and influence policy decisions.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://waznesprawy.org/>

**5. Online Campaigns and Social Media Activism:** Using digital platforms to mobilise support, raise awareness, and spark discussions on important youth-related issues.

**6. International Exchange Programmes:** Facilitating exchange programmes funded by Erasmus+ or partnerships with youth organisations from other countries to share experiences and collaborate on global challenges.

These activities aim to empower young people to become proactive agents of change in their communities and beyond, fostering a sense of responsibility and leadership among participants of the "Ważne sprawy" youth initiative.

## 2. Guidelines for Civil Society Organisations on Empowerment for Youth Civic Engagement

CSOs play a crucial role in fostering youth civic engagement and developing meaningful youth or volunteer programmes. Empowering young people to become active citizens requires a structured approach that considers their unique needs, motivations and the broader community context. Many young people and other CSOs today are faced with the spread of apathy and lack of interest in community and civic matters. And it is up to them to foster and incite grassroots initiatives, help them grow, develop and reach out to new people, new communities and new opportunities. Based on the data collected, some elementary steps have been outlined, that are needed for a successful and meaningful civic engagement of youth and/or volunteers:

### 1. Needs assessment and stakeholder involvement

Conduct thorough needs assessments involving diverse groups of stakeholders, including youth, community members, local authorities and other relevant entities. This helps identify the pressing issues and areas where youth engagement can make a significant impact. Ensure that various community groups are represented in the assessment process. This inclusivity helps in understanding different perspectives and fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among all involved.

### 2. Building partnerships

Establish strong partnerships with youth organisations, schools, volunteer groups, public authorities and other relevant entities. Collaborative efforts can pool resources, share expertise, and enhance the reach and effectiveness of youth initiatives. Use existing networks and create new ones to support collaborative projects. Engaging with local, national, and international networks can bring new opportunities and broader perspectives to your initiatives.

### 3. Recognising and engaging youth as volunteers

Recognise that each volunteer has unique motivations, backgrounds and stories. Understand their personal goals and reasons for volunteering to better align their roles with their interests and strengths. Go beyond assigning tasks. Engage volunteers in meaningful ways by involving

them in decision-making processes, providing opportunities for personal growth and recognising their contributions. Pool your volunteers and find out what their priorities are.

#### **4. Developing meaningful programmes and tasks for young people**

Define specific activities that will contribute to reaching clear and measurable outcomes based on the needs analysis. Set realistic goals and objectives and create a feasible timetable that considers sustainability and follow-up. Include young people in the planning and implementation stages to ensure their voices are heard and their ideas are incorporated. This fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the project/programme.

#### **5. Providing training and skill development**

Provide comprehensive training and skill development opportunities to equip young volunteers with the necessary skills and knowledge. Focus on areas such as leadership, project management, teamwork, communication, and raising awareness on values and advocacy. Encourage continuous learning and professional development through workshops, seminars, and peer-learning sessions.

#### **6. Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility**

Design programmes that are inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of background, ability or socio-economic status. Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute. Identify and address potential barriers to participation, such as transportation, financial constraints or lack of information. Provide necessary support to overcome these challenges.

#### **7. Creating a supportive environment**

Create an environment that motivates and supports youth. Consider their preferences, ambitions and goals, and involve them in decision-making processes. Offer mentorship and guidance to help them navigate challenges and develop their skills. Experienced mentors can provide valuable insights and support.

#### **8. Monitoring and evaluation**

Establish monitoring and evaluation processes for youth-led initiatives. Regularly assess progress, gather feedback and make necessary adjustments. Engage young volunteers in the evaluation process to gain their perspectives and ensure that their experiences inform future projects.

#### **9. Raising awareness and visibility**

Increase the visibility of initiatives by using various communication and promotion methods, including digital tools, social media, personal encounters and public events. Raise awareness about the issues addressed by the initiatives. Effective advocacy can attract more support and resources and inspire others to act.



## **10. Encouraging peer-to-peer engagement**

Provide a safe and comfortable space for peer networking and creativity. Encourage peer-to-peer engagement to foster a supportive community. Encourage youth to share their knowledge and experiences. Collaborative learning can enhance skills and build stronger relationships.

## **11. Ensuring sustainability**

Consider how to prolong the impact of the project. Identify strategies to ensure that the initiative continues to benefit the community even after the initial project ends. Anticipate potential challenges and limitations. Develop contingency plans to address these issues and ensure the project's long-term success.

