

Gabriella Civico

Corporate Volunteers Choosing Change for Refugees in Europe

Volunteering is a Choice for Change!

5 years after the European Year of Volunteering (EYV 2011), and a review by volunteering stakeholders from across Europe, it is concluded that the required policy agenda for volunteering for the coming years can be illustrated through a focus on the 5 'Rs'.

Recognition: The learning achieved by volunteers needs to be properly recognised and accredited when desired. The roadmap for the implementation of the recommendation on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning should be fully implemented.

Real Value: The evidence base for volunteering policies should be improved whereby the contribution of volunteering to the economy and social cohesion and convergence be measured and better understood.

Regulatory Framework: Europe still requires a co-ordinated volunteering policy with a single contact point in the EU institutions. Local volunteering strategies need to be rewarded when they are well developed in line with the Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (PAVE) recommendations, and supported to improve when they are not in order to continue to ensure quality volunteering standards.

Resources: Volunteers and their organisations, including infrastructure organisations providing advice, support and training for volunteering, deserve to be properly funded and supported, including through employee volunteering.

Refugees: Just as when PAVE was written there was a specific context of the economic crisis, at this time of the PAVE 5 year review, the fact that volunteers are the backbone to the support being offered to people seeking sanctuary in Europe also gives a specific focus. It is a current example, and visible symbol, of the importance of volunteers and the way that they embody European values, contribute to resilience, and are available to offer flexible and pragmatic solutions to shared challenges.

Help bring

Opportunities for

Participation in

Europe!

Europe is reminded, through this situation, that if the potential of these Helping Hands to offer HOPE for Europe is to be maximised, then there needs to be the organisational infrastructure available to welcome, recognise and value them. This includes a recognition of, and support to, the appropriate contribution from different fields and sectors sharing the same goals and acting in complementary and supporting capacities. Only in this way will enough quality volunteering experiences, with the capability to harness the enthusiasm, commitment and energy of European citizens, be provided. Implementing the 5 'Rs' will bring Europe closer to this goal of the enabling environment for volunteering in Europe that citizens want - and Europe deserves and provide refugees with a real chance to integrate to their new lives in Europe.

Volunteers choose a different approach to the welcome and support offered to refugees than other entities, people and sectors are seen to be giving, and Employee/ Corporate volunteers are no exception. In Europe we are lucky to have the freedom to choose, not least the opportunity to elect our Governments. Many citizens are shocked by the choices some of these Governments are making with regards to addressing the humanitarian needs of refugees in Europe. A great number of the refugees in Europe are people who have overcome tremendous obstacles to reach our continent, a region they imagined would be a place of safety. Compared to the wars, poverty and persecution that they have experienced in their countries of origin, Europe is still probably a more secure place. Recent incidents have shown us however, that it is by no means free from all danger.

Volunteers provide refugees with crucial help and care in the form of clothes, food, and shelter and assistance to integration through language lessons and other capacity building support. They provide a change-making example to others through their 'helping hands'. These voluntary acts of kindness, by huge numbers of European citizens, have not only changed and saved refugee's lives, but they have changed the attitudes of others with regards to how they view and treat newcomers to their communities. This reflects and restores the intrinsic sense of solidarity and respect for human rights that is the real basis of Europe, an aspect that policymakers sometimes neglect, but volunteers demonstrate every day through their commitment and engagement.

Thankfully, lives are being saved because of these individual people who have chosen to volunteer, to take action, showing solidarity and compassion in contradiction to the approach of many political leaders. Crucially, in many cases, the employers of these people have also chosen to contribute their human and financial resources to provide key and pertinent support where needed. This example shown by employers, big and small, has a

huge impact in how refugees are accepted and helped to integrate. In this way, through their leading example, even more assistance and support is leveraged from the local population and the influence and outreach of employee volunteers goes far beyond the actual hours those employees spend volunteering.

We ask more employers from whichever sector (Public, private, for-profit, not-for-profit) to help provide the necessary means so that, when their staff choose to volunteer they are encouraged and supported. We ask that their actions are seen not as a hinderance to the employer's objectives but as an outward sign of the values and sense of commitment. Not only of their individual staff who are volunteering, but of the whole organisation where they work, and in this way is viewed and treated as an asset.

We also ask that policy-makers, to help provide the necessary means so that, when someone chooses to volunteer, the appropriate infrastructure is in place for them. Only through this will volunteer organisations be able to offer quality volunteering opportunities to all those employers and employees who are willing to take positive action to meet the needs of refugees. The commitment of people and entities from all sectors will mean that volunteers can be properly managed with the appropriate training, equipment, and support, and that refugees will benefit from the full potential of this incredible resource based on free will, generosity, and European values.

Local, regional and national volunteer centres and agencies are ready to help harness the potential of these volunteers in order to have the biggest impact possible. The Employee Volunteering European Network (EVEN) is ready to support the for-profit / corporate sector to increase capacities in employee volunteering, access reliable partners and enable more 'leading by example' through greater visibility for their life-changing actions.

Author

***Gabriella Civico** is the Director of the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) and initiated the Employee Volunteering European Network (EVEN) in 2013. She is from the UK but has lived for many years in Spain and Portugal and has a degree in Social Policy and Education from Surrey University (UK) and a Masters in Education in E-learning from the University of Hull (UK). Gabriella has volunteered since childhood in a variety of fields including Youth Advocacy, International Development, Disability, Environment, Immigration, Human Rights, Sports etc. She has worked closely with CEV since July 2010 in her role as Project Manager for the EYV2011 Alliance until the end of the project in March 2012 when she became CEV Director.*

Contact: gabriella.civico@cev.be

Further Information: <http://www.cev.be/even/>

http://www.cev.be/uploads/2015/12/HELPING_HANDS_Report.pdf

Redaktion

BBE-Newsletter für Engagement und Partizipation in Europa

Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (BBE)

Michaelkirchstr. 17/18

10179 Berlin

Tel.: +49 (0) 30 62980-114

europa-bbe@b-b-e.de

www.b-b-e.de