

## European Voluntary Service Future Search Conference

Enhanced Perspectives for  
Transnational Volunteering for Youth

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### A summary of findings and recommendations



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## Value of volunteering & based on the needs of young people

It is important that the **value and possibilities for volunteering**, including the learning opportunity it provides, **are promoted amongst youth** and **supported at all levels**. It is imperative to involve young people (with their needs and interests) in shaping the transnational volunteering opportunities.

Transnational volunteering can be a **bridge for principles and cooperation within society**, attracting commitment, sponsorship, and involvement from other sectors precisely due to those shared values in the volunteering activity. A clearer common understanding is needed of **what is volunteering & why the EU needs it**: What is the essence of volunteering? What makes it meaningful to young people?

The volunteering experience is supported by organisations that help young people to find their voices; empowering them to realise their motivation; encouraging their **passions delivered through their own initiatives**, while ensuring the placement is developed around the needs and interests of the young person. The **young people's voice needs to be heard**, in a continuous reflection with support organisations, for them to positively influence their placement and have **ownership over the learning path**. **Mentoring must be individualised** throughout the whole process, to determine the appropriate approach and support structures needed for the individual volunteer, before, during and after their international experience.

"I want to make something, to BE the difference. People that volunteer inspire me, I like the atmosphere there. I don't want to sit on the sofa, I want to be more powerful." (Anna Grund, age 18, volunteer)

**Promotion and visibility** of the opportunities should be improved and receive more funding. Information on volunteering opportunities for youth should be **youth friendly and digitally smart** to reach a larger number, especially those who would need **more support to engage**. The offer should be **'packaged'** to include other benefits such as: what they will get out of the (cost-free) experience; offering time and space for exploring their identity; learning at the same time of going abroad; getting new ideas and enhancing the sense of belonging in a local community. Change is needed in the way we communicate and promote volunteering: we must build honest, clever, enthusiastic communication strategies using mostly **social media channels**. The **EVS brand name** has been developed for 20 years and is now recognised by many in the field – do not lose it!



MY TEACHER ENCOURAGED US TO VOLUNTEER 15 H/WEEK.

The initial contact with the concept of volunteering should **start early to promote the culture of volunteering** with communication towards schools (primary, secondary etc) as well as other institutions (youth clubs, local municipalities etc). Transparent information to all would increase the **equity of access to opportunity** as the children grow. Volunteering from an early age is recommended by the EU; the **third sector and statutory sector must cooperate** to deliver this together. Dedicated budgets must be provided to develop tools and **use the experienced stakeholders** (organisations, alumni etc) to promote the opportunity to peers. **Support structures should be put in place on regional/local level** to reach potential organisations active on a local level, to keep them interested, and help them make the first steps. **Bridges** should be made between transnational volunteering schemes and other volunteering schemes, and with research. **Dissemination of results** and sharing of experiences must be mandatory. Current volunteers should be **provided with tools** to spread the word in 'normal life' after EVS.

## Skills, Competences, Learning, Recognition, Employability

Transnational volunteering has an impact on the local community, and it is **also a learning process**, for the volunteer and for others. The benefits of volunteering, including competence development, must be **recognised** more widely.

The volunteer's awareness of their **competence development** must be **supported pedagogically** throughout their non-formal learning experience by a professional who has been trained specifically to do that job, who promotes the learning and development of the young person and is motivated, supported and remunerated to do so.

Volunteering placements also provide learning for **other stakeholders** who are active in the supportive net behind the individual volunteer, and this must **be more strongly recognised and reinforced through the whole programme structure**, including an improved training system for support staff. **Clear roles and the required competences of the people involved** must be defined to support young people, and should be equal in practice in all programme countries.



There should be a **flexible framework to develop emerging skills needed for the future** through training and online tools. Soft skills and life skills are becoming **more demanded by employers**, and volunteering can link directly to the development of those.

