#V4VOLUNTEERS

# Policy Recommendatios EU Report

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## June 2021

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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# INTRODUCTION

The V4Volunteers is a project funded by **KA3 – Social inclusion through education, training and youth of Erasmus+ programme** that aims to empower youth workers and support staff who are experienced in the field of volunteering.

They will develop competences related to promotion, implementation and mainstreaming of volunteering projects as a tool for social inclusion.  **Specifically, this project aims at:**

• promoting youth voluntarism as a tool for social inclusion of youngsters with fewer opportunities;
• actively encouraging volunteerism, as a way of civic engagement and youth capacity building;
• developing and sharing innovative methods to reinforce volunteering structures;
• developing policy recommendations about the topic of volunteering;
• establishing sustainable cooperation between the actors involved
in European Voluntary Service and European Solidarity Corps;
• equipping EVS support staff of partner organizations with efficient
skills, knowledge and competences, in order to set higher standards in voluntary projects across the participating countries.

The **implementation** of the project has been carried out in 3 phases*:*

### First Phase

- Holistic approach to the volunteerism
- Discovery of the role of volunteerism as a way of civic engagement and capacity development of youth.
- Ways to use volunteerism as a tool to create opportunities for social inclusion

### Second Phase

- Create a sharing space for evaluating the volunteering projects.
- Sharing of good and bad practices
- Innovative approaches, tools and methodologies.

### Third Phase

- Creation of policy recommendations on the framework of voluntary projects
- Involvement of Local, regional and European level authorities.

This report covers the third phase of the project, with a total duration of **two years.** Its main objective is to create **policy recommendations** on the framework of voluntary projects with the involvement of local, regional and European level authorities.

The Policy Recommendation Report aims to influence policy makers, stakeholders and volunteers. It address to the **EACEA and policy makers.**
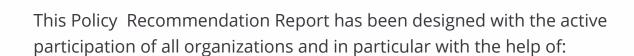This report analyses the national policies and national voluntary activities in **UK, Greece, Spain, Italy and Poland**, and based on gaps identified, suggests improvements.

The report is divided into two main sections:
- National policies: Gaps and improvements identified
- National policies: National Voluntary activities, Gaps and improvements identified

One important aspect of this project is to map the **actual framework of policies** that shape the **voluntary work** in **Europe** and analyse **gaps and improvements** to see the parts that need to get developed.

After checked the relations of the good practices with the policies, we prepared this report on the recommendations that policy makers can take in the account.

This Policy  Recommendation Report has been designed with the active participation of all organizations and in particular with the help of:

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# 1

# National policies:
# gaps and improvements

## 🇬🇷 Greece

3 main **issues** that results in insufficiency in term of policies for volunteerism;

Since there is **no certain legislation for volunteers** or for voluntary organizations, the volunteers do not benefit from any **particular legal protection.** This results in the application of the general regulations governing employment, residency, social and health benefits and mobility. Related issues that are arising are the indefinite borders between paid and unpaid work;

As for **voluntary organisations,** there is **no reference to** their **voluntary status,** neither in civil law, nor in tax law. Hence, there are no provisions regulating the relations of civil society organisations with their members. As a result, ambiguity and legal issues can may occur between paid staff and members carrying out voluntary activities to an organisation;

**Volunteering** is not clearly or officially established as a **concept,** neither is widespread. This derives from its poor promotion, from the absence of its formal recognition and employability value, from the insufficient financing of volunteering opportunities and the inexistence of structured guidelines for their management and monitoring.

As a response to the above issues, **improvements** in terms of policy making would concern:

- The clarification, definition and **establishment** of volunteerism, of the roles of volunteers and of volunteering organizations;

- The establishment of a **legal framework** for voluntary work, so that it can be separated and distinguished from other forms of work (paid work, internships), with the main concern of protecting the volunteer from exploitation;

- The **increase of the value attribution** to volunteering experience and respective acquired skills, as well as the enhancement of its recognition and visibility when it comes to one's employment in the public sector;

- The **insurance** coverage of any health issues that may arise in people who offer voluntary work;

- The establishment of **official and structured guidelines** on the operation of voluntary organizations and on the management and monitoring of volunteering activities;

- The creation of a **control mechanism** that will be evaluating the compliance with the legal framework for the protection of beneficiaries and volunteers;

- The integration of volunteerism in the upbringing of children, by adding corresponding actions and courses to the **educational curriculum;**

- The increase of **investment on the amount and quality** of volunteering opportunities that are funded and provided by the **state** itself, and not just from European resources.

Last years' history has shown that **local authorities** across Greece have asked for voluntary help when issues concerning the whole social sphere arose, such us need of **socially vulnerable groups**, poverty, immigration, disability (Paralympics 2004) and natural disasters (Mati 2018). It is a fact that as times have become harsher in Greece, the **demand for humanitarian aid has increased**, as well as the **response** to it from Greek citizens. This connection between the demand and the response has been and is being bridged by the operation of NGOs that operate on a voluntary basis.  As mentioned before there is no legal framework for volunteering activity, what leads to the **incapability of the state to easily foster** such activities, directing it to synergies with NGOs and informal groups in order to deal with social issues. These synergies usually happen through funding which most often derives from **European funds and foundations**, rather than the state. It is a phenomenon in Greece that **local authorities are not that enabled in cooperating with voluntary organizations if there is not a widely spread issue, especially in large communities** such as Thessaloniki, where relationships between people are more impersonal; thing challenges their collective activation and involvement in voluntary activities. Therefore, there are only a few local authorities in Greece that are involved in volunteering activity on a regular basis (e.g. city cleanings, food provision and blood donations).

