



 **CREATING**

 **EFFECTIVE**

 **VOLUNTEER**

 **PROGRAMS**



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OPPORTUNITY FOR VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEER PROJECTS

What is the European Solidarity Corps?

The European Solidarity Corps is a funding programme of the European Union that creates opportunities for young people to volunteer and run their own solidarity projects that benefit communities around Europe. It builds on the achievements of more than 25 years of implementation of European programs in the field of youth and solidarity, in particular the success of the European Voluntary Service, the EU Humanitarian Aid Volunteers' initiative and the previous European Solidarity Corps program, which was successfully implemented in 2018-2020.

The program represents a single entry point for solidarity activities. It opens up more and greater opportunities, covering areas as diverse as migrant integration, environmental challenges, natural disaster prevention, education, youth activities and humanitarian aid. It also supports national and local actors in their efforts to manage various social challenges and crises.

It offers young people opportunities to engage in solidarity activities that enable them to engage for the benefit of the community and gain useful experience and competences for personal, educational, social, civic and professional development, thereby improving their employability.

The European Solidarity Corps unites young people in efforts for a more inclusive society by supporting vulnerable people and responding to social and humanitarian challenges. It offers an experience that inspires and empowers young people who want to help, learn and develop and provides a single entry point for such solidarity activities across the Union and beyond.

After completing a simple registration process, participants could be selected to join a wide range of projects. These projects will be run by organisations which have been checked and authorised to run European Solidarity Corps projects.

How does the European Solidarity Corps work?

When you register, your details will be held in the European Solidarity Corps system and organisations will be able to search the database for people for their projects. Organisations will then ask selected participants to join these projects.

Organisations can apply for funding for their projects and after their projects are approved, these organisations will be able to access the pool of participants to select young people that could be best suited to join the project. The organisations will then contact the potential recruits and make a final choice.

All organisations will undergo checks before they are authorised to run projects for the European Solidarity Corps and before they are allowed to search for and recruit participants for their projects.

What types of organizations can run European Solidarity Corps projects?

The European Solidarity Corps is open to a wide range of organizations to run projects. These include governmental organizations, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, and companies. These could also be of all sizes, from big multinational companies to small NGOs working in a local community. In order to participate, organizations should obtain a Quality Label. Any public or private organization from a European Union Member State holding a Quality Label can submit applications for funding for volunteering.

Organisations from Partner Countries outside the European Union that hold a Quality label can participate in volunteering activities as partners.

The European Solidarity Corps is a pool of young people who register their interest to take part in solidarity-related projects and who agree with and will uphold the Mission and Principles of the European Solidarity Corps.

How can an organization apply to run a European Solidarity Corps project?

There are usually two calls for proposals per year. Organizations should apply via online forms to the National Agency of the country where they are established.

Calls for proposals are published here:
<https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity/organisations/calls-for-proposals>

Who runs the Corps?

The European Solidarity Corps is managed by the European Commission and it is implemented on the ground by a variety of bodies:

- European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)
- National Agencies in each participating country
- SALTOs
- European Solidarity Corps resource centre.

VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS

Volunteering projects offer young people opportunities to participate in solidarity activities. They must respond to the important needs of society, challenges in the field, contribute to strengthening the community, and at the same time enable volunteers to acquire skills and competences for personal, educational, social, civic, and professional development. Cross-border and national projects are possible. The latter is mainly intended for young people with fewer opportunities. Organizations can also run group volunteering projects. Volunteering projects cover a wide range of areas such as environmental protection, climate change mitigation, greater social inclusion, etc.

The European Solidarity Corps volunteering projects are aimed at young people between 18 and 30 years old and are divided into two options – Team Volunteering and Individual Volunteering – both of which can be done only once.



Team Volunteering

brings together between 10 to 40 young people from different nationalities in a country where they carry out various volunteer activities. These volunteer projects last from 2 weeks to 2 months and, to a certain extent, are similar to the short-term projects, since volunteers live in an international and very active environment.

Individual Volunteering

lasts from 2 to 12 months, that is, it is a long-term project. Although usually there are other volunteers in the hosting organisation, the work developed includes more responsibilities and the possibility of focusing more on acquiring new skills and knowledge.

SOLIDARITY PROJECTS

A solidarity project is a set of solidarity activities designed, developed and implemented by young people themselves, to help bring positive change to their local community, but they can also extend to the national and transnational level in the case of cross-border cooperation activities.

The basic purpose of solidarity projects is to provide a group of young people with the opportunity to express their solidarity through taking responsibility and commitment to bringing about positive changes in their local community through the creation of new solutions and approaches to the challenges faced by society and the environment in which they live.

The project must include the active involvement of the entire group of young people, address a clearly defined topic, which is reflected in the daily activities of the project. The participation of young people in a solidarity project is an important informal learning experience, through which young people can strengthen their personal, educational, social and civic development and increase their employability.

The project can be submitted on behalf of the youth group by an organisation whose role in the project is only of an administrative nature. Young people independently decide on project management processes, coordination and implementation of activities, in accordance with the planned goals of the project. Further help, especially with learning support and mentoring, can be provided by the instructor.

The project can last from 2 to 12 months and it is mainly part-time.