Volunteering programmes should adjust their approach to **include evolving competences**, such as emotional intelligence, flexibility, curiosity, resilience, critical thinking. These are key assets that young people will need to be future-proofed in a changing world, and are not always covered through formal education.

**A culture of recognition of volunteering is required in Europe.** The value of volunteering and the competences it can develop should be recognised and validated by a wider network of employers, formal education structures and other stakeholders. This could be done through connection of the fields, such as Services Learning or transferable study points gained through the volunteering placement that can be used for other further education paths of the young person.

**Recognition and validation tools** (such as Youthpass and Open Learning Badges) should be **updated technically and improved** to make them easier for volunteers to use. This could be done in the form of an App. They should be more flexible for the diversity of placements and variety of competences learned.

Becoming more professional and gaining job skills shouldn't be the key purpose of volunteering, although the **competences gained can very much support young people in their next steps**. **'What Next' training for volunteers** could bridge the gap between the volunteering experience and the interests/needs of young people for their next steps in life – whether that be further education (formal or non-formal), training or employment. The network of support behind transnational volunteering could **cooperate more strategically to link to other sectors** to support the development pathway of young people.

“Different youth actions are incredibly valuable. You can show your initiative, your ability to take risks, your team work. In sometimes uncomfortable environments you can use humour... These experiences are what you need [for things like] entrepreneurship, venture capital - whatever interesting things you want to do with your life.”  
Mailis Reps, Estonian Minister of Education and Research

## Flexibility in formats

**Flexibility in formats** of volunteering (long-term, short-term, individual and team, online, free time volunteering, mixed in terms of local and international, etc) **increase volunteering popularity** amongst youngsters and facilitate their active participation.

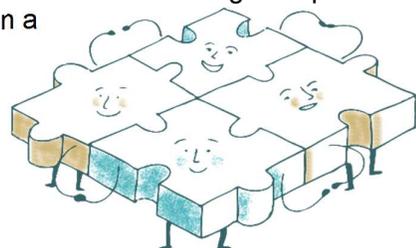
Having a rigid and formal structure for a voluntary approach, which clashes with its own malleability as a tool, is **outdated for today's youth in a changing world**. The concept of commitment is evolving and young people are demanding more flexible and diverse possibilities. Mobility is part of volunteering, but not always, not for everyone. Young people's commitment is often to the passion or the theme, and not to one specific placement. This could be realised through combinations of approaches, such as linking **local, national and transnational** volunteering schemes in various permutations according to need and interest. **Youth coaches could be used as the linking bridges** between the available opportunities and the youngsters. Projects could be designed to fit **specific profiles** of young people, with more flexibility within the format to answer the needs of youth. There could be a **differentiation between placements** that need a specific skill set, and those that are more universal.

Prioritising **shorter term projects** such as work camps will support the build-up of critical mass and quantity that new programmes desire. These must however link with a broader range of transnational volunteering opportunities to provide a **fuller, more flexible, option** for the diverse needs of young people.

To increase popularity in these programmes, we should be open to innovation. **Digital volunteering** can be complementary with local youth work, as a way to stay active in a part-time approach, and may or may not include physical or mobility placements. We should **move away from specific vocabulary that decision makers want to hear**; this requires simplifying the expressions used, not always requiring the English language, simplifying the application process etc. The offers should be more fluid, allowing **transfer between the sectors** of volunteering, vocational training, formal education (eg. Youth centre for 2 days, internship 3 days).

**Criteria for the structure of volunteering** could be enlarged to include: 2 year placements; global placements; family volunteering; intergenerational volunteering; an increased age range (15-35?) supported by two programme strands of youth and adult; informal groups could host short term volunteering. For ESC, there should be the **option of participating** in all solidarity branches at least once, allowing personal development within progressive roles (eg. as a volunteer, a trainee, an employee, a project manager, a team leader).