By following these guidelines, CSOs can develop best practices that empower youth, foster civic engagement and build resilient communities. These strategies emphasise the importance of collaborative networking, inclusivity, continuous learning and sustainable impact, ensuring that youth are equipped and motivated to contribute meaningfully to their societies.

# **3. Framework for Youth on Applying Civic Competences through Community Projects**

Empowering youth through community projects requires a comprehensive framework that ensures supportive environments, competent management and appropriate infrastructure. This framework should be supported by organisations, communities, states and the EU to foster youth participation and initiatives in all segments of society. The framework should encompass infrastructure, programmes and activities, legal support, community connection, and institutional support. In the previous chapter, the Guidebook showcases the role of civil society organisations in this process, based on the information gathered through desk research, interviews and case studies from partner countries. It also guides organisations in creating a supportive environment for youth through developing appropriate youth programmes and gives recommendations on how to support youth. Thus, in this chapter, the Guidebook gives a general outline of the necessary elements that need to be realised as a supportive framework in which young people can apply civic competences.

## **Physical and Digital Infrastructure**

Creating a supportive environment for youth involves developing both physical and digital infrastructure. Youth centres, such as community centres, youth clubs and multi-purpose halls, provide dedicated spaces where young people can meet, plan, and implement their projects. Resource centres are essential, as they are equipped with the necessary materials, equipment, and technological tools to support a variety of youth volunteer activities. Additionally, it is cru-

cial to establish safe spaces that are inclusive and accessible to all youth, including those from marginalised communities.

On the digital front, online platforms play a significant role in facilitating communication, coordination and resource sharing among youth. Tools such as project management software, forums and social media groups enable efficient collaboration and connectivity. Furthermore, virtual training resources, including online courses, webinars and digital libraries, offer vital training and information to support and enhance youth activities. This comprehensive approach to infrastructure ensures that youth have the physical and digital resources they need to succeed in their civic engagement and community projects.

### Programmes, Initiatives and Activities

A robust framework for youth engagement includes a variety of programmes, initiatives and activities designed to foster civic competences and promote active participation. Educational programmes play a fundamental role, with civic education courses that teach the principles of democracy, human rights, and civic responsibilities. Additionally, workshops and seminars provide essential training in leadership, project management, communication and advocacy, equipping young people with the skills they need to lead and contribute effectively to their communities.

Volunteer initiatives are another critical component, offering opportunities for young people to engage directly with their communities. Community service projects address local needs such as environmental conservation, social services and cultural preservation. Youth-led campaigns empower young people to advocate for social change, focusing on issues like climate action, human rights advocacy and health awareness. These initiatives not only address immediate community needs but also foster a sense of responsibility and leadership among youth.

Engagement activities further enhance the impact of these programmes by promoting active participation and dialogue. Peer-to-peer learning programs facilitate knowledge sharing and mentorship among youth, helping them learn from each other and build strong support networks. Public events, including community forums and cultural events, provide platforms for civic engagement and dialogue, encouraging young people to participate actively in their communities and engage with a broader audience. This comprehensive approach ensures that youth are well-prepared and motivated to contribute to societal development and the promotion of EU values.

### Legal and Policy Framework

An effective legal and policy framework is essential for fostering youth civic engagement and ensuring that volunteers can operate in a supportive and protected environment. Supportive legislation is a key component, encompassing volunteer protection laws that safeguard volunteers'



liability, safety, and rights. Youth participation policies are crucial as they ensure the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes and civic activities, thus promoting a culture of active citizenship from a young age. Additionally, recognition and incentive frameworks provide formal acknowledgement of volunteer efforts through certifications, awards, and other incentives, motivating more young people to engage in volunteer activities.

Ensuring freedom and rights is another fundamental aspect of the legal framework. Policies that safeguard freedom of expression, including free speech and the right to protest, are vital for enabling youth to voice their opinions and advocate for social change. Anti-discrimination laws play a significant role in protecting volunteers from discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, and other factors, ensuring that all youth can participate in volunteer activities without fear of prejudice or bias. This comprehensive legal framework creates an environment where youth feel supported, valued, and empowered to contribute to their communities and engage in civic activities.