QUALITY LABEL

Every organisation that wants to apply and implement projects in the field of volunteering within the framework of the European Solidarity Corps program must obtain the appropriate quality label. The quality label is necessary to ensure the quality and compliance of participating organisations with the principles and objectives of the European Solidarity Corps program regarding their duties in all phases of activity.

Obtaining the quality label is a process of verifying an organisation that wants to be involved in projects in the field of volunteering to demonstrate knowledge of the philosophy, values and quality standards for participation in activities that are part of the European Solidarity Corps programme.

Depending on the role that the organisation wants to take in participating in the program, there are two types of quality label:

A hosting role

that covers the entire range of activities related to the reception of the participant of the solidarity unit, including the creation of the activity program of the young participant and the appropriate guidance and support of the participant in all phases of the project (some of these activities may be carried out by the support organisation involved in the given project).

A support role

that includes support, preparation and/or training of participants before departure, coordination between participants and the host organisation and/or support for participants after returning from the activity. In addition, the supporting organisation may assume some parts of the host role when the host organisation is unable or unwilling to be responsible for them. An organisation that plays a supporting role can also send volunteers to activities.



IMPACT MEASUREMENT FOR VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS

What is measuring impact?

The post Covid-19 world is here, alongside a global rise in the cost of living and a war that has had consequences for the whole world. The impact on people's physical, emotional and financial health are starting to show and the third sector has seen a sudden rise in demand for the services it offers.

With lockdowns and limited movement, volunteering in its traditional sense slowed down, as communities tried their best to look after the most vulnerable groups. The challenge now is to get people back out and back volunteering; not an easy task given that many people have become used to staying at home more often, working from there and socialising too.

Therefore a new push to promote volunteering is needed, to both future volunteers and potential funders. The best way to get buy-in is to demonstrate the positive impact it has on all parties through a robust impact measuring strategy.

Impact measurement is not something new, however it is something fairly commonly overlooked. It is the method by which we clearly show the benefits of delivering something.

Firstly, we must think about the overarching goal of either an organisation or a project and the actions and resources needed to make that project work. From those actions we can start thinking about how each one will have an impact.

We need to move from the traditional measurements of outputs and shift our view to outcomes. Whilst outputs simply track numbers of people attending or volunteer hours committed, outcomes track people over time. It is not simply a satisfaction survey, more a glimpse into how their lives were or were not changed because of that organisation or project.

Whilst many organisations or projects just do entry and exit interviews, true impact measurement is done regularly at various time intervals. This feedback then shapes future provision in the goal of making it more effective and impactful, creating better outcomes for all those involved.

For this, we often apply a framework called “Theory of Change”. There are numerous free resources available online and we encourage you to watch some of the available videos and try a few of the worksheets to put together your own Theory of Change.

In some cases where we wish to translate impact into monetary value, we can apply the quite subjective tool “Social Return on Investment”. This is often done at the end of a project. However, in order to carry this out certain data must be collected during the period you wish to calculate the return on investment.

Working through the tool provides you with a social return on investment, which ultimately states that for every euro invested in running the organisation or project, it generated a certain number of euros in social value.

Measuring the impact organisation can strengthen your applications for funding, your methodology and reputation, as well as your ability to attract new volunteers. Udruga Bonsai, who run the Volunteer Centre Dubrovnik, did exactly that in order to show their local council, the City of Dubrovnik, why investing in a volunteer program where they hired volunteer co-ordinators, would not only save money in the long run due to improved physical and mental health provision, but also provide a social return on investment.

SO WHAT IMPACT SHOULD BE MEASURED AND FROM WHERE?



Volunteering and its impact

Just as with any project or organisation, we must look at all the stakeholders when truly determining the positive effect, as well as in some cases the negative effect, of what we do as volunteer centres. To do so, we decided to hone in on three groups.

The volunteers

If you have ever volunteered, you will know the reasons why people do it, the feeling gained and the importance of being thanked or being shown how you are a part of the bigger picture of the organisation and their goals. These sorts of gestures retain you as a volunteer and might even encourage you to take on more roles or hours.

From an organisational perspective, it is equally important for you to be measuring the impact you have on the volunteer, perhaps when it comes to the skills they gain, the feelings they get from doing it and other testimonials. Reporting on volunteer hours and the number of volunteers might be beneficial for certain reports or applications, but it is actually the storytelling from volunteers that can inspire and motivate others to do so.

Society as a whole

In many of the partner countries, organisations find it hard to take on volunteers. Sometimes they are skeptical of the time that needs to be put in and perhaps they have had bad experiences before and the only way to change this is by measuring the impact on the organisation when they have a positive and well organised volunteer program.

This can include sharing increased outputs, perhaps in terms of project applications submitted and in turn the amount of funding brought in, or it could be the extra programs or activities run by volunteers and the further impact it had on the users. You could then measure this in terms of increased impact and overall show how by having a solid program it can lead to improved outcomes for the users.

Organisations using volunteer

Finally, when it comes to funding, you need to demonstrate the bigger picture. We have already looked at the volunteers themselves and the organisations with volunteer programs, but what about the wider society?

This is one of the harder things to measure, because here we can only speculate and then use case studies to provide backing to our theory. However, there are some things that have been proven in history, which you can base your impact measuring on when it comes to the wider society. For example, longer term projects have shown increased societal cohesion when intergenerational or intercultural volunteering projects are run.

This is similar to mentoring of young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds where those volunteering shift their mindset, reduce the stigma against certain groups, which in the longer run leads to better social mobility and greater opportunity for all.