Local authorities are strong, independent democratic institutions of the state, which have to be next to the citizen. Volunteering is also an action of civil society to deal with a series of problems that the State alone is not able to cope with. Therefore, the **cooperation of the Local authorities with the voluntary movement** is an absolute necessity, which is worthy of further development. The existence of a **formal framework** through which the two can work together can bring them closer and strengthen their joint contribution to the well-being of citizens and to addressing issues of concern of the **local community.**

In Greece it is a common phenomenon that **employees** get only valued for the formal qualifications, something that makes voluntary work hold minimum to **zero value** for one's employability. This has to do with the initial issue of no official framework for volunteering activity, and thus **no official recognition**. Despite this fact, there seems to be a **contradiction** between what employers think of **competences acquired** through voluntary experiences and the actual skills that were acquired through them. The focus groups finding suggest that many volunteers that recognize that they obtain tools, experiences and build capacities. Volunteerism helped them grow as individuals, gain knowledge and skills. Also, volunteering organizations put effort on conducting team building activities, task related training and the training of volunteers on the topics that the organization deals with.

As a result, on the one hand we have the equipment of volunteers with tools that increase their competitiveness in the market, but on the other hand we have a lack of valuation from the employers' perspective. To bridge this gap, the government and local authorities should establish a **mechanism** which would **evaluate** the **competences** gained through voluntary activity, and give them **official accreditation**. Another way would be to assess voluntary organization's quality of work, and to grant them the ability to provide their volunteers with official accreditation.

The **Youth**pass **certificate** plays such a role, however it doesn't hold formal **recognition value,** neither seems to be taken in consideration by employers. The two main reasons are the **lack of awareness** of what YouthPass is, along with the fact that the competences that can be written on it **do not require evaluation;** which bring us back to the solution of an **official assessment mechanism.** Europass as well is not that **widespread,** as it seems more appropriate for enterprises and organizations working in European or international levels. The issue here appears to be the **lack of customization options** in the structure and format of CVs, which leaves small room for **creativity** in one's CV and Cover Letter.

## Italy

Volunteering is a **deeply rooted and widespread phenomenon** in Italy. It has a long tradition recognised by **legislation**. The law, in fact, recognises the **social value** and function of volunteering as an expression of **participation, solidarity and pluralism**. In Italy there are also various forms of non-organised volunteering, spontaneous and unpaid activities undertaken for the benefit of others.

Volunteering has developed historically through different cultural matrices: the main ones are the Catholic matrix, based on the concept of Christian pietas; the workers' and socialist matrix developed since the nineteenth century; and the liberal matrix.

The Italian **Constitution** provides an important stimulus for **social solidarity**. Articles 2 and 3 provide for the respect of the **fundamental duty of solidarity** and assign **responsibility** to the **community and public administrations.**

- *"Art. 2 The Republic recognises and guarantees the inviolable rights of man, both as an individual and in the social groups in which his personality takes place, and requires the fulfilment of the binding duties of political, economic and social solidarity."*

- *"Art. 3 (.....) It is the task of the Republic to remove economic and social obstacles which, by limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the country."*

It is also worth mentioning Article 18 that states '*Citizens have the right to associate freely*'.

In 1991 the first framework law on volunteering **(Law 266/1991)** was approved. The law has defined the legal profile of **voluntary organisations** and has regulated their relationship with **public institutions**, recognising the **social value and function** of volunteering as an expression of **participation, solidarity and pluralism**.

Art. 2, paragraph 1, clarifies: *"[...] voluntary activity means activity performed personally, spontaneously and free of charge, through the organisation of which the volunteer is a member, without any profit motive, even indirectly, and exclusively for the purpose of solidarity"*.

The Law 266/1991 has stablished the **principles and criteria** that regulate the **relationship between public agencies and volunteer organizations.** The different regions and autonomous provinces have followed these principles. The regional authorities have basically established similar regulations following the national law. The law did not directly focus on the **individual as a volunteer**, but rather essentially has addressed volunteering by defining volunteer activities and governing the work of volunteer organizations and their relationship with the national and local governments. The law has extended certain **protection** and rights to volunteers by imposing **duties** on the volunteer organizations, including a duty to **insure** members against **illness** and **third-party liability**, and it **distinguishes volunteering from employment** relationships.

Subsequently, after the repeal of the framework law on volunteering 266/91, Legislative Decree 117/2017 (known as the **Third Sector Code**) defined a volunteer as *"a person who, by his or her own free choice, carries out activities in favour of the community and the common good, including through a Third Sector entity, making available his or her time and skills to promote responses to the needs of the people and communities benefiting from his or her action, in a personal, spontaneous and free manner, without profit, not even indirectly, and exclusively for purposes of solidarity".*
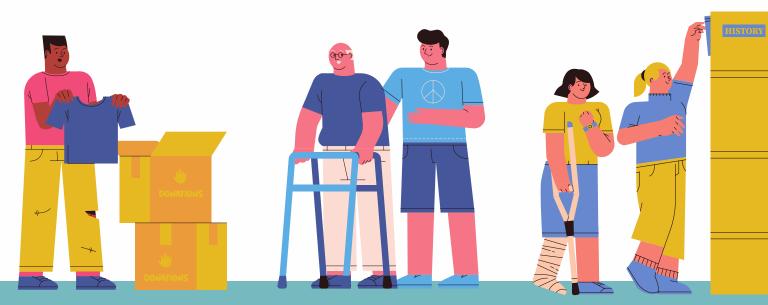
With this reform, the **volunteer acquires a legal status:** he\she is the person who, by his *own free choice*, carries out *activities in favour of the common good* and of the *community*, through a *third sector body*, making *available* his *time* and his own *ability* to promote *responses* to the *needs* of people and the community, in a *personal* way. *spontaneous and free*, exclusively for purposes of *solidarity.*

The Third Sector Code **protects** volunteers **from** possible **exploitation.** For example, volunteers must not work for the organisation in which they serve as a volunteer.