## Community Connection

Establishing strong community connections is vital for the success and sustainability of youth volunteer projects. Community engagement forms the backbone of these connections, with partnerships playing a crucial role. Collaborating with local organisations, schools, businesses and public authorities ensures comprehensive support for volunteer activities. Including community members in the planning and decision-making processes guarantees that the projects are relevant and address local needs effectively.

Awareness and advocacy are essential components of community connection. Public awareness campaigns are crucial for informing the community about volunteer projects and their impact, thus garnering broader support and involvement. Advocacy initiatives further this goal by promoting the social issues addressed by the projects and mobilising community support for these causes.

Networking opportunities enhance the effectiveness of community engagement. Organising networking events such as meetings, conferences and forums connects volunteers with community leaders and other stakeholders, fostering collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Mentorship programmes pair volunteers with experienced mentors from the community, providing guidance, support and the transfer of valuable knowledge. This comprehensive approach to community connection ensures that youth volunteer projects are well-supported, impactful, and sustainable.

## Institutional Support

Institutional support is essential for empowering youth in their civic engagement and volunteer activities. Government support plays a pivotal role by providing funding and grants at local,

regional and national levels to finance volunteer projects and initiatives. Furthermore, the development of government policies that promote youth engagement and volunteerism ensures a supportive framework for young volunteers. Additionally, leveraging government programmes such as national service programmes, youth councils and funding initiatives can further enhance youth engagement and provide structured opportunities for involvement.

Educational institutions contribute significantly to institutional support through school partnerships. Collaborating with schools to integrate civic education into the curriculum provides students with foundational knowledge and encourages participation in volunteer opportunities. Certification programmes offered by educational institutions validate and certify the skills and experiences gained through volunteer activities, enhancing the credibility and recognition of volunteer efforts. This collaboration ensures that the competences gained through volunteering are formally recognised, which can be beneficial for the volunteers' educational and professional futures.

Civil society organisations are also crucial in this support system. CSOs provide essential training, resources and support to volunteers, equipping them with the skills and tools needed for effective engagement. Additionally, capacity-building programmes aimed at enhancing the organisational capabilities of youth-led initiatives and volunteer groups ensure that these projects are sustainable and impactful. CSOs often play a vital role in bridging the gap between volunteers and the broader community, offering support and resources that might not be available through other channels.

States play a critical role in fostering an environment conducive to youth civic engagement. This can be achieved through:

- **Policy development:** Develop and implement policies that promote youth participation in civic activities.
- **Funding and resources:** Allocate funds and resources to support youth initiatives and volunteer programmes.
- **Educational integration:** Integrate civic education into formal education curricula to build awareness and skills from a young age.
- **Recognition programmes:** Establish recognition programmes to celebrate and incentivise youth civic engagement and volunteering.

By implementing this comprehensive framework, organisations, communities and governments can create an enabling environment for youth to apply their civic competences through community projects. This approach ensures that young people are supported at every level, from infrastructure and legal frameworks to community connections and institutional backing, fostering a culture of active citizenship and engagement in EU values.

## 4. Guidelines for Volunteers on Empowerment for Youth Civic Engagement

Empowering youth to engage in civic activities and realise their ideas requires a structured approach. The following guidelines, based on data collected across several European countries, provide practical steps for young volunteers to plan, implement and evaluate their projects effectively. These steps help ensure that young people can make meaningful contributions to their communities and develop their civic competences.

### Before embarking on a new project:

**Identify and contextualise the issue** Consider the social context of your initiative. Identify the problem it addresses and determine whether it affects the community as a whole or specific segments.

**Resource and support assessment** Determine what resources you need to bring your idea to life. Assess if joining a youth organisation or other CSOs could help achieve your goals. Evaluate whether your initiative would benefit from the structure and support of a CSO. Identify organisations that have a history of supporting youth initiatives and working on similar topics.

**Setting and networking** Decide if your idea is better implemented in an informal setting or would benefit from networking with other groups and initiatives that share similar goals and values.

**Advocacy and communication** Consider if your idea involves advocacy and communication with local or national authorities. Determine if CSO support would be beneficial for these activities.

**Finding the right fit** Choose the best fit for your needs and ambitions. If you require structure, a highly formalised CSO might be the answer. If you prefer flexibility, consider a loosely structured organisation or an informal group.