In conclusion

Measuring impact is vital for the voluntary sector and for volunteer centres, to enhance the reputation of volunteering and secure funding for the future. Capturing this information is difficult, so planning ahead and defining your Theory of Change are key first steps. However, once this is in place and as you measure across your work, the data starts to speak for itself. The outputs and outcomes are there and you have plenty of information, stats and stories to inspire all of your stakeholders.

PROMOTION OF VOLUNTEERISM AND VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Promoting volunteerism and volunteer programs includes a cluster of promotional strategies and activities which could take a variety of forms. However they fall under the following main categories.

Create carefully designed awareness-rising program, which emphasize the impact that volunteers have, with identified goals such as:

1. To inform the community about outstanding volunteer efforts
2. To recognize and thank volunteers
3. To publicize and bring people to special events
4. To describe or report on continuing and new programs, services and activities

Include relevant stakeholders who can be of assistance in promoting the impact, such as:

1. Community leaders and opinion-makers
2. Media people (editors, station managers, journalists, columnists, researchers)
3. Schools, colleges, universities
4. Local businesses and corporations with branches in your community
5. Other civil society organisations

Define and use raising awareness methods relevant to your target audience

1. Social media
2. Orientation community meetings
3. Providing a community information resource on volunteering

Raising public awareness for volunteer contributions to communities and the society

Examples:

The CCI has implemented a project for strengthening voluntarism where young volunteers, mostly prospective university students, were identified. For each individual a volunteering position was found in relevant companies and institutions. Meanwhile the project team prepared a program and activities for lobbying and raising awareness for institutions and companies to be more socially responsible and to provide opportunities to the volunteers for employment;

In another project, in order to identify, motivate and train young leaders, the media, representatives from the parliament and local government, social workers and other stakeholders were included. Training for public speaking, storytelling and successful promotion of activities were given to high school students. Ultimately, the young students were given a regular radio show for volunteerism, a tradition where the city mayor and children plant trees together was begun, funds for renovation of the schools were accumulated via projects prepared by the students and many students started volunteering in local civil society organisations.

Motivate people to volunteer and help maintain or increase previous volunteering commitments

Create a program for motivating people to volunteer, including the following goals:

1. Motivate and retain volunteers by instilling pride in the services they provide
2. Provide means and methods for recruiting and referring volunteers
3. Provide a community information resource on volunteering
4. Increase the public's awareness and support for voluntarism and the voluntary sector

Provide services for volunteers

1. Training for volunteering
2. Provide a referral service to link volunteers to opportunities
3. Organise events to promote volunteerism and volunteering opportunities

Include relevant stakeholders who can be of assistance in presenting opportunities, motivating and increase volunteer commitments

1. Government bodies
2. Media people (editors, station managers, journalists, columnists, researchers)
3. Schools, colleges, universities
4. Local businesses and corporations with branches in your community
5. Other civil society organisations

Examples:

The CCI has organised a workshop for volunteers where a program was developed by discussing the current conditions for volunteering, how they can be improved, why it is important to volunteer, etc. As a result, we have together with the volunteers created a publication as a guideline for volunteering;

In coordination with other organisations from the country, especially organisations that work with young people and with the help of many volunteers, public events throughout the country were organised. These events were part of a campaign for awareness-rising for volunteering, to appreciate the work the volunteers have done so far, to inspire new generations of volunteers and to present to the public the importance of volunteering. A database with contact information of potential volunteers was created;

You cannot promote volunteering without engaging volunteers in your organisation. The CCI engages at least 3 volunteers on a daily basis and has a database of more than 50 other volunteers ready to be engaged if needed.



NETWORKING WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

When it comes to what makes an NGO truly successful, we might think first about the various numbers involved and the presentation of the website. How many children in rural areas get an education thanks to this organisation? How many mosquito nets are being handed out to curb malaria? And how impressive is that all-important website?

All this is important, at least to a degree. But we often neglect to consider what is behind the scenes. We forget about the fundamental structure that makes NGOs effective or not. In order to be successful, NGOs must create a close community of stakeholders, partners and other NGOs and work together. Collaboration is key. No organisation can be entirely efficient on its own. While working together sometimes proves difficult because so many individuals voice so many different opinions, cooperation allows for greater expansion of ideas and more creative solutions.

How to identify suitable partners for achieving your goal?

Staff with diverse expertise

Gather a team of staff with different social, academic and professional backgrounds. This will allow you to take advantage of their experience and social networks, as well as facilitate the identification of suitable partners.

Volunteers

Volunteers are also a great source from which to identify potential partners. Organise periodic meetings with your volunteers to discuss and develop a map of possible partners who can contribute to better achieving your goals.

Networking opportunities

National and international events like conferences, workshops, study trips etc. are also an excellent way to meet and connect with potential partners from the same or other fields that are beneficial to your work.

Cause and values

Find a company, institution or other potential partner whose cause aligns with yours. In the wake of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability concerns finding their way into corporate strategies, companies are looking to create partnerships with NGOs whose cause aligns with their business values.

Long-term thinking

Think of the partnership as a long-term strategic investment. Companies often include CSR and sustainability initiatives in their strategies for the future that are linked with long-term goals. Identify your long-term goals and search for companies that would be interested in long-term cooperation.