The law requires civil liability **insurance coverage** and comprehensive **medical** insurance.

In addition, volunteers cannot be paid, but may receive **reimbursement** for **expenses** actually incurred for their work within limits established in advance by the organisation.

The Third Sector Code requires to the public administrations to promote a **culture of volunteering** especially among **young people**, by organising **promotional initiatives** in schools, universities and elsewhere, involving voluntary organisations and other third sector bodies.

Today, non-profit organisations in Italy play a crucial role in providing **social services** and contributing to achieving **social policy goals.** As a consequence of the decentralisation of health and social services subjecting non-profit organisations to local authorities, as well as flowing from the recent increase in the number of services being contracted to these organisations by local authorities, some areas of **health and welfare** are heavily dependent on the non-profit sector. This also means that non-profit organisations very often find themselves making up for certain shortcomings, especially with regard to social services and **public utilities,** above all, with the worsening of the **COVID 19** pandemic, responding to a **real and concrete need** and on a totally voluntary basis managed an **emergency**, filling a **governmental gap.**

Despite the great mobilisation and the recognition of volunteer status, even now in Italy it is a common phenomenon that **employees** get valued for the formal qualifications, during the interview. This is because there is **no official framework** (especially at local level) **for recognising the skills** that come with volunteering experience. This situation is paradoxical, as more and more young people are trying to add more and more voluntary activities to their CVs in order to acquire new skills, which are very often not recognised. That being so, the framework of recognition of voluntary activities in Italy is a subject of debate, development and experimentation of practices.

The **Youthpass** is the main tool for the **recognition of competences** developed in youth work projects (and voluntary activities) in Italy. The National Agency (ANG) provides a specific activity of information, promotion and technical assistance on the use of Youthpass among young people who have participated in projects funded by Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. The Youthpass is also promoted as a useful tool for the recognition of University Training Credits (UTCs). However, there are still **no common national regulations or guidelines for Universities**, since the recognition of UTCs depends on the **individual Degree Courses** to which students present their Youthpass. But despite efforts, the certificate is not always recognised. Young people themselves do not know its meaning or **usefulness**.

In the light of this, it is crucial to ensure that it is **disseminated** through **governmental initiatives** and that it also begins to be applied to other **non-formal education** pathways, such as **community service.**

# Poland

The last thirty years have seen a **fundamental reappraisal of social policy** resulting in the **emergence** of a **new role** for **voluntary groups** in Poland, recognizing the **value of volunteer time** and the **benefits to individuals** of volunteering.

The **Government should has led a number of initiatives to increase** the level of volunteering.

In each type of founds (EU, government, local government), it is recommended that **administrative costs were as low as possible.** This costs are largely the costs of salaries, taxes, social security etc.

In the Polish reality, where there is a **shortage of employees on the labor market,** non-for-profit organizations have **great difficulty in recruiting employees with high competences and managerial skills.**

In order to develop long-term volunteering directed at volunteers from the local community for the benefit of this community, **qualified people are needed who will be involved in the recruitment of volunteers.** When seriously thinking about developing youth volunteering, organizations must take this topic seriously - **mapping the needs** of volunteers, **developing a strategy** for its development, **supporting the competences** of volunteers, and when it is necessary to **provide support** to a volunteer.

Unfortunately, in Polish conditions, usually the **project manager** is "doing everything", including "volunteering coordination" .

In Poland, a lot is said about volunteering and its development, but **no visible activities** are undertaken that could facilitate the process of implementing volunteering in youth organisations. There are **no key national policies/programmes** that stimulate volunteering directly.

However there are **programmes** that play important role in creating volunteering policy:

**SOLIDARITY CORPS - Programme for Support and Development of Long-Term Volunteering (2018-2030)**
The Corps in particular aim at *raising the profile of volunteer activities, stimulating interest in volunteer work and encouraging citizens to engage in volunteering.* Launching Solidarity Corps also *promotes volunteering among those NGOs and public institutions that have made little or only occasional use of volunteer activities so far*. One of the main ideas behind the Programme is to *support long-lasting and long-term relationships between volunteers and hosting organisations.*

**Strategy for volunteering**
A nationwide programme run independently by the Volunteer Centres Network. Its main objective is to *support volunteering initiatives across Poland*, such as establishing local or regional centres for volunteering, providing training for people who manage volunteer centres, facilitating exchange of experiences etc.

**Internal strategies of volunteer organisations**
Internal Strategies focuses on *engaging volunteers and enabling them to reach their goals and on providing the supports for local needs, specific partners, and affiliate staff who work closely with volunteers.*

## 🇪🇸 Spain

The concept of volunteerism has been recording a **gradual increase of interest** in Spain, and it has been involved within the **legal framework** in the country's constitution itself. La **Constitución Española** de 1978 (The Spanish Constitution) mentions that *"public authorities will promote conditions for the free and effective participation of youth in the political, social, economic and cultural development"* in its article 48.