A broader scope of **sectors must be linked** through transnational volunteering to improve sustainability, share practice and increase efficiencies within a flexible framework. Using the existing volunteering network could be done by: 'borrowing' volunteers to neighbouring organisations for a few days/activities to find out how it could work; mixing between themed placements; a group of organisations managing a group of placements between them; linking EVS with work-camps in a local community.



Complimentary funding streams that have existed in previous programmes (Future Capital, Youth Initiatives) and that currently exist (Strategic EVS) add value to any transnational voluntary experience. They allow young people to convert the competences gained into tangible activity, enhancing their entrepreneurship, their management skills and helping them own the visibility of their project. **Longer term follow-up projects** such as these should be implemented to support the next steps of volunteers.

## Meaningful experiences meeting communities' needs

The EU funded transnational volunteering opportunities should aim to **connect** the **youngsters** interest, learning aspirations and potential with the **needs of developing cohesive societies** in Europe and beyond. This calls for **participatory needs assessment of local community** when designing the placement and linking it with the aspirations of the volunteer.

“For the Y generation (born between 1982 - 2000), there is nothing worse than working on nonsense”  
Ott Pärna, SCULT

Transnational volunteering is a **tangible contribution to cohesion and solidarity in Europe**, becoming more and more important in these times of nationalism and isolationism that could threaten the European project. However, the **shared meaning of solidarity** must be explored and elaborated for all to understand and have a wish to join.

The core of volunteering should be **problem-solving based on the joint needs** of the volunteer, the organisation and the local community. **Open dialogue** must be held during the preparation phase for recognition of the intended positive impact of the activities, increasing a shared sense of social responsibility. **Understanding of the context of local community** and interaction with it are vital, also considering the geopolitical and cultural frame. This should be a core dimension or even a **specific quality criteria**, when accrediting organisations and assessing projects to be granted.



During the delivery of the project, conscious effort must be made to **engage volunteers in the local community**. Best practice should be shared and **resources collated** on this topic. **Municipalities should be invited to play a bigger role** in new volunteering programmes.

The **effective use of funds to provide meaningful experiences for as many young people as possible** should be in focus. Creation of the meaningful experience has to be based on the profile of the volunteer and often needs a long-term approach. It is critical to find a **sufficient length** for the **volunteering experience to impact the volunteer as well as the local community** where it is taking place.

## Inclusion groups – access and support

**No youngster should face obstacles in engaging** in local, national or transnational **volunteering**. Keeping a low threshold (simple and flexible) in accessing the possibilities is of utmost importance. **Particular conditions** to guarantee access to and participation of **young people with special needs and fewer opportunities** must be established. At the same time pedagogical support based on diversity principles and the participation of organisations working with diverse target groups of young people needs to be ensured.

“EVS is open for all, regardless of qualifications. It has to remain so in the ESC!”  
Conference participant

To be able to choose freely to volunteer, a young person needs to have economic security. However, it is not only money that young people lack. Other barriers (language, cultural etc) also restrict their courage to apply.

Having EU funded opportunities on **national/local level**, such as **Solidarity Projects**, would undoubtedly support the **inclusion agenda and widen participation and recognition** across a broader range of stakeholders. To improve the existing proposal: young people should be able to do solidarity projects more than once to build on the experience;

submission dates for funding should be flexible, local Solidarity Projects should be able to link internationally to each other and to invite participants from different countries to take part.

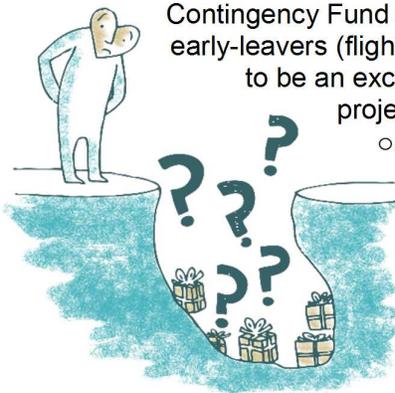
**Local volunteering** should be a preparatory step for involvement in an international project, especially for the more vulnerable young people. Short-term and group volunteering projects should continue. They are a means to encourage inexperienced young people to be a volunteer internationally.