How to approach potential partners and various stakeholders?

Make use of your “core competency”: each organisation has its own strengths and core competencies. Once you have identified a company or an organisation you wish to partner with, it is time to identify their needs. A company might have expertise in marketing, while an NGO may have expertise in climate and environment. Knowing what you can offer a potential partner provides the best way to approach them.

Invite representatives of local government and its bodies to take part in your initiatives and all your activities.

In education, open youth activities where representatives of the education sector in local level are an integrative part and bring your activities into the context of schools and universities to make the reality of civil society more tangible for the young.

Have your older volunteers share their youth experiences with the younger (potential) volunteers in high school settings and thus make volunteering an interesting experience from the youth perspective.

How to establish long-lasting partnership with various stakeholders?

Implement projects that reflect the needs of the community and at the same time address local and national policies. This and the quality implementation of your projects will help you gain a good reputation with the local authorities and other stakeholders, thus making them more willing to be involved in future projects. Organise opportunities for volunteers, partners and stakeholders to bond and deepen their relationships (youth retreats, team building activities, etc.). Give them the opportunity to share their ideas for the upcoming events and projects.

Express the desire and readiness to be a part of their initiatives as an active actor.

Sign a Memorandum of Understanding. This will make clear exactly what each partner will do, outline basic agreements between them and help avoid confusion and conflict.

Never forget to make the role and the engagement of your partners and local stakeholder visible to the public. Use their logos, mention them in your press releases and in social media posts.



HOW TO BUILD VOLUNTARY WORK PROGRAMS DURING THE CRISIS

Guidelines

1. To define mission, vision and values (helps to find people with the same attitudes)
2. To make a plan (helps to get ahead, to not become stuck)
3. Be responsible (do what you say)
4. Show respect (increases motivation)
5. Include the society around (only some people become volunteers, but overall the attitude of the society involved is very important)
6. Do not diminish and devalue initiatives of people around you
7. Look for support from the government and local government
8. Look for support from the private sector

Why should we do it?

To stay stable during a crisis: it is based on the local society, people with trustworthy networks and resources. Building such groups is important at any time and they can especially help when a crisis comes.

How to start a new program?

Define the needs

What are the needs to be fulfilled? Is it food deliveries? Emotional support? Who are the people in need?

Make the group of supporters

Look around and find people who think the same way as you, do not keep all the work for yourself. You need to build a team composed of members who have the same ideas. The pandemic showed that we can work virtually, that we do not need the time or a place for group meetings in an office. We can use WhatsApp groups, e-mail groups, Facebook or Instagram groups.

Give support and time to those who are ready to learn

First outcomes arrive slowly, therefore there is no need to stress about it. Changing habits and making contacts with new people, gaining new volunteers, all takes time.



The right motivation

To be considerate of other volunteers and think more how to motivate them.

To be more knowledgeable, work with personality tests and find the right motivation of every member of the team:

Lumina Splash test:

<https://www.luminalearning.com/partners/latvia-riga/en/Splash>

16 personality test:

<https://www.16personalities.com/freepersonality-test>

Gallup Clifton test:

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/253850/cliftonstrengths-for-individuals.aspx>

To evaluate the stage of the lifecycle of your organisation:

<https://hr.mit.edu/learning-topics/teams/articles/stages-development>

To work on the team expectations about the current development point:

<https://thecultureguy.co.uk/fivedysfunctions-questionnaire/>

Three main motivators for volunteers

People want to help others – important to show that society gains from the voluntary work of every person;

To show the world that being a volunteer is good. The private and public evaluation of the volunteers;

The joy of acquiring new skills. This works for young people who are at the beginning of their work experience.

What not to do?

Do not lose reliance.

Do not take on too much yourself. Every person in a team must fulfil their own obligations. Starting to work with newcomers is a challenge that creates the possibility to grow together. Be flexible about new challenges which arise. Do not become stuck, but look for new supporters, financing, donors and new technologies. It is good to accept youngsters as a part of your team to start learning new technologies and ways of thinking.

COMPETENCIES GAINED THROUGH VOLUNTEERING

No matter how extensive your experience is you might consider adding a volunteer work section to your resumé. Listing volunteer work on your resumé can help employers understand your interests, skills and experience. It shows you are community-minded and offers an opportunity to prove your professional skills.

This is really important if you are a recent college or high school graduate as it improves resumé with little to no professional experience. Volunteer work may also be beneficial for anyone applying to work in industries where such work is highly valued, such as non-profit organisations or positions in academia.

In a LinkedIn survey, 41% of managers said they had hired employees because of the mentioning of volunteering on their resúmes.

Be accurate and precise

While explaining what you have done during volunteering, be accurate and precise. Do not list things that are not significant or relevant to future work possibilities or your career plans. It will only distract from the experience hiring managers wish to see on your CV. Include keywords from the job description that connects your volunteer experience back to the role applied for. No one wants to read information which is not relevant to the topic, especially hiring managers who read hundreds of resúmes for the same position. Do not just list your tasks, support your work experience with key responsibilities and achievements. If possible, measure your impact with numbers.

For example: if you held a volunteer position of a social media manager.

DO

Social media marketing manager with 2+ years experience on a fast paced content team
Increased Facebook conversion rate by 30% with new copywriting strategy
Identified more accurate target customer base which increased retention by 15%

DON'T

I have been social media manager for more than 2 years now. During this time I have written Facebook posts, published tweets, created image artwork and promoted the company on Pinterest.