On a **national survey** that was done on solidarity attitudes in Spain (CIS, 2001 cited in Association of Voluntary Service Organisations AVSO and European Volunteer Centre CEV, 2005), **74%** of the Spanish population believes that engaging in volunteering activities displays that a **person** has **interest in social concerns.**

For its **national youth strategy vision** of 2020, the country has included six actions, which involve different aspects of **community service,** some of which include but are not limited to participation, voluntary work, inclusion and equality.

Starting from 2015, there has been a law that specifically mentions what institutions can become **targets for volunteers**, such as companies, universities and/or Public Administrations. Through the law, the country recognizes the different scopes of volunteering, and it is technically the tool through which it regulates the **collaboration between the volunteer and the volunteering entity.**

The law also specifies some of its rules and regulations, such as:

- *The regulation to have the volunteer's right to be protected under the law*
- *The minimum age of the volunteer (12),*
- *The scope through which the volunteer could work in (e.g. social, environmental, cultural, international cooperation, leisure time, and more)*
- *A set of agreements between the companies, private institutions and any potential entities.*

Since 1986, Spain has also developed a **platform that promotes volunteerism** (Plataforma para la promoción del voluntariado), and later on, the Spanish Volunteer Association (Asociación española de voluntariado), which are only some of the **organisations that promote volunteerism on a national level.**

There are a number of points of **improvements** that can be applied with the support of policy makers, at EU and local levels, to be better implemented or spread.

Some of these improvement points can include but are not limited to the following:

There is room for improvement for more **targeted awareness campaigns, explaining the benefits of volunteering to different age groups.** For instance, if a young person has volunteered from an early age or has observed that practice in their everyday life, they will likely value the importance of giving back to the community, and leverage volunteer opportunities in their local level.

Later on, once becoming an adult, and able to travel in or outside their community, many of these youth understand and become beneficiaries of such programs and volunteering initiatives. For that reason, awareness campaign can not only target the typical age groups that are eligible for applying for volunteering opportunities and programs in or outside their country (mainly 18-30), these campaigns can also target schoolchildren, above the age of 12, incorporating them into the children's everyday learning, as they gain not only academic but also social skills during their time, spent at school.

Volunteering opportunities are often marketed for experiencing life abroad, in another European country, while **local volunteering opportunities** similarly offer a wide array of benefits that can be even clearer, when **promoting community service** among young people, eligible to become involved in such opportunities. Here, the **cooperation between public and private entities**, offering a certain number of benefits to the volunteers in a local context can promote even more involvement by the youth themselves.

According to Spain's National Report, as part of Study on Volunteering in the European Union it is believed that **volunteering increases the chances for "unemployed people to find a job"** and **"higher earning potential"** as they would develop **new skills** through their volunteer experience. This can also result in **new job creations, new businesses,** and will **contribute to local and regional development**.

## 🇬🇧 UK

There is no statutory definition for volunteering in the UK, however there is a definition of volunteer in the **1997 Police Act**, volunteer means a *"person engaged in an activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travel and other approved out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit some third party other than or in addition to a close relative".*

More recently the **Volunteering Compact on Relations** between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England 2 Code of Good Practice, defines volunteering as *"an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or addition to) close relatives" (Home Office, 2005, p.4).*

That allows enhancing community links and at the same time helping people in the need. In the UK like everywhere volunteering is made up from different ranges of social background. There is a large opportunity to help community, whether at school, in the community or refugee centres across the UK. Volunteer placements are generally flexible, and you can give as much or as little time as you want to volunteer. Most of time it lasts one year but it is flexible as you can realise a short-term project.

However, there is also a slightly different definition of volunteering between England, Scotland, and Wales which they are also responsible for their own policies.

According to the "Study on Volunteering in the European Union – Final Report" (2010), in the UK **over 40%** of adults is involved in carrying out voluntary activities. In the last years, the interest of the government in volunteering has developed and, also volunteers became deeply involved in many aspects of welfare state.
There is no one single national strategy for volunteering in the UK and each administration is responsible for developing its approach to volunteering.

In the UK volunteering is **free and open to everyone**; there is no age limit of participation in volunteering, however, insurance policies of some organisations do not include if the volunteer is under 16 or older than a certain age (usually 80 years). Moreover, in the UK people are not allowed to volunteer/work for a profit-oriented organisation if their age is under 14.

A volunteering opportunity for young people aged 15-17 is the National Citizen Service (NCS). This program runs in the spring, summer and autumn and young volunteers have the opportunity to spend a short time away from home and take part in a team project to help their community.

Volunteers in the UK do not have a contract of employment. Volunteers usually receive a **volunteer agreement** where is explained the level of supervision, support and training they will get, insurance and health and safety issues and the expenses the organisation will cover. The volunteer agreement is not compulsory, but sets out what volunteers can expect from the organisation they are volunteering for and it is not a contract between the volunteer and the organisation.

Statistics show that people from 65-74 years old are more likely to volunteer compared to young people. It has emerged that 29% of 65-74 year old's voluneer once a month, with 42% volunteering once a year. Statistics also show that the least likely group to volunteer are 25-34 year old's. Findings demonstrate also that people who do not work are more likely to volunteer regularly because of their free time. Women are found to be more likely to have taken part in regular volunteering than men, with 41% having volunteered monthly at some stage, compared to 36% of men.

In the UK volunteers hold decision making roles, for instance they are part of the board in organisation, and they can support it with their personal knowledge and experience. Indeed, giving more responsibility and decision-making roles to volunteers is a way to empower them and to increase their self-esteem.

Although there are strong messages in the UK concerning the cultural and social benefits of volunteering, particularly in terms of social inclusion, current research shows that those deemed at risk of social inclusion are less likely to volunteer. Despite this, the UK remains a country where volunteering is strongly recognised for personal improvement and to help others.