Interconnections between stakeholders (mentors and organisations) are important to create a safe environment. The international networking reality, that has built up over 20 years, could help support other options for inclusion in transnational volunteering. These recommendations are especially **relevant for countries where there are no structural funds** for youth work:

- **“Ready-made” projects for inclusion.** Specialised organisations, centrally contracted and supported by the National Agencies, provide high quality inclusion placements to secure places for disadvantaged volunteers. These are available several times in a year. Support Sending organisations can then network with local structures to provide higher quality preparation and follow-up, within an appropriate timeframe for the young people’s needs.
- Support a system of **outreach youth work with a focus on volunteering.** Mobile representatives of the Programme could link to disadvantaged areas and target groups, working on a long-term basis to motivate and support young people from these communities to participate in international volunteering (working both with the youngster and the community, families etc).
- **Dedicated financial means** for partnerships and projects that have an inclusion focus. There should be transparent lump sums for reinforced mentorship and/or a fixed amount of exceptional costs communicated within a clear structure of what is eligible.
- **Quality Stars** should be awarded to organisations who reach **‘inclusion’ standards** every year, which makes them eligible for further funding. Existing financial frameworks do not cover the administrative workload required by inclusion projects and quality coordination of multiple placements.

The management of grant funding could also be improved:

- **Financial risk is a concern** for organisations working in inclusion. Drop-out levels are relatively high amongst this target group which has real financial impact. An optional Contingency Fund should be available to cover unexpected costs for vulnerable early-leavers (flights not taken etc), where the reason for drop-out can be proven to be an exception. Sustaining organisations that deliver quality inclusion projects is fundamental to ensuring that this priority thrives.



- **A longer-term strategic approach** is needed for organisations that work on transnational inclusion volunteering. Applications should allow for flexibility on partners, deadlines for application, numbers of volunteers per application (more than 30) etc. The focus can then be on the quality of support from the organisation to do what they do well, within a funded framework that acknowledges local delivery being a vital aspect of the realisation of EU priorities.

## Quality – accreditation & support

The **quality of transnational volunteering placements** needs reaffirming in terms of accreditation (quality control and monitoring mechanism) and an ensured support system (fully fledged training & evaluation cycle for organisations and volunteers).

The focus on the humanity behind the process is important, and to ensure the quality of the experience within it. The support, structure and mentorship has to be co-ordinated between all stakeholders involved to create a **safe environment for volunteering and support the learning process**. Preparation of the volunteer is vital, especially for inclusion groups, and the supportive training to develop their cultural immersion and personal development should be kept.

This includes pre-departure training (to be provided by ALL National Agencies), on-arrival, mid-term training, as well as final evaluation, or 'What Next' training. These could be complemented by theme-focused trainings dependent on the development needs and interests of the volunteers.

"EVS is not just a project, it's somebody's life experience."  
Conference participant

"Improved quality provides a common understanding of key principals" Andrea Casamenti, European Youth Forum

There should be **clarified and agreed quality standards**, with indicators to measure the quality, linked to the Charter that will be used for Accreditation. The ESC Charter must be modelled directly on the EVS Charter which was built with years of experience and expertise. The role of institutions must be clear within it, as must be the rights of the volunteer.

The Quality Label in ESC should be recognised as a **tool for motivation**, especially for new organisations. To attract more organisations in this way, the accreditation process must be **light and easily accessible**, while ensuring unified standards across Europe. It should be a **consultative, supportive approach** (through giving tools and advice). Newly accredited organisations should be **trained within a short timeframe**. The **impact of the organisation on the volunteer and the community** should be assessed, through a follow-up accreditation process.

## Support Organisations

**Recognising the contribution of organisations** active in the field of transnational volunteering for youth is very important and their **work should be adequately resourced**.