Write concisely

The volunteering section and the CV in general should not be too long. Employers do not like long CVs. If you have little or no professional experience, volunteer positions relevant to the job can serve to demonstrate why you are the right candidate. If you have extensive professional experience, try to include only the three to five most recent and relevant experiences for the job. Make an effort to emphasize the basics of your experience so far. Employers will decide (based on the information about you and your experience) whether you meet their criteria or not.

List the skills you have acquired through volunteering

Make an effort to list the exact skills which you can say with certainty that you have acquired through volunteering. Employers want people with skills useful for the job, strong communication skills and those who are good at teamwork. Where exactly in the CV you place your volunteer work depends on how much professional experience you have.

The best place to include volunteer experience in your resumé is the "work experience" section, if:

- it is very relevant to the job,
- you have little paid experience, or
- a gap in your resumé.

Volunteer experience is much like work experience: you apply yourself, someone tracks your performance and you learn new skills. Format your volunteer work using the same structure you would for previously held (paid) jobs, but make sure to identify your role as "volunteer" along with any additional titles (volunteer shift manager, volunteer position as software engineer, volunteer position as social media manager...).

Pro Tip: Are you putting volunteer work on a resume as work experience? Name it that way. For example, "Hospital Experience," or "Accounting Experience." That way you do not need another word for "volunteer."

Even unrelated community service on a resumé can move you a long way closer to getting an interview with a potential employer. But you need to list it correctly. Put volunteer work in a special "volunteering" section of your resumé if:

- It is not related to the job offer
- You have a range of paid, related work experience.

For example, if you are applying for a position in a hospital, volunteer experience working in a second-hand shop or at a local homeless shelter are not related so you should not list them as experience. However, you can list them in the special volunteer section as it shows valuable qualities such as teamwork, competence and a community service mindset.

Pro Tip: Only 32% of applicants list volunteer work on a resumé. Yet most managers like it to be mentioned. Put it on your resumé and you will be in the top third of all job seekers.



Seek recommendation from volunteer organizations

Do not be ashamed to ask for recommendations from the organisations you volunteered for. It can make your application stand out as it means your skills, ethics and character can be verified. Anyone you have worked with can write a few sentences about your engagement and experience so far, as well as about your qualities as a collaborator. Reach out to those who have first-hand knowledge of your qualifications and work experience such as previous colleagues you managed, someone you chaired a volunteer project with, previous employers or clients.

Include certifications

You might have the skills you need to do a job well but not enough experience to qualify for an interview. In this case, listing a certification that verifies your relevant skillset and commitment to the industry may make up for what you lack in practical experience. Many employers are happy to hire employees who have already invested in their own professional development by pursuing certification.

If you received a certificate or diploma through volunteering, feel free to mention it on your CV. This will confirm the acquired skills you have stated. It will also confirm your experience so far and your volunteer engagement. You can also include certifications that are still in progress as long as you clearly label them as such and add the expected date of completion.

Remember to tailor your resume

It is important to tailor your resumé to each job opening. This means you should not submit a standard resumé to every position applied for. You may find that it makes sense to include your volunteer work for one job position, but it does not make sense to include it for another. For example, some organisations may have a company culture of giving back to the community; you can highlight that you fit in with that culture by including your volunteer work. Keep a master copy of your resumé with all of your work and volunteer work experience. Then, you can personalize it to each individual position.



VOLUNTEERING AS AN ADDITIONAL POINT FOR COLLEGE

Anyone from the age of 14 can volunteer in Lithuania in any non-profit organisation, as stipulated in the Law on Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania. Each organisation foresees the need for volunteers and the corresponding profile, and when meeting the expectations of both sides are coordinated live: tasks, the scope of activities, the schedule, communication and combining the possibilities of both parties. Any non-profit organisation can sign a bilateral volunteer agreement and use volunteers. Volunteers can find the organisation of interest independently in the database and apply directly to the organisation of interest or the SVO (organisation organising voluntary activities) in their county or municipality.

Youth affairs

Twice a year, basic registrations for the JST (youth affairs agency) program are announced, where young people from all municipalities of Lithuania can register. 3-4 additional registrations for vacant JST program places in specific municipalities and additional registrations for JST implementation places additionally financed by municipalities are also announced.

Every year the Lithuanian government decides the budget for youth activities and after the budget is received, JRA decides how many volunteering spots will be available. If there is an increased number of both accredited organisations and volunteers in one district, the municipality of that district may be asked for the additional budget.

This volunteering service program started in 2017-2018 and since then has changed the understanding of what volunteering is. Every year the application number increases because volunteering officially creates a safe environment for both organisations and volunteers where all their rights are protected.



Accreditation for organisations

There is a process for an organisation to get accredited. First, the organisation needs to submit an application where they explain their activities, plans and motivation for volunteers. Also, they need to list all the coordinators who would be able to work with volunteers. After that, JRA (youth affairs agency) sets up a live meeting with the organisation where they visit the facilities where the organisation perform their activities, talk with coordinators and evaluate if the organisation can work with volunteers and give them the best experience possible.