Volunteering is strongly established in Britain as the country continues to have one of the **highest rates** in the world and remains a key element to promote social participation and active citizenship, especially among young people. A recent survey shows that in 2018/19, nearly 19 million people (36%) volunteered with a group, club, or organisation at least once in the year and over 11.9 million (22%) volunteered regularly (at least once a month). 52% people also took part in informal volunteering (unpaid help to someone who is not a relative) activities at least once in the year and 26% volunteered regularly.

Some concerns were raised that there is no consistency to volunteering at the **EU level.** Rather than developing a strategy for volunteering at EU level, it was suggested that more debate across Europe at national level about policies and strategies for volunteering is required. There is a view that the European Year of Volunteering will be a good opportunity to identify issues around diversity in volunteering and to highlight and celebrate the differences between what some local communities believe to be culture, tradition, history, and what others believe to be volunteering across Member States. At EU level it is important European policies and strategies do not have unintended consequences for volunteering. The issue here relates to the need for a joined-up approach to volunteering across the EU.

In 2000, the UK Prime Minister pledged that **employers** should be encouraged to release staff for 1 day a year to undertake volunteering activity. Many and varied programmes are being set up to assist employees to volunteer, whether during work hours or in their own time, most commonly known as Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV). In addition, the government is also introducing a range of initiatives to boost skills in the workplace, namely that of the Graduate Talent Pool initiative to help employers create and offer graduate internships voluntary opportunities. This initiative is reported as being particularly important for both employers and individuals during the economic downtown by providing opportunities for graduates to improve their employability through volunteering.

 The **recognition of volunteer's skills and competences** within the education system is implicit within the education and training systems across the UK. This is largely reflected in the arrangements for the accreditation and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Linked to the recognition of skills and competences within the national education system, a number of awarding bodies offer accredited qualifications relating to volunteering. These qualifications are on the Qualification and Credit Framework (these can be viewed in more detail from the national database of accredited qualifications). In recent years award ceremonies have been used as an important approach to recognise the contribution volunteers have made and the skills they have developed.

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# 2

# National voluntary activities ; gaps and improvements identified

# 🇬🇷 Greece

Starting from European Union, which is where the main source of regular funding for volunteering activities in Greece, there could be **better monitoring** of the quality of the projects that are approved. Cases where individuals are not living up to their responsibilities as volunteers are not that rare, however, due to the poor monitoring, organizations do not always encourage them and support them to become activated. Role in this behavior plays also the fact that European funds are the only source of sustainability, meaning that if an organization shows traits of poor work, it will risk its future funding for other programs. There are also cases were organizations have volunteers do work that corresponds to paid-work standards, thing that results in their exploitation. In regards to these issues, a more **frequent and trust-based communication** should be persuaded **between European bodies responsible for financing and bodies that receive it.** Moreover, organizations should not be punished for mistakes in their program's management, but rather be provided with suggestions and tools and how to improve.

Beneficiaries of these funds are also the **local communities** that the organizations are working with, also the main beneficiaries of local authorities. Thus, having these two sharing a common target group, there should be a configuration of **common goals** and a striving towards them. Here, there seems to be a lack of interest from the authorities' side, since usually they do not support or disseminate activities coming from voluntary organizations. The influence that the local authorities can have on the community and their disseminating capacities can be a good solution for another problem organizations commonly encounter, which is the lack of engagement of local participants in their activities.

Local young **candidates** for volunteering are easy to reach, but hard **to keep engaged** in. Each organization working with youth has to rely on their own local networking and reach on social media in order to find human resources. Having the local authorities having a tighter synergy with organizations could also result in the creation of a **local pool of volunteers** that will be managed by local authorities, and that would support organization in their activities. This would give citizens a more realistic view of volunteering, which would also contribute to the resolution of another issue that might repel them from engaging with it. This issue is the public opinion that NGOs are often facing in Greece, which is that they are only working with refugees, that they are corrupt and that they are part of a plan that wants Greece exploited by other more powerful nations.

Judging from young people's approach to life, regardless of volunteering background, there is an apparent focus on the **building** of their **competences**. In the focus groups, the youngsters that haven't volunteered, said that they chose to do so because they want to use their time for studying, while the ones that have want to have a learning experience where they will build skills.

As a result, more focus should be given in the capacity of volunteering opportunities for fostering people's development, as well as in the dissemination of this capacity. It is a fact that often young people are not aware of such opportunities, and even if they are they tend to not focus at the benefits and to be afraid of the commitment. In order to make these opportunities more beneficial for them, they have to be **better promoted**, **more skill-building focused** and more **supportive**, especially when it comes to hesitant or discouraged youngsters.

One of the main issues with involving young people with **fewer opportunities** is the **reach difficulty.** Usually, groups as such don't have access to digital means where voluntary projects are promoted or do not feel motivated to move away from their group in which they find comfort and protection. The increase of digitalization increases the accessibility of people in technology; however, until everyone can have access to it, people that lack this benefit will be aware of less and less opportunities. This leads to the need for the **spreading** of voluntary projects through the word of mouth and through face-to-face interactions with vulnerable groups.

The next step after including them, would be the provision of a favourable environment for their **safety and integration.** This can be achieved with trainings that the staff and rest of the volunteers would undertake, in order to create a welcoming and accepting environment.

