

REPORT

**STATE OF THE
ART ABOUT
YOUTH
VOLUNTEERING
IN EUROPE**



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Municipality of Altea (Spain)



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Municipality of Athienou (Cyprus)



Industry Disruptors Game Changers
(Greece)



Asociația Scout Society (Romania)



Associação Juvenil de Deão (Portugal)



Hellenic Institute Of Cultural Diplomacy
(Netherlands)



Associazione InCo Molfetta (Italy)



Opcina Kalnik OpcinskoVijece Kalnik (Croatia)



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1. Introduction

Youth volunteering is an essential aspect of civil society and contributes significantly to the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. In recent years, many European communities have made volunteering a priority, with involvement from various agencies, individuals, and local officials.

Young people's participation and involvement in volunteering activities have multiple benefits, such as developing initiative, organizing time, and acquiring skills in communication, the environment, and social consciousness. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted volunteering activities in various ways, leading to new challenges and opportunities.

This report provides an overview of the state of the art about youth volunteering in Europe, focusing on the participation and engagement of young people in volunteering activities, the challenges and opportunities posed by the pandemic, and the measures taken to address them.

By examining the current state of youth volunteering in Europe, this report aims to provide insights into the importance of volunteering and the ways in which communities can support and encourage young people's engagement in volunteering activities amidst the pandemic.

2. Youth Volunteering in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Volunteering has been a priority for many people in various European communities, especially with the involvement of agencies, individuals, and local officials. Volunteering gives young people the opportunity to develop initiative, organize their time, and acquire skills in areas such as communication, the environment, and social consciousness.

In some communities, youth volunteers are the largest percentage, with engagement often starting from volunteering activities organized by schools and local organizations. Examples of volunteering activities include coastal clean-up days, services for elder people, meal preparation and delivery for the homeless.

However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has affected volunteering activities in various ways. During periods of lockdown, physical volunteering activities have been limited, leading to isolation and less celebration of holidays such as Christmas and Easter. The pandemic has disproportionately affected young people, who may suffer long-term negative effects on their economic situation, health, and well-being, such as missing opportunities for education, volunteering, and training.

On the other hand, the pandemic has also created new opportunities for virtual volunteering, and many organizations have shifted their programs online. This has made it easier for some young people to participate in volunteer activities, as they can do so from the safety of their own homes.

Despite the pandemic's challenges, volunteering has been a great pride for some communities, such as Molfetta, where the younger generations have been in the first line of helping their fellows, culminating their effort with successful vaccination campaigns.

In other communities such as Križevci, volunteering activities practically stopped during the pandemic, and after the pandemic, young people have been closed and

disinterested, so it has been challenging to reach them. However, interactive games, presentations, and social networks have become the main focus of attracting them back to volunteering and active participation in society.

In Romania, the number of volunteers has grown, but it is still lower compared to other European countries. The pandemic has significantly impacted young people's participation and engagement in volunteer activities in Romania and other countries.

Nevertheless, social and civic competences are being stimulated in many European communities through formal, non-formal, and informal learning, and partnerships between formal education providers, youth organizations, and youth work providers.

Overall, volunteering is always a function in society, and despite the pandemic, young people's engagement in volunteering activities in European communities continues to be essential for the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

3. Overcoming Obstacles: Strategies for Promoting Youth Volunteering in Europe

Youth volunteering is crucial to addressing the challenges facing society, and many European communities are working to encourage young people to get involved. However, there are obstacles to youth volunteering, such as the lack of youth organizations in some areas, inactive civic behavior, and the limited awareness of opportunities available. In Romania, many young people are unaware of the benefits of volunteering, and there is a lack of outreach by organizations. However, there is a significant proportion of young people who would like to volunteer, and the Youth Barometer of the Ministry of Youth and Sport shows that 56% of respondents said there is no Youth Centre in their city or town. In response, organizations are working to promote volunteering and build connections and cooperation between volunteers and other associations.

In some communities, such as Deão, youth volunteering is not a common practice, and organizations such as AJD are making a difference in promoting volunteering both nationally and internationally. In Molfetta, volunteering provides an opportunity for young people to develop a sense of belonging and reverse the trend of an aging population and emigration. However, youth organizations are struggling to find motivated and serious volunteers for their projects, and they are adapting to the new context by presenting themselves in a more engaging form and highlighting the fun involved while linking it to tangible learning outcomes.