Information about accreditation
<https://jra.lt/jaunimui/suzinok-daugiau/savanoryste/po-akreditacija>



Certificate

Youth Voluntary Service is an intensive 6-month program. During the program for young people (aged 14 to 29) they volunteer for at least 35 hours per month in a selected accredited host organisation, meet once a month with a mentor appointed by the NGO organisation and learn to overcome difficulties, turning experience into lessons. The program is an opportunity not only to discover a field of activity that you like but also to get to know yourself better and to develop general competencies.

Volunteers who complete more than 3 months of service receive a JST (youth volunteering service) Certificate - a document confirming the skills acquired or strengthened during service, but only for up to 6 months. At least 35 hours per month continuous service gives recognition of 0.25 entrance points for admission to first-cycle studies. After the volunteering program ends, the organisation submits all the necessary documentation to JRA (youth affairs agency), such as monthly schedules, contracts, accomplishments etc. and then JRA issues an official certificate that is recognized by the state.

About the program

<https://jra.lt/jaunimui/suzinok-daugiau/savanoryste/jaunimo-savanoriska-tarnyba>

Voluntary activities must be carried out for at least 2 hours per week and at least 35 hours per month, but not less than 110 hours. Also for no more than 130 hours within 3 months from the date of the start of the voluntary activity specified in the Agreement and for at least 240 hours within 6 months. It must be carried out by the deadline set in the Agreement according to the volunteer's schedule of youth volunteering agreed by the volunteer, the host organisation and the NGO.

0.25 entrance point is a large number and can be the deciding points for a financed spot at university. For example, in 2023 the minimal point for entrance in university is 5.4. The points consists of your exam results and the average grades from each subject. The higher score you have the more chances the student has to receive financial support. Over the years we have many success stories where these additional 0.25 points were the reason for receiving a financed spot at university.

**0.25 entrance points
for admission to
first-cycle studies**

WORK ACTIVITY ALLOWANCE FOR VOLUNTEERS

Being involved in the volunteer activities of local organisations allows one to gain new knowledge, gain experience from different areas of work, meet people and expand one's network. On the other hand, by volunteering, one contributes to the realisation of the mission of the organisation they help and enriches them with knowledge and experience.

Volunteering while receiving social assistance also opens additional employment opportunities. In Slovenia, the government offers incentives for recipients of social assistance to become active as volunteers. Volunteers who receive social assistance are entitled to additional benefits – an allowance for work activity.

What is work activity allowance?

Work activity allowance is defined by the Act on Social Security Benefits. The Act regulates the right to financial social assistance, its beneficiaries, the conditions for entitlement to financial social assistance, the amount, the allocation period and the payment method, assessment procedure, repayment, financing, monitoring and data collection.

The Act on Social Security Benefits provides that persons who have concluded a contract on performing voluntary internships and those who have signed a written agreement on voluntary work under the law governing volunteering are entitled to work activity allowance.

Work activity allowance is a supplement to the minimum income of a working single person or an adult family member, intended to encourage work or to maintain the motivation to work. Under the law individuals with a signed agreement on voluntary work are considered to be working for 60 to 128 hours per month.

How does a volunteer obtain a work activity allowance?

First, an individual must join one of the non-governmental organisations classified as a volunteer organisation. Volunteer organisations are all registered as such in the Register of Volunteer Organisations at AJPES (Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services).

Once they choose an organisation where they wish to volunteer, they must enter into a written agreement on voluntary work for at least 24 hours per year.



WHO CAN OBTAIN A WORK ACTIVITY ALLOWANCE?

Work activity allowance can be obtained by first-time recipients as well as long-term recipients of social assistance if they meet the conditions for obtaining a work activity allowance.

First time applicants for social assistance

When registering for social assistance, people who apply for social assistance for the first time and are volunteers in the voluntary organisation(s) must attach a copy of the agreement on voluntary work.

For how long can one receive the work activity allowance?

Recipients of social benefits who are active volunteers are entitled to a work activity allowance every month for the validity of the decision on eligibility to receive social assistance. However, the work activity allowance is paid only for the months when voluntary work is performed.

To receive the work activity allowance each month, recipients must submit a monthly volunteer work report to their Social Services office to prove their activity. If the volunteer is granted social assistance for a period of up to 3 months, they can submit the report after the expiration of those months for the entire past period.

If the individual performed volunteer work but did not submit proof of work, they are not entitled to the work activity allowance. The same applies if the volunteer did not perform volunteer work in the month.

Recipients of social assistance who just started volunteering

Recipients of social assistance who did not have a signed agreement on voluntary work when applying for social assistance must submit a completed form for reporting changes regarding the exercise of rights from public funds at their Social Services Office along with a copy of the agreement on voluntary work.



The amount of the work activity allowance

The amount of work activity allowance for all recipients of social assistance, is determined by law based on the number of hours worked. Under the law, individuals with a written agreement on voluntary work are considered to be working for 60 to 128 hours per month, regardless of the actual number of volunteer hours performed. Thus, those individuals are entitled to the lowest amount of work activity allowance.

FROM VOLUNTEERING TO EMPLOYMENT

What is volunteering?

The scientific understanding of volunteering, in its multiple aspects, goes back decades. From sociology to economics, from theology to ethics, various sciences have been dedicated to the understanding and study of volunteering, its importance and the motivations and justifications underpinning it. The notion of volunteering means different things to different people. For some people it may be immediately associated with supporting a sick or disabled person, for others with other types of social, psychological or clinical support. For still other people, volunteering will be immediately related to nature, whether fire fighting or conserving biodiversity. Also military activity, animal protection, politics and the arts are commonly related to volunteering. Regardless of the typology of volunteering, social sciences point to six common factors that guide voluntary activity.