Lastly, financial support for voluntary projects is required in order to deal with issues that disadvantaged youngsters might face. It is found necessary among European Solidarity Corps projects that **extra funds** are dedicated in the support of the inclusion of such youngsters, in order to better support their experience. This strategy seems to work well, since these funds are usually used for mentoring and psychological support, things that are effective when it comes to dealing with people that face discrimination, have a refugee background, health problems or limited social skills.

## **Italy**

The support that youth organizations expect from **European Union** is **greater transparency** and above all **clearer and more timely communication.**

By the **local policy makers**, we expect **measures to promote** volunteering, including the provision by the state of **technical assistance, training programmes, information services and campaigns to raise awareness** of volunteering in schools (secondary and high schools), universities and youth centres.

The governments must set **clear policies and goals**, which will help **determine the type of volunteering** they want to regulate. **Local traditions** of volunteering must also be considered. Otherwise, laws might discourage spontaneous initiatives, burden on small organizations, and have a deterrent effect on the general culture of volunteering by giving advantages to one form of volunteering over others.

In order to ensure that the legislative initiatives address **real needs** of the volunteer community, governments should make certain that **all stakeholders** are **properly consulted** and their **comments** are **regarded in** the **draft provisions.**

Finally, all governments should **recognize volunteering as an initiative of citizens**, based on their **free** will, to take action in the **community** in order to **alleviate problems** and contribute to the achievement of **social and humanitarian goals**.

This activism has been and must continue to be appreciated, cultivated, and facilitated through **state policies**, so that formal and informal volunteer initiatives can flourish and help create a better society for all.

Existing volunteering activities and projects can be **more beneficial for young people** in the following ways:

- *By building their skills on various sectors but mostly in the digital sector, as it's one of the most important ones in today's professional world;*

- *By reinforcing communication between volunteers and other volunteers as well as other associations, so as to better understand the various levels of social work and diversity in voluntary projects;*

- *By realizing training activities on various topics of actuality (politics, media literacy, leaderships etc.);*

- *By reinforcing the role of a mentor, who is there to aid volunteers and help them throughout the projects;*

- *By reinforcing communication between coordinators, centers and volunteers;*

- *By including some professional orientation and guidance, even in the form of activities;*

- *By connecting the activities to the real professional world (for example activities such as meetings, reports etc.), so as to better insert volunteers in the professional world.*

To foster the participation of young people with **fewer opportunities** at risk of social exclusion, voluntary projects can be **more inclusive** in the following ways:

- *By providing financial support from beginning to end of activities;*

- *By focusing on areas with high population in risk of social exclusion, so as to be accessible to youngsters with fewer opportunities;*

- *By providing more linguistic training and support/tutoring on various subjects, so as to aid young people with educational voids/ difficulties;*

- *By having more seminars and better network building between volunteers and associations, so as to build a sense of inclusion and unity;*

- *By reinforcing the role of mentors and the concept of mentoring so as to aid youngsters with practical difficulties they might face;*

- *By realizing more "scouting" events, focused around topics that are interesting to target group (competitions, games) so as to include young people;*

- *By providing materials and access to internet, when necessary in order to facilitate the participation of young people with less opportunities in activities;*

- *By recruiting more educators/trainers of different cultural/social backgrounds, so as to build a holistic and more effective approach to the activities;*

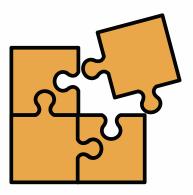- *By reinforcing the role of peer educators and embracing the concept of peer education;*

# Poland

Over the nearly thirty years, after Communist regime collapsed, Polish society has been **implemented a number of programs, and accumulate a lot of valuable experience.** Barriers and deficits hindering the path to full "citizenship" of Poles were also defined. One of the significant diagnosed problems is the still **low level of involvement of Poles in volunteering compared to most Western countries.**

According to reports on voluntary activities in Poland and practitioners experience in the field below a few main **barriers** are presented

- Raising the **competences of volunteer organizers.**

- Among the **organizers of volunteering,** there is a **noticeable low level of awareness, low knowledge and lack of skills in the field of volunteering management.**

- In cooperation with a volunteer, several basic stages can be mentioned: recruitment, adaptation, motivating, training, management of work results, termination of cooperation or entrusting a new function in the organization. **Improper coordination** of activities at any of the above-mentioned stages has negative consequences for both the volunteer organizer and the volunteer. This situation may lead to **inappropriate use** of the volunteer's individual competences, lower motivation to act, premature departure, and in extreme cases discouragement from social activity. A volunteer invited to cooperate should become an **active participant** in the activities carried out, **a member of the team** who has an **impact on the decisions** made. Volunteering is not only about spending time usefully for others, but also about gaining **new skills, knowledge and experience.** Volunteering understood in this way is **a source of satisfaction and development.**

- Raising the **knowledge about volunteering**

- Little knowledge about the **idea of volunteering, wrong perception of volunteers' activities, often identified only with emotionally demanding service for sick or elderly.**

- The **publicity** about volunteering requires **systematic and effective image-building activities** to create a **positive change in the perception** of volunteering. There is a **lack** of publicly and **available information** regarding what **support** people with **different abilities** require to volunteer. **The image of volunteering often deters younger people from donating their time.**

- Raising the **public awareness**

- **Public recognition** of volunteer work will make citizens more aware of the **vital role** volunteers play in the society and of the **critical need to ensure the constant availability of qualified and dedicated** volunteers. A society which supports and encourages **different forms** of volunteering is likely to be a society which also promotes the **well-being** of its citizens.