**Resource planning** Identify the resources needed to implement your idea and explore funding options. Develop a realistic plan outlining your initiative's goals, objectives, activities, timeline and expected results.

### During project implementation:

**Time management and manpower** Assess the time commitment required to implement your idea. Determine if you can manage it alone or if you need additional manpower. Consider collaborating with an organisation to gain the necessary support.

**Peer engagement** Engage more of your peers in the project to amplify its impact.

**Promotion and awareness** Utilise social media and digital platforms for promotional and awareness-raising activities. Choose the method best suited for your initiative.

**Civic engagement** Remember that any type of volunteering and community engagement is a form of civic engagement.

### After the work is done:

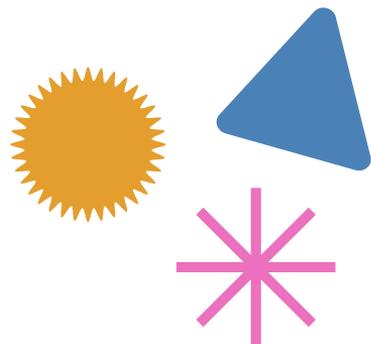
**Impact reflection and evaluation** Reflect on the impact of your initiative and evaluate its success. Identify the tactics, tools and actions that were instrumental in reaching your goal and those that could be improved or did not work at all.

**Community sharing** Share your experience and results with the community to inspire others and gain feedback.

**Sustainability and upscaling** Consider the sustainability of your project. Determine if you can build on the results and whether the project can be upscaled.

**Unexpected outcomes** Reflect on any unexpected outcomes. Assess whether new issues have arisen from the initiative or if your project has addressed previously unidentified problems.

By following these guidelines, young volunteers can effectively plan, implement and evaluate their projects. This structured approach helps ensure that their initiatives are impactful and sustainable. It also provides a framework for developing critical skills in leadership, project management, communication and advocacy. Ultimately, these steps empower young people to make their ideas a reality, contribute meaningfully to their communities and develop a deeper understanding of civic engagement and its importance in promoting democratic values and social change.



# 5 Conclusions and Summary



Throughout this guidebook, various methodological approaches and frameworks for supporting youth in gaining and applying civic competences through volunteer programmes and community projects have been explored. Despite the diverse contexts and legal frameworks across Europe, the issues faced by youth regarding civic engagement and volunteering are strikingly similar. Political apathy is prevalent, particularly among young people, who often feel their participation does not make a difference, or they prioritise other aspects of life over public and community matters. However, the research and case studies have shown that impactful and meaningful actions are being implemented successfully across different countries.

From political engagement and human rights advocacy to climate justice and transforming unused buildings into community spaces, youth engagement persists and finds innovative ways to make a difference, often regardless of the level of institutional support available. The mission was to identify and highlight key elements from the successful cases, surveys and studies examined and provide practical guidelines for civil society organisations, youth/volunteers and local/national authorities. These guidelines aim to facilitate the transfer and adaptation of good practices to new environments, whether it be in different countries, neighbouring towns, or from local to national levels and vice versa.

In summarising the key points and insights from this guidebook, youth engagement is vital for the health and development of democratic societies. Young people bring fresh perspectives, energy and innovative solutions to pressing community issues. Their involvement in civic activities not only benefits society as a whole but also fosters personal growth, leadership skills and a sense of responsibility among the youth themselves.

## Key Recommendations for Encouraging Youth Initiatives and Civic Engagement

Despite the variety of circumstances, legal frameworks and methodologies, we can distil the recommendations for how civil society organisations (CSOs) can encourage youth initiatives and civic engagement into five key points:

**Listen to what young people are saying:** Engage with youth to understand their perspectives, needs and ideas. Actively listening fosters trust and ensures that initiatives are relevant and impactful.

**Recognise their potential, values and possibilities:** Acknowledge the unique strengths and values that young people bring to the table. Encouragement and recognition can significantly boost their confidence and motivation to engage.

**Foster a supportive environment:** Create environments that are conducive to youth participation. This includes providing the necessary resources, infrastructure and mentorship to support their initiatives.

**Co-determine needs and goals:** Collaborate with youth in identifying community needs and setting goals. This joint approach ensures that projects are well-aligned with both community priorities and youth aspirations.

**Interact with your community at all times:** Maintain continuous interaction with the broader community to ensure that projects remain relevant and supported. Community engagement enhances the sustainability and impact of youth initiatives.

### Importance of Policy Support

The support from policymakers is crucial in creating an enabling environment for youth civic engagement. Policies that promote youth participation, provide legal protections for volunteers and offer funding and resources for youth-led initiatives can significantly enhance the effectiveness and reach of civic projects. Policymakers should recognise the value of youth engagement and work to remove barriers that hinder their participation.

### Final Thoughts

The insights and recommendations presented in this Guidebook emphasise the importance of empowering youth through civic engagement. By listening to young people, recognising their potential, fostering supportive environments, collaborating on needs and goals and maintaining community interaction, we can create a robust framework for youth civic engagement. The collective effort of CSOs, volunteers, communities and policymakers is essential in building a more inclusive, democratic, and resilient society.



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# Information about the Project and Partners



Unlike the traditional view of volunteering as an act of charity, the modern and innovative approach recognises volunteering as a form of youth activism that strengthens young people's sense of initiative, particularly for the acts of solidarity, significantly increases young people's capacity to be proactive in the community on the democratic principles of inclusiveness, intercultural dialogue, and mutual trust. The project idea starts from this premise and aims to support organisations and youth to use the potential of volunteering as a driving force for civic education, youth empowerment and engagement in building European society and strengthening democracy, EU values and identity.

## **The project Powered by V aims to:**

1. Encourage a better understanding of the cultural, social, and political context of relations between youth engagement through volunteering and EU values.
2. Support youth volunteering as a transformative force in strengthening EU values and resilience & sustainable communities.
3. Strengthen youth organisational capacities for more impactful youth volunteer engagement underpinning EU values.
4. Unlock the potential of national, transnational and EU cooperation on the issue.

To achieve the aims, the project uses the potential of deliberative dialogues creating a space to seek a shared understanding of issues and challenges and searches for common ground and action. The project proposes intensive and transnational capacity building to stimulate and support youth as well as practitioners, researchers, and policymakers by opening a wider dialogue space, bringing more data and knowledge, and sharing best practices, new skills and recommendations that will make us more able to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The cooperation partnership starts from that approach to volunteering as an active expression of civic participation, which has the potential to strengthen fundamental European values. Led by DKolektiv – organisation for social development, the project is implemented in partnership with Slovene Philanthropy (Slovenia), Volunteer Ireland (Ireland), Centre for European Volunteering (Belgium), FriSe (Denmark) and Regional Volunteer Centre Gdansk (Poland) and funded by Erasmus+ Programme.

## DKOLEKTIV – ORGANISATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



DKolektiv is a social development organisation built on the 15 years of experience of the Volunteer Centre Osijek in the fields of development of volunteering, civil society, and democratic culture.

DKolektiv is established on the principles of solidarity, humanity, respect for diversity, non-violence, tolerance, understanding, responsibility, and cooperation.

The organisation is socially sensitive and actively encourages dialogue and cooperation. They protect human dignity and human rights whilst contributing to solidarity and social cohesion. DKolektiv actively listens and argues for sustainable development and a humane, open, and democratic society.

The organisation's mission is to inspire and support democratic culture, the development of civil society and volunteerism, the creation of equal opportunities and active participation of citizens.

DKolektiv wants to contribute to the development of, a democratic culture, active citizenship, the development of volunteerism, a strong and progressive civil society, good governance, an inclusive society and a better position for minority, vulnerable and marginalised groups. DKolektiv is characterised by independence of action and open presence, the exchange of knowledge and capacities, openness to different opinions and attitudes and sharing knowledge and expertise in the field of activity.

DKolektiv cooperates with civil society organisations and initiatives, citizens, public institutions, public and private institutions, media, the economy as well as European and international organisations.

Special attention is given to the creation of targeted and sustainable interventions through projects and programmes that are implemented in cooperation with other organisations and work collaboratively. DKolektiv strives to be innovative in our actions, to promote positive changes, create opportunities for learning and development, foster dialogue and create connections between people, organisations, and communities.

Website: <https://www.dkolektiv.hr/public/hr>

## SLOVENE PHILANTHROPY

SLOVENSKE  
FILANTROPIJA

Slovene Philanthropy, Association for the Promotion of Voluntary Work, is an independent, non-governmental, non-political, non-profit, humanitarian organisation working in the public interest since 1992. Its programmes are aimed at improving the quality of life in the community and advocating for vulnerable groups in society. Slovene Philanthropy's central activity is the promotion of volunteering, stemming from the belief that through volunteering we can all contribute to a better and more tolerant society, based on respect towards everyone, no matter their personal or objective circumstances.