Motivations for volunteering

- 1) Contribution to society;
- 2) Social interaction;
- 3) Personal development;
- 4) Learning about the environment;
- 5) Generic sense of environmental ethics;
- 6) Affection for the volunteering location.

point of view
Volunteer []
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ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING IN LOUSADA

The environmental volunteering experiences developed in the municipality of Lousada since 2016 are part of the Municipal Strategy for Sustainability , which has the clear aim of involving the community both in decision-making processes and in the subsequent implementation of the environmental projects defined. Environmental volunteering extends to various age groups and has various purposes, structuring itself, in practice, into various projects that have their own objectives, methodologies and resources.

Why?

1. Regional /Territorial development;
2. Better life quality;
3. Creation of green jobs;
4. Attraction of youth;
5. Promote active citizenship:
 - participation
 - literacy/awareness
 - training
 - personal development
 - volunteering

VOLUNTEERING – SOCIAL INCLUSION – EMPLOYMENT ?

The passion and self-giving of volunteers has an intangible value to which no numerical indicator can ever do justice. Also on an individual basis, volunteering brings a wide range of benefits that ultimately have repercussions on overall public health and communities. In this sense we have seen the growth of associations such as Bioliving. Plus others were started (based in Lousada - A Verde) with the purpose of more environmental volunteering. Due to these good practices the demand for youth employment in these areas grew.

The formal environmental volunteering carried out in the municipality of Lousada between 2016 and 2020 represents an investment value, by the volunteers, of more than 200,000 euros. However, the material and immaterial value derived from it is incalculable.

Results achieved in environmental volunteering initiatives carried out between September 2016 and August 2020, in the Municipality of Lousada.

PROJECT	OBJECTIVES	TARGET AUDIENCE	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS	NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER HOURS	MAIN RESULTS
PLANTING LOUSADA	Territorial renaturalisation	All	5.700	12.000	+5.0000 trees planted +20 hectares restored
LOUSADA GUARDA-RIOS	Protection of rivers and streams	Families and schools	835	3.340	+15000 litres of rubbish collected +14 km of water lines under monitoring
LOUSADA PONDS	Conservation and creation of ponds for wildlife	Families and schools	620	2.480	+16 ponds built
INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING	Environmental upgrading of degraded areas	Young foreigners (18-30 years)	80	7.680	+7 hectares of invasive plants controlled Contribution to the other projects
YOUTH VOLUNTEERING	Biodiversity enhancement	Young Portuguese (18-30 years)	45	1.800	Support for the enhancement of the municipality's Micro-Reserves Network Contribution to other projects
GREEN GIANTS	Enhancement of tree heritage	Young people and adults	15	1.468	+3000 large trees identified
		Total	7.295	28.768	

BUILDING SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

Volunteering in Malta is a common practice embedded in the culture. For years, people have attended and belonged to various volunteering organisations, specifically smaller village-based volunteer organisations with a specific focus issue.

People move to and between the Maltese islands, both locals and newly arrived migrants. The changing demographics of many villages is affecting the understanding of voluntary activities and cultural events.

As a municipality, the Gharb local council, we have understood this movement of people and the changes it brings to the village society affecting participation and integration. Following a study of these trends and understanding that our village population now has around 21% of its residents being foreign, be it economic migrants, Maltese natives moving to our island or young Gharb people moving back to the island after completing their studies in Malta. Local NGOs have aided the Gharb local council in understanding how to study voluntary activities and cultural events in the light of demographic changes. The Gharb local council understands they should be open to change. While at the same time initiating socially inclusive activities and bringing new inhabitants closer to the society while at the same time keeping traditions alive.

The methodology followed was:

1. Performing a review of the inhabitants of the village.
2. The organisation of a citizens' meeting to identify their needs vis-a-vis activities.
3. The organisation of a meeting with active and non-active NGOs and volunteers.
4. Identification of the needs of the voluntary organisations.
5. Offering assistance in logistical support.
6. Offering the use of a community centre for meetings.
7. Assisting in funding opportunities for voluntary organisations.
8. Assisting in the identification of networking possibilities.
9. The organisation of training courses.



Following these identified methodologies, we can see changes in the operation and organisation of various cultural/social activities where the concept focused on the core area of the volunteer group. Most started incorporating ideas and activities that brought non-local residents closer to the society and integrated society through activities assisting in the social integration of non-locals.

To further explain the methodologies used to improve and build a more inclusive society, we took examples of 2 local NGOs with a long history of voluntary activism in our village. Through their examples, we wish to show how to create a more inclusive society.

Example 1: Għaqda infioration Għarb

Għarb in the Isle Gozo is well known for the infiorata (the art of creating images, traditionally with flower petals) prepared in the church hall on the village feast day. In recent years the Grupp Infjoraturi Għarb even had opportunities to take this art abroad. Although they remained in Gozo in 2020, the group still had the honour to exhibit their work abroad virtually – this time in Tokyo.

The pandemic disrupted the group's plans in 2020, as they had intended to exhibit their work at the International Congress of Infioratas in Tokyo at the end of May. This problem, however, did not dampen the spirits of the Gozitan enthusiast volunteers, who had worked on a project inspired by Japanese culture and entitled 'Dreams of Tokyo'.