The value of all organisations in the **supportive net** behind the volunteer must not be underestimated. Volunteering organisations, with their vast experience and expertise, have a responsibility to their communities and the young people they work with to be a **resource to support Programme change on a European level**, both in further consultation and in the implementation.



**Support for the Support Organisations** is just as vital for a healthy sustainable volunteering environment for all. **Supervision, training and mentoring for key actors** is needed. **Peer learning schemes and quality resources** should be available for sending organisations to help their networking and mutual learning. Mentors should be trained, supported and paid through the grant to **facilitate the learning experience as well as the intercultural community experience**. The specific terms and roles need to be **clarified**, such as mentor, tutor, work-supervisor, Project coordinator etc.

**Exchange of expertise** should be encouraged between Support Organisations to sustain and **improve the quality of volunteering through shared practice** on regional, national and international levels. Some examples how this could be improved: study visits to volunteering projects on both international and national level should be organised; national/regional meetings to exchange experience and difficulties within the same policy framework; regional focus or cross-border focus for information meetings and contact seminars.

To support the European approach for transnational volunteering with Support Organisations, several suggestions were made:

- **Create a Sending Structure, instead of a Sending Organisation**, that combines all tasks together (eg. promotion, inclusion, outreach, consultation, preparation, language support, What Next training after placement etc). This structure should be detailed in the application procedure.
- More of a focus on volunteering activities and cooperation among local organisations and communities, and **less of a focus on top-down initiatives**, special budgets, new branding and new programmes.
- **A dedicated lump sum** for Sending Organisations to prepare participants and support them through all project phases afterwards.

## Countries involved



The current **ESC proposal is focusing on the EU member states only** and thus excludes the **EFTA-, associated and partner countries** participating in Erasmus+ Youth in Action. In terms of solidarity with this proposal the EU **sends out a counter-productive signal**. All affected countries are targeted by policy strategies of the EU and have played an important role in the implementation of Erasmus+ Youth in Action already for years. The same cross-border voluntary activities so far carried out as EVS would now be divided which **interrupts** an until now **successful and established programme implementation**.

The current need related to **migration and refugees**, and the political focus it brings, also needs to be taken into account to fit into Programme changes on this level.

## Established Volunteer Status

Recognition, accessibility, safety and quality of volunteering calls for **establishing a European Status for Volunteers** that needs further mainstreaming to national policies on volunteering. An EU-wide strategy aiming at creating, enabling and empowering a positive environment for volunteering in Europe should be developed and implemented.

Policies on volunteering vary from country to country. Challenges in one country do not exist, or are not the same, in another. There is a definite need to harmonise volunteering policies in Europe and the EU has a role to play in that.

The **recognition of volunteering** would support access to opportunities, especially for those with fewer opportunities. At the moment, there are several areas where the lack of Status leads to young people being **discriminated against**. For example: local taxation of volunteers' pocket money, volunteers losing their unemployment or housing benefits if they leave the country, visa restrictions (in stark contrast to recent legal changes made for

Erasmus students and researchers) and lack of recognition on social, family and political levels.

To clarify the roles of different actors, and to support recognition, a clear **distinction must be made between volunteering, unpaid internship, traineeship and an employee.** This would also avoid the threat of job replacement through volunteering.

“Service Civil International is generally very concerned by the misuse of the term volunteering and the increasing number of cases where the values of volunteering and its benefits are undermined and devalued through replacing paid jobs.” As quoted in the Foresight paper, in preparation for the conference

## Smart(er) tools combined with Face to Face

‘**Smart**’ (digital) transnational volunteering opportunities and support tools for **learning, recognition and validation** of learning should be put in place in combination with face to face support measures (information, guidance, mentorship).

“It was very hard to handle the EVS database and the youth portal” Daniel Winkler, EVS volunteer, Estonia

The online tools currently provided are **not smart**, don’t make things easier for the users, and cannot replace human support. The tools only make sense if they are connected with existing youth work structures. Standalone remote support through online tools only would **further exclude disadvantaged** young people who need more support to utilise such things.

