



Gabriella Civico

Volunteering is a Choice for Change!

The 2015 CEV »Helping Hands - Hope for Europe« conference, and the conference briefing document¹ detailing what was said during EYV 2011 and what has happened since, made it clear that considerable work remained to be done in order to realise a fitting EYV 2011 legacy. Held 5 years after EYV 2011, the Helping Hands conference showed us that the required policy agenda for volunteering for the coming years could be illustrated through a focus on the '5R' policy priorities. This is still the case in 2019 as we look ahead to a new configuration of the European Parliament and European Commission.

With this in mind, CEV has developed the Vote Volunteer Vision (VTV) campaign. It comprises a Toolkit for CEV members and other Volunteer-Involving Organisations to discover and develop the European Parliament 2019 election candidates' opinions on volunteering with reference to the Policy Agenda on Volunteering in Europe (PAVE) & the »Helping Hands EYV 2011 5-Year Review« and the 5R Policy Priorities.

Recognition:

The learning achieved by volunteers needs to be properly recognised and validated when desired. The roadmap for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning still needs to be fully implemented even after the deadline at the end of 2018. There remains too much focus in many countries on vocational training (i.e learning and training provided in people's place of work and on specific 'hard' vocational competencies). The volunteer sector needs to put pressure on Member State education ministries to ensure that non-formal learning through volunteering, especially as concerns transversal and 'soft' skills, is also included in the scope of the implementation. Volunteer organisations also need to ensure that they are included as stakeholders when designing the processes and implementing the recommendation.

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. Whilst several EU countries currently gather and publish some data on

¹ »Helping Hands« Hope for Europe! Conference Report 8-9 October 2015, Brussels Five years after EYV 2011, volunteers continue to »Make a Difference«! But how has it made a difference for volunteering? https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/3ec99c_d09820abb77847678d0cc98dc8a3e0fc.pdf

volunteering it would be of great value if countries used the same methodology and committed to collect data on a similar, regular basis. In this way trends could be measured and the impact of different volunteering policies and programmes better understood and improved where necessary. Public/ Private partnerships to cover the funding for this on a member state level should be encouraged, but EU funds could also be committed for this purpose. Despite many attempts, with the support of the EP, it has not yet been possible to ensure Eurostat action in this field. It is hoped that a newly elected EP could change this. The collection of data concerned with attitudes around EU Values and Solidarity would also be extremely valuable information to obtain.

Regulatory Framework:

Europe still requires a co-ordinated volunteering policy with a single contact point in the EU institutions. An important part of the VVV campaign is to gather pledges from the candidates, that if elected they will support the establishment of a Volunteering and Solidarity Intergroup in the EP. This will help with better co-ordination and improvement to the new European Solidarity Corps and other EU policies and programmes that have an impact on volunteers and volunteering. EU policies provide the framework in which local volunteering strategies operate. These policies need to provide guidance and support in order to ensure quality volunteering standards. CEV has launched the European Volunteering Capital Competition in order to recognise, reward and encourage local volunteering strategies. In 2019, the European Volunteering Capital is Kosice in Slovakia and in 2020 will be Padova in Italy. The winner for 2021 will be announced in December 2019 and the call is now open for candidates with the deadline in the middle of June 2019.

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. The only EU programme that until now had volunteering as a priority - The Europe for Citizens programme - will not continue under the new MFF and its areas of focus taken up by the new Rights and Values fund. MEPs and all stakeholders need to ensure that this focus is not lost in the future. The new European Solidarity Corps (ESC) provides opportunities for young people to engage in solidarity activities as volunteers or trainees. MEPs should work with stakeholders to ensure that the ESC is the starting point for a broader and more co-ordinated volunteering and solidarity policy framework aimed at people of all ages not only young people as is currently the case with the ESC.

Refugees & Social Inclusion:

When PAVE was written (in 2011) there was a specific context of the economic crisis and at the time of the PAVE 5 year review (in 2015), the fact that volunteers were the backbone to the support being offered to people seeking sanctuary in Europe also gave a specific focus. Volunteers embody European values, contribute to resilience, are available to offer flexible

and pragmatic solutions to shared challenges, and are a visible symbol solidarity with others. In this way they offer a critical counterbalance to the rise of populism, intolerance and extremism of all kinds that is all too prevalent today.

Conclusion

Defending the rights of others is the basis of solidarity, one of the values on which the EU was founded. We hope that even in these challenging times for the EU, all stakeholders will continue the work done before, during and after the EP elections to develop the EU as an enabling environment for volunteering, facilitating the role that volunteering plays in promoting and sharing the fundamental rights of all citizens in the EU. CEV advocates for EU legal frameworks that support and promote volunteering, and therefore supports and promotes one way that citizens can actively recognize and defend the rights of others.

Helping others is arguably what volunteering is all about. For millions of volunteers in Europe, volunteering is a time to help others and put the needs and interests of others as a priority above their own. Volunteering is a concrete way in which millions of EU citizens contribute to bettering the lives of others, to help others, and in other words, defend the rights of others. The definition or underlying principles for volunteering that were universally accepted by all stakeholders involved in EYV 2011 recognised volunteering as *»a journey of solidarity, providing a way to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns«*.

Extra attention needs to be given to ensure that the EU is not a place where citizens are only encouraged to think of themselves, and how the EU benefits them personally, but to also think of others and how, in protecting the rights of others, often in a selfless, voluntary way, we collectively contribute to the EU project. The efforts of the millions of volunteers in Europe are a daily reminder of this and offers a counterbalance to the individualistic approach promoted in many aspects of modern life. Volunteers are giving a helping hand to Europe, to its people, to our future. Candidates for the EP elections need to understand that if the potential of these voluntary »Helping Hands« to offer HOPE for Europe are to be maximised, then there needs to be the organisational infrastructure available to welcome, recognise and value them. Only in this way will enough quality volunteering experiences, with the capability to harness the enthusiasm, commitment and energy of millions of citizens, be provided. Implementing the 5R policy priorities will bring Europe closer to this goal of the enabling environment for volunteering in Europe that citizens want - and Europe deserves! Vote Volunteer Vision!

Author

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