- Although the work of the voluntary sector is growing **the number of people volunteering is not increasing at a comparable rate.**

## 🇪🇸 Spain

The idea of **community service** is more popular among young people in the country, similar to other European states. This is naturally connected to the concept of promoting volunteering programmes, such as European Solidarity Corps (formerly European Voluntary Service), Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, and other similar initiatives, which promote both local and international volunteering opportunities that open many doors for young people to get to know Europe and beyond, through a variety of **cultural and socio-economic scopes.**

**Sende,** as a Spanish organisation, has hosted various events and individuals in its space, promoting **local economic development**, when cooperating with the local vendors, shops, transportation services and other stakeholders, while reviving a village of 20 people in a tiny village in Northern Galicia. Aside from the local development, Sende is also a space that brings people together from different nationalities, backgrounds, interests, ages, and professions.

This has provided the organization with the opportunity to leverage and crystalize its commitment into bringing a **social change**, and promoting **collaboration between youth from different backgrounds**, while also making the commitment to **revive a rural area** that might have been neglected with its potential in the past by others. 80% of the things we buy comes from a local shop, 2 restaurants, and 3 nearby bakeries. Sende cooperates and provides jobs to locals.

Two of these programmes connected to the young people participation on a **longer term** is **hosting Erasmus+ international trainings, European Voluntary Service volunteers as well as participants from Erasmus for young entrepreneurs programme.**

The founders, being beneficiaries of Erasmus programmes in the past, recognize the immense value and change these initiatives bring into young people's lives. The organisation has hosted volunteers through European Voluntary Service, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs and other youth through different programmes from Turkey, Armenia, Poland, and many other countries.

One area of support the organisation would potentially expect from the European Union and local policy makers in order to run successful and quality voluntary activities would be to create a differentiation between the organisations that are hosting such activities. Sende, in itself is **more than a youth organisation**: it is **a hub for digital nomads, a social enterprise, promoting rural development and local economic growth**. Therefore, the legal frameworks, differentiating the types of organisations creating opportunities for young people across the country and Europe, would promote even more interest towards the idea of **social entrepreneurship**, creating opportunities for youth to engage in such activities, whichever background they represent (including in marginalized youth).

The current voluntary activities and projects can be more beneficial for young people, if they are given more **incentive** towards participation in these initiatives. They need the platform and the opportunity to become more aware of the immense benefits of volunteering, that promote **social and human empathy in the first place**, and contribute to **their own personal and professional growth** in the second place.
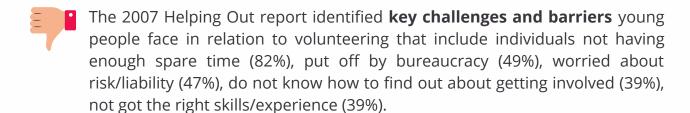
Sende is an organiser of different international trainings for youth of different backgrounds and ages. The organisation is particularly specialized in conflict transformation, peacebuilding and social entrepreneurship. The organisation collaborates with other youth organisations, coworking /and coliving spaces/ across Spain and Europe. In partnership with professional educators we host participants from all over the world, from Cameroon, all the way to Colombia to attend our programs.

Therefore, such initiatives often promote dialogue and brainstorming for new ideas. Nonetheless, if youth are more clearly explained and promoted the idea of firstly visiting and later receiving support to promote the implementation of such activities i**n their hometowns, and villages,** they will be even more incentified in volunteering and learning from the experience of others to apply it in their own context and developing their own communities through their own initiative.



Voluntary initiatives often struggle with identifying and reaching out to different stakeholders and beneficiaries, as many times, **the same young people** will be incentified to continuously benefit from the different initiatives of the same organisation. Which is why the issue of **youth with fewer opportunities** at risk of social exclusion need to be more targeted and approached with certain strategies. For instance, limiting the opportunity for the same youngster, and instead **partnering with organisations with different initiatives,** where marginalized young people are the center of the attention, will make them even more motivated to explore their options. The organisations can seek to constantly reach out to new partner organisations to cooperate with, and bring youth from less experienced backgrounds to these training sessions, they will see a real difference created in an even bigger number of youngsters' lives.
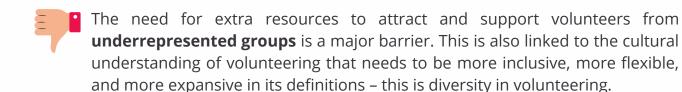
## 🇬🇧 UK

👎 The 2007 Helping Out report identified **key challenges and barriers** young people face in relation to volunteering that include individuals not having enough spare time (82%), put off by bureaucracy (49%), worried about risk/liability (47%), do not know how to find out about getting involved (39%), not got the right skills/experience (39%).

👎 Similarly, research undertaken for the Russell Commission identified a range of barriers to young people's volunteering. These barriers include competing demands on young people's time; negative peer pressure; young people's lack of access to appropriate information on volunteering; voluntary organisations' failure to reach out to young people and to offer them appropriate opportunities; administrative issues affecting voluntary organisations, including legislation, insurance and regulation, benefit arrangements which deter unemployed young people from volunteering, and specific barriers to disabled young people's involvement. Research carried out for v into factors preventing young people from volunteering identified lack of time as the main obstacle, followed by lack of information about how to get involved, and young people feeling that they did not have anything to offer. Transport was also identified as barriers to involvement.

The research findings point to volunteering becoming **more professionalised** with increasingly formalised structures involving, for example, selection, appraisal, and training.

👎 A challenge highlighted by Stanley et al (2004) is linked to that of **image.** The research suggests the term „volunteering" causes some groups to disassociate themselves from voluntary activities which they might otherwise engage in. This finding was supported by Gaskin (1998) reporting a survey in which two-thirds of young people interviewed said "volunteering" was not something people in their age group would do. Amongst other barriers to their participation peer pressure was cited and two-thirds of those interviewed said volunteering would be "uncool". To address this image problem programmes, need a brand that young people can identify with and aspire to is necessary.