At the national level, governments are investing in volunteering policy, and funding is provided to municipalities to encourage investment in voluntary work. At the local level, the right infrastructure is necessary to support volunteering with the aid of regional and local authorities. At the organizational level, recruitment, coaching, and retention of volunteers are essential. At the individual level, finding the time for volunteering between the demands of leisure and paid work is a challenge.

To address these challenges, local organizations and communities are taking action. They are communicating and disseminating their volunteering activities, organizing events to allow new people to meet them, and cultivating the volunteering mentality at an early stage. By promoting youth volunteering and addressing the challenges facing it, communities can support and encourage young people's engagement in volunteering activities, contributing to a more engaged and connected society.

4. Supporting and Encouraging Youth Volunteering: Measures and Policies Implemented by Local Authorities

Local authorities have implemented various measures and policies to support and encourage youth volunteering. Some of these measures include offering services of high social interest, having clear administrative organization, guaranteeing free participation in common actions, and providing members with the opportunity to express an opinion and participate in public affairs.

In Romania, there is no national policy, program or strategy dedicated to youth volunteering, but the Ministry of Youth and Sports grants funds for small projects to youth NGOs. Monitoring and evaluation measures are not strong, but according to the Youth Barometer, 52% of young people have been participating in volunteering activities.

In the Netherlands, municipalities have the legal task of supporting volunteers and youth volunteers, and the Social Support Act provides the context for municipalities to conduct integral policies. National programs have stimulated volunteering in the past, and evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of these initiatives come from self-assessment and assessment evaluation sessions and forms that are circulated from time to time.

In Križevci, Croatia, the Youth Center is financed thanks to the State Office for Demography and Youth and the City of Križevci, and the city also recognizes the quality of their work by offering help in organizing various events and inviting them to include volunteers.

While in Molfetta, Italy, an official list of volunteers and volunteering associations has been created to recognize the efforts of civil society during the pandemic and to be ready for any future occurrences. In the province of Bari, CSV's (Volunteering Service Centers) support and manage various services for the non-profit world. The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth promotes youth volunteering projects aimed

at environmental sustainability, forest protection, citizenship, gender equality, social entrepreneurship, and human rights.

At the international level, the European Solidarity Corps program has had a great impact on the development of youth volunteering organizations, such as AJD in Portugal. In Croatia, the municipality council has implemented a local volunteering bank, and the Municipal Youth Council is starting to address youth volunteering and its promotion.

Local authorities in general support and encourage youth volunteering by implementing volunteering activities in collaboration with public services, promoting certain volunteering activities, collaborating with public offices and services, and offering direct support through assistance and services when needed.

5. Best Practices by country

5.1 - Asociația Scout Society (Romania)

Engage Connect and Empower Youth via Books

The Engage Connect and Empower Youth via Books project is an initiative that seeks to address the issue of limited access to books for children and young people in rural areas in Romania. The project is being implemented by a group of 5 volunteers, supported by Scout Society, and it began in 2022 and will end in 2023.

The project's main aim is to contribute to increasing the accessibility of children and young people from rural areas to books. The project addresses a social challenge present in rural areas and aims to address this existent issue in the rural communities with the help of volunteers and local institutions, thus creating a better future for the local community and its members.

Why is the project important?

1. Through the project, we offer equal chances to young people to access education and culture.
2. Instill the love of reading in young people.
3. Encourage young people to reach out to a world beyond school and home.
4. Help young people from rural areas own books or even their very first book.
5. Contribute to protecting the environment by reusing books. We reused the books that many people do not want to keep by offering them to young people who cannot afford to buy books.
6. Create solidarity between young people themselves and between young people and the broad community. As this is a project created by young people for young people, we raise awareness about staying connected, engaging with our needs, and empowering each other through culture.

7. 2022 is the first year when Romania introduces the National Reading Day, on 15th February. With our project, we support this National Day and encourage reading among youth by bridging access of young people to books.

Development

The development of the "Engage Connect and Empower Youth