The secretary of the Grupp Infjoraturi Għarb, Marika Farrugia, explained that this had been a virtual initiative of the International Association. It was a token of appreciation to the group members preparing for the Congress in Japan. The Gozitan group prepared a set-up with coloured salt, on which some 15 volunteers worked, in small groups and at different times, to follow the directives of the health authorities.

"Michael Bajada prepared the design. We took pictures and video footage of the design and forwarded them to the organisers. After, the organisers created a video project with all the infioratas from all over the world and broadcasted it at the same time the Congress was supposed to happen in Tokyo," Marika Farrugia explained.

As part of their initiative, the infiorata voluntary group organises various training opportunities open to everyone interested in art and teaches them the methodologies used. During the training, they invite foreign groups to attend and share their ideas and working methods. It is interesting to know that these activities have brought locals, foreign guests and several migrant citizens together to further enlarge and share experiences, ideas and collaboration. After the training, the infiorata voluntary group organises an open-air activity in the main village square. At the open-air activity, group members and new volunteers can create their artistic impressions in flower petals or coloured salts. Visitors are welcome to come and observe how a local traditional art form is becoming a learning experience of inclusion by having non-native participants working together. They can also discuss the training and their work with the participants.

<https://tvmnews.mt/en/news/watch-gharb-infiorata-with-a-japanese-touch/>

<https://gozo.news/83891/gharb-infjorata-display-inspires-solidarity-with-a-message-of-hope/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tCHOWcaFOE>

<https://www.gharbnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/pjazza-August-2020.pdf>

Example 2:

Ghaqda Vizzazzjoni Gharb

This group of volunteers keeps local traditions alive by creating various stained glass items, religious statues and other traditional, classical creations, all made by hand. The end products are used in the traditional feast, which takes place in June, and exhibited in the main square, church and public buildings.

The group understood that these traditional crafts were in danger of being lost. Elders who have mastered the trade started teaching the youth to learn and to keep the local traditions alive.

The main stakeholders and beneficiaries are the public of Gharb. They enjoy their work during the traditional local feast that covers a whole week.

The group raises its funds by doing restoration works for private households that still have their crafts at home. Through this they generate funds to be able to buy the needed materials. They also benefit from donations given during the feast, where people donate some money as a thank-you gesture when seeing the results of their work.

The group meets weekly in a small store. A private benefactor provided the space for the youths who devote their free time to these traditional crafts.

The produced products are displayed to the general public during the traditional feast and each year they add to the various products produced over the years.

An example of the appreciation of their products is through the number of requests from private people who ask them to do restoration of their statues and those who buy some of the stained glass products.

The most challenging issue for the organisation is keeping the young people active over the whole year, mainly because many of them study at the university in Malta and are not available during school. However, in June, many of them return home to Gozo. Thus the activity of the young and their numbers increase drastically just in time for the feast preparations.

Both examples show that a successful integration is a dynamic and multi-directional process that involves the mutual adaptation of migrants and of the host society, based on principles of the protection of fundamental rights, respect, tolerance and non-discrimination. It is a multi-dimensional issue that covers migrant's inclusion in economic, psychological, social, linguistic, navigational and civic spheres, as well as empowering host communities and other local actors to receive and engage with migrants.



INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN VOLUNTEERING



The mission of KOM 018 is to empower young people through the development and implementation of different programs to actively participate in the life of the community. Also to help them to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life for young people and the local community.

KOM 018 often uses creative methods of working with young people and implements creative and cultural projects (street art, photography, video production, organisation of music festivals etc.). The biggest part of the projects are focused on the inclusion of youth who have fewer opportunities. KOM 018 cooperates with a wide range of local institutions, sport clubs / associations and NGOs in the south of Serbia.

The most important resource for the working of KOM 018 are young people, both those directly involved in such activities as volunteers and activists and those who are indirectly involved as members of local communities where activities are implemented.

KOM 018 has partners all over the world and participation in activities in other countries is one of the motivations for young people to be active. Other reasons are to contribute to the improvement of the local community, personal development and growth. They learn much that is new, improve their already existing skills and competences and make new friendships, which is also one of the reasons for activism and voluntarism. Young people have the opportunity to participate in the organisation of the biggest hip-hop festival in the Balkans - "Dodji na Amfi" - which is presented as an example of good practice for volunteering and activism. KOM 018 provides opportunity for young people, not only regular volunteers, but also other young people to be active and to volunteer within the festival.

The organisation is also highly dedicated to keeping volunteers active all the time. This is because they are a source of new ideas and they also recognize problems and challenges in local communities, so their participation is very important in creating and implementing different programs and projects.

Usually, after the festival and after the international training organised in Nis, or other cities in partner countries, the number of volunteers and active young people constantly grows, since they are interested in this kind of activity.

KOM 018 uses non-formal education in its work, but also creative methods, such as photography, video, graphics, dance, hip-hop and rap music, stop animation and other creative forms. This is something that is attractive to young people, since they have an opportunity to create, to express themselves and to work with their peers, both on local and the international level. Constant work and dedication to young people, provision of different opportunities for participation on different topics and provision of opportunities to express themselves are the main reasons for young people to become involved in the work of the organisation and to be active in local communities.



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