The need for extra resources to attract and support volunteers from **underrepresented groups** is a major barrier. This is also linked to the cultural understanding of volunteering that needs to be more inclusive, more flexible, and more expansive in its definitions – this is diversity in volunteering.
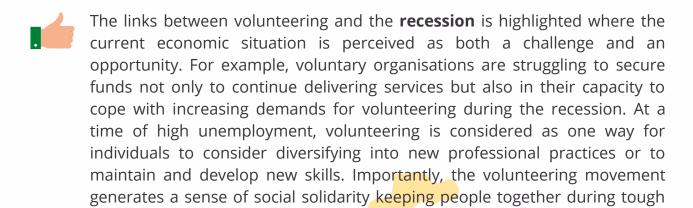
Some concerns have been raised about the policy assumptions underlying volunteering and how volunteering has been used to address **policy needs**. The concern being that it runs the risk of generating a distinction between those that do and do not volunteer. It is unhelpful and over-simplistic to equate volunteering with good citizenship and nonvolunteering with poor citizenship. Volunteering can be an expression of citizenship and contribute to activities and qualities associated with citizenship, but many people make an equally valuable contribution to society in many other ways.

A barrier to an effective volunteering **infrastructure** is reported to be a shortage of resources. The research suggests organisations lack the funds to provide management and support systems at an optimal level. Government funding of volunteer programmes is criticised for a number of aspects, including limitation in planning, continuity and consultation. While benefits of government programmes and initiatives to promote volunteering are acknowledged, there are a number of deficits. These focus on the lack of synergy between volunteering programmes and policies, and programmes and policies in other areas, including legislative barriers such as benefits rules, CRB checks, and health and safety laws.

The introduction of the Compact and Volunteering Code of Practice was generally welcomed however the research evidence suggests implementation and applicability has been limited. As the Compact is not legally concerns have been raised that it inherently lacked authority to ensure compliance.

The need for a **national agenda** (though not described or required in the form of a national strategy) for volunteering was considered important. This links to concerns that at both UK and EU level, volunteering is widely dispersed across a broad range of policy areas.

The issue of more research (particularly in relation to diversity and the economic value of volunteering) together with a consistent approach to data collection at national level were raised and highlighted as **key opportunities** for volunteering.

The links between volunteering and the **recession** is highlighted where the current economic situation is perceived as both a challenge and an opportunity. For example, voluntary organisations are struggling to secure funds not only to continue delivering services but also in their capacity to cope with increasing demands for volunteering during the recession. At a time of high unemployment, volunteering is considered as one way for individuals to consider diversifying into new professional practices or to maintain and develop new skills. Importantly, the volunteering movement generates a sense of social solidarity keeping people together during tough times, rather than society collapsing.

**Benefits** of volunteering need to be more widely promoted. Easier access routes, the removal of barriers, more promotion of opportunities, and highlighting the positives that can result from volunteering would enable more people to make an informed choice and to engage with voluntary work.

A **key opportunity** for volunteering is the strength of marketing, raising awareness and promoting positive images relating to volunteering. This is linked to the increasingly important need to channel practice towards policy makers. The benefits for individuals, organisations and communities need to be publicised and celebrated. Advantages for different groups, such as young people, unemployed people, or employees, should be more actively promoted.

# Conclusions & Recommendations

The aim of this report is to present an overview of the national policies and national voluntary activities in the UK, Greece, Spain, Italy and Poland, based on gaps identified throughout the V4V project.
The Policy Recommendation Report underlines the differences and similarities among partner countries and underlines also the diverse cultural understanding of volunteering in different parts of Europe and that most of the times needs to be more inclusive in its definitions.

**Volunteering** is an important expression of active citizenship; it builds social capital, contributes to social cohesion and solidarity, provides valuable economic benefits to society and enables individuals to realise their potential. Volunteering "refers to all types of voluntary activities which are undertaken of a person's own free will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain". In view of the current crisis in Europe, demographic change and related challenges, it is important to recognise the key role volunteering plays for individuals as a facilitator for inclusion, empowerment, skills building and networking. However, volunteering needs to be clearly distinguished from paid employment and should by no means replace it.

In each of the above partner countries several challenges have been identified, both for volunteers and for organisations supporting volunteers. Based on the challenges identified, the partnership has defined some recommendations for policy makers, local and national institutions.

## Recommendations

Partners have worked together in order to develop policy recommendations based on their findings.

- **More promotion** on the volunteering opportunities. Young people should be informed about the local and international opportunities, as well as on the support that they can get. Volunteering should be promoted as an essential social activity that adds value to society.
- Recommend to member state governments to **raise awareness** of volunteering in education systems
- Creation of an **official document** that recognises the skills acquired by volunteers, as well as the recognition of informal and non-formal learning. The Youthpass certificate plays such a role at European level but it does not hold formal recognition.
- Adopt a **common** approach to **volunteering legislation**. A single legislation at the European level could be of help for the many young people looking for opportunities (both local and European) and also for the countries, which would finally have a common framework to refer to. In light of this, there seems to be a need for European policies to enhance and disseminate volunteering opportunities in order to make it accessible to all.
- **More funding** and infrastructure for volunteering in order to support those from fewer opportunities.
- Ensure that rights and responsibilities of volunteers are recognised and respected and that volunteers themselves are aware of them.

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# #V4VOLUNTEERS

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union