Before creating new tools, an audit should be held on **existing tools**. The good ones that already support volunteers and organisations should be **promoted and built upon**.

Young people need **smart, personalised, technological solutions** to explore new ways to volunteer in the e-world of young people. The database approach currently provided is rigid, and doesn’t allow for the ‘dreaming’ phase of young people; what about a **playful, interactive online system that works like a dating site**, giving 6 different options that fit the person’s interest, ranging from volunteering to traineeships to jobs? A possibility for **mutual search must be developed** - young people don’t want to wait passively to be ‘picked up’.



The online approach must be condensed into a **centralised one-stop-shop portal** which should support volunteers: to communicate between themselves; to connect alumni; for Solidarity Projects; to map where volunteers are placed, with statistics and contact details etc. It should also have functions for the needs of other stakeholders (mentors, Project Coordinators etc). It should have a transparent list of approved projects with a clear timeline when the projects will start. The format should also be reconsidered: using Apps might be a better solution. It must be user-friendly and intuitive to use without much training. Tools should be introduced only when the actual use is immediate.

## Pathways for the volunteer

**Sustainable volunteering pathways** should be encouraged and supported through **connecting local and transnational volunteering opportunities**. Transition, Alumni networking and follow-up support should be offered by support structures to volunteers before, during and after their transnational experiences.

Helping to **see volunteering as 'the norm'** from an early age, and supporting values within it such as 'solidarity', will increase recognition, and support the trajectory of young people in their volunteering opportunities as they grow. Promotion should be done in schools (from primary age upwards).

Giving priority to youth volunteering should **not undermine the importance of other youth activities** (youth exchanges, youth initiatives and structured dialogue projects) as an **ecosystem** of young person's development in **Erasmus+: Youth In Action**.

Complementary youth activities, such as youth exchanges and volunteering camps, should provide a **stepping stone** for young people on their path from local to transnational volunteering. These must be safe-guarded and recognised as valuable in their own right, as a first intercultural experience within a safe context of being part of a group, and as a step up to volunteering. Different actions of ESC should also be possible to link as **next-step opportunities**. All of these should be **systematically combined** to provide volunteering options as a **continuous networked process**.

Working **cross-sectorally** should be promoted for transnational volunteering. Combining volunteering opportunities with formal education allows for possible partnerships with schools and universities. Linking volunteering to other mobility projects should be made - ESN (Social Erasmus) is already doing this. Volunteering can often be the **tool that bridges the gap between different mentalities** (formal/non-formal, business sector, social work etc).

The future EU Youth Strategy (2018+) should include the **fundamentals of all mobility projects** and should connect different tools within it (ESC, EVS, formal education etc). It should also include the concept of transferable study credits for volunteering, such as those now possible with Services Learning.

## Efficient systems

Any complications and difference in conditions or procedures must be avoided when implementing **parallel programmes (Erasmus+ and ESC) to support transnational volunteering** projects. A **fast-track grant award** procedure should be put in place.

Programmes should be simpler in their administration to make them more **sustainable**, and easy to apply to make them **more attractive to a higher number of organisations**. They should be complimentary to other existing programmes, including those on **national levels**. The processing of applications should be faster, decreasing the waiting time from application to the start of the project. **Guidelines must be unified** in one place. There must be the **same approach** for application, budget structure, lump sums, accreditation, trainings etc for both EVS and ESC. There must be a similar budget between programmes, or it will lead to one becoming the programme for 'second-class citizens'. There should be cooperation between stakeholders and programmes to be able to **openly combine different funding** programmes (not double funding). The **visa procedure** should be easy, and well-supported.

A **fast-track procedure** should be implemented for experienced organisations. A strict accreditation process is needed, and organisations with a Quality Label should be monitored, but then the application can be based only on the award of budget. This would be **similar to the VET application process, but adapted to volunteering needs**.

## Long Term Recommendations/strategy/dreams