The organisation offers training for volunteers, mentors and organisers of volunteers, and educational content for various stakeholders. Its values are Solidarity, Respect towards People and Nature, Tolerance, Equality and Equal Opportunities for All. The organisation groups its various activities into Programme Units. Slovene Philanthropy believes that we are all responsible for the life of our community and it wants everyone to be aware of this, so its work is focused on awareness raising, information, advocacy, and networking. Programmes deal with areas that are not yet covered or not covered sufficiently by state institutions but can be significantly improved by the additional involvement of people - volunteers. These areas are: Helping refugees, the homeless and other people without health insurance by providing health services, advocating for migrant workers' rights, building intergenerational cooperation, etc.

Unfortunately, with the increasing stratification of society, there are more and more areas where people's participation is crucial to ensuring the values of a fair and just society. Slovene Philanthropy's vision is a kind and secure society that offers a safe environment to all, even for those who are, for any reason, unable to provide a comfortable existence for themselves and their families. This will be achieved through true partnership and cooperation of national institutions, the economic sector, and the voluntary activities of citizens.

Slovene Philanthropy supports people's initiatives that are in line with the values it represents. The organisation also uses its projects to transfer good practice to developing countries. For 30 years, Slovene Philanthropy has been actively responding to social problems, encouraging, and developing volunteer work and intergenerational cooperation while acting in the area of migration, helping the vulnerable and being a vocal advocate of human rights.

Website: <https://www.filantropija.org/>

## VOLUNTEER IRELAND



Volunteer Ireland is the national organisation that promotes, supports and advocates for volunteering in Ireland. We work with a range of stakeholders to make volunteering accessible, inclusive and of high quality. We build capacity in organisations and companies to create meaningful volunteering experiences. We celebrate volunteering and communicate its impact to the government and the wider public. We advocate for volunteering so that its value is recognised. We support the network of Volunteer Centres and work closely with them to ensure volunteering thrives at local and national levels.

Our work is guided by our strategic plan 2023-2027, where we have identified five strategic goals:

- Advocate for volunteering
- Support the Volunteer Centres
- Develop meaningful volunteering
- Raise the profile of volunteering
- Grow and sustain an excellent organisation, consistent with our values

There are 29 Volunteer Centres across the country that work with Volunteer Ireland. Volunteer Ireland develops and supports best practices in volunteering and Volunteer Centres, including the evaluation of Volunteer Centres according to a quality standard framework.

Website: <https://www.volunteer.ie/>

## VOLUNTEER CENTRE AND SELF-HELP DENMARK (FriSe)



FriSe is the national umbrella organisation for 69 local volunteer centres and 10 self-help organisations across all of Denmark. We are independent of government, party political and religious interests. Together with our members and many collaboration partners nationally and internationally, we are concerned with developing local volunteering and strengthening the local communities, so that everyone has the opportunity to volunteer and find help and support in the voluntary communities. FriSe works to support, develop, and promote volunteering and to improve the framework and conditions for volunteer organisations. We work to promote and support volunteering and our members through:

- Knowledge building & knowledge sharing
- Capacity building & consultancy
- Partnerships and networking with key stakeholders across all sectors
- Visibility & dissemination of social volunteer work
- Interest Safeguarding & advocacy

In addition, we run several projects and initiatives, all of which aim to make it easier to become and be a volunteer and easier to be a voluntary association. For example, we operate Denmark's largest job portal Frivilligjob.dk where volunteers can find a volunteer job amongst the many different organisations, and we provide digital solutions for associations via TechSoup as a part of the TechSoup Global Network. TechSoup runs a donation programme, which provides eligible organisations with donated and discounted software. We are also the coordinator of the national celebration of volunteerism; Volunteer Friday and are responsible for the national distribution of Socialkompas.dk, a database where people can find help and support amongst organisations in the community.

Website: <https://www.frise.dk/>

## CEV - CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING



The Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), previously the European Volunteer Centre, was established in 1992. It is a European network of over 60 organisations dedicated to the promotion and support of volunteers and volunteering in Europe at the European, national or regional levels.

Through our network, we aim to be the leading voice in the values-based volunteering debate in Europe. We aim to influence and share current trends and challenges and those predicted for the future. We develop and provide policy advice and expertise for European policymakers so that volunteering policies and programmes developed at the European level are effective and fit for purpose.

Network members are supported to further their objectives at national, regional and European levels by protecting and supporting a free and enabling civil society space, by advocating for suitable European funding support, and by developing supportive policy statements on pertinent volunteering issues at the European level.

In this way, we are reaching out to the many thousands of volunteers and volunteer organisations in Europe as a source of support by bringing the European dimension to their work.

CEV channels the collective priorities and concerns of its member organisations to the institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Together with other stakeholders, we exchange policies, practices and information to reach the outcomes envisaged in the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 (BEV2030).

CEV's vision is a Europe in which volunteers are central in building a cohesive, sustainable and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship. CEV is a European network of organisations dedicated to the promotion and support of volunteers and volunteering; its

mission consists of providing collaborative leadership to create an enabling environment for volunteering in Europe.

Website: <https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/>

## REGIONALNE CENTRUM WOLONTARIATU GUIDEBOOK GDANSKU



The Regional Centre of Volunteering in Gdańsk was started in 1993 and since 1997 it has functioned as an independent association. It is a non-profit institution based on cooperation, professionalism, and social commitment. The goal of the Centre is to popularize the idea of volunteering and civic activity for organisations, institutions and people, as well as comprehensive support for people and institutions interested in such activity. RCWG cooperates with over 5,000 volunteers.

The mission directs actions to create a strong civil, active and participative society, based on the principles of equality. The goal is to reach the inhabitants of Gdańsk and the surrounding area regardless of their age, gender, education, or social status. The main permanent programmes of the organisation are:

- Coordinating the Gdańsk Volunteer Centre - intermediation between non-governmental organisations and institutions willing to engage volunteers, Volunteering Recruitment Agency.
- Action volunteering - supporting large sports events both in their service and in the city's support in the public space (including the Handball World Championships of Men EHF Euro 2016, Gdańsk Marathons, triathlons), supporting cultural and civil events, conferences, etc.
- Senior Fund of Gdańsk - implemented in 2013, the project was created as a response to the low level of voluntary involvement of older people. The fund is based on a mini-grant mechanism. The purpose of this project is to co-finance initiatives/events proposed by seniors.
- Employee volunteering - as part of the programme, the Centre stimulates and activates representatives of the private sector to create actions dedicated to the local community and the city.

The Centre also implements other programmes to reach the largest possible audience, including such programmes as School Volunteering, Volunteer Week in Gdańsk or Volunteer Programme at the European Solidarity Centre.

Website: <https://wolontariatgdansk.pl/>

## Appendix 1

### Plain language summary

This guidebook aims to help youth gain and use civic competences through volunteering. It provides a methodological framework for youth volunteer programs and projects, emphasising peace, solidarity, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and human rights. The guide addresses youth concerns like lack of time, fear of repercussions, and lack of knowledge about community involvement, as well as challenges faced by organizations in engaging young people.

The guidebook seeks to enhance the capacity of youth volunteering organizations, promoting democratic values, leadership, and EU values such as peace, equality, and sustainable development. It offers innovative approaches for volunteer-involving organisations, youth leaders, youth workers, and youth themselves.

Key points include:

1. Supporting youth in gaining civic competences.
2. Providing a framework for volunteer programs focusing on peace, solidarity, and human rights.
3. Creating an environment that supports youth volunteer engagement.
4. Fostering democratic thinking and behaviour among youth.
5. Raising awareness about equal opportunities and social inclusion.
6. Offering know-how and resources to develop organizational capacities.

The guidebook is designed as a comprehensive resource aimed at empowering youth to develop and exercise civic competences through volunteering activities. It serves as a methodological framework for youth volunteer programs and projects, placing a strong emphasis on values such as peace, solidarity, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and human rights. The guidebook addresses various concerns and challenges faced by both youth and volunteer organizations, providing strategies to overcome these obstacles and promote active community involvement.

The primary objective of the guidebook is to support youth in acquiring civic competences, which include the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for active participation in democratic life. It highlights the importance of volunteering as a means for young people to engage with their communities, contribute to societal well-being, and develop a sense of responsibility and leadership. The guidebook outlines a structured approach to designing and implementing volunteer programs that are inclusive, accessible, and impactful.

One of the significant challenges addressed by the guidebook is the various barriers that prevent youth from participating in volunteer activities. These barriers include a lack of time, fear of negative repercussions, and insufficient knowledge about how to get involved in their communities. By providing practical solutions and recommendations, the guidebook aims to create an environment that encourages and supports youth engagement in volunteering.

For organisations that involve volunteers, the guidebook offers valuable insights into effectively engaging young people. It recognises the difficulties these organisations face, such as limited resources, lack of awareness, and the need for innovative approaches to attract and retain youth volunteers. The guidebook provides strategies to enhance organizational capacities, foster a supportive environment, and implement best practices for volunteer management.

A key aspect of the guidebook is its focus on promoting democratic values and behaviours among youth. It underscores the importance of instilling principles such as equality, social justice, and respect for diversity. By engaging in volunteer activities, young people can experience firsthand the impact of democratic participation and develop a deeper understanding of their roles as active citizens.

The guidebook also emphasises the importance of intercultural dialogue and social inclusion in volunteer programs. It encourages the creation of opportunities for youth from diverse backgrounds to collaborate and learn from each other, fostering mutual understanding and respect. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of volunteer projects but also contributes to building cohesive and inclusive communities.

In addition to promoting democratic values and social inclusion, the guidebook highlights the importance of raising awareness about equal opportunities and human rights. It advocates for volunteer programs that address issues such as discrimination, inequality, and social exclusion. By engaging in activities that promote these values, young volunteers can contribute to creating a more just and equitable society.

The guidebook provides a wealth of practical resources, including tools, templates, and case studies, to support the development and implementation of effective volunteer programmes. It offers guidance on project planning, volunteer recruitment and retention, capacity building, and evaluation. These resources are designed to equip youth leaders, youth workers, and volunteer organizations with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully engage young people in meaningful volunteer activities.

Furthermore, the guidebook aligns with broader European Union values and objectives, such as promoting peace, sustainable development, and intercultural understanding. It reflects the EU's commitment to supporting youth participation in civic life and fostering a sense of European identity and solidarity.

Overall, this guidebook serves as an essential resource for anyone involved in youth volunteering, from youth leaders and youth workers to volunteer-involving organizations and the young people themselves. By providing a comprehensive framework and practical tools, the guidebook aims to empower youth to become active and engaged citizens, capable of making positive contributions to their communities and society at large. Through volunteering, young people can develop the

competences needed to navigate and shape the world around them, while also promoting the core values of democracy, equality, and social inclusion.

Ten takeaways:

- 1. Empowerment Through Volunteering:** The guidebook emphasizes the importance of volunteering as a means for youth to gain civic competences, which are crucial for active participation in democratic life and community engagement.
- 2. Overcoming Barriers:** It addresses common obstacles faced by youth in volunteering, such as lack of time, fear of negative consequences, and insufficient knowledge, offering practical solutions to mitigate these challenges.
- 3. Support for Volunteer Organisations:** The guidebook provides strategies for organizations to effectively engage young volunteers, enhance their capacities, and implement best practices in volunteer management.
- 4. Promotion of Democratic Values:** It underscores the importance of instilling principles like equality, social justice, and respect for diversity in young volunteers, promoting democratic participation and citizenship.
- 5. Intercultural Dialogue and Social Inclusion:** The guidebook encourages creating opportunities for youth from diverse backgrounds to collaborate, fostering mutual understanding, respect, and inclusive communities.
- 6. Raising Awareness on Equal Opportunities and Human Rights:** It advocates for volunteer programs addressing issues like discrimination and social exclusion, aiming to build a more just and equitable society.
- 7. Practical Resources:** The guidebook offers tools, templates, and case studies to support the development and implementation of effective volunteer programs, aiding youth leaders and organisations.
- 8. Alignment with EU Values:** It reflects European Union values and objectives, such as promoting peace, sustainable development, and intercultural understanding, aligning with broader EU goals.
- 9. Comprehensive Methodological Framework:** The guidebook provides a structured approach for designing and implementing inclusive and impactful volunteer programmes, ensuring accessibility and effectiveness.
- 10. Fostering Active Citizenship:** By engaging in volunteering, young people can develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become responsible, active citizens capable of contributing positively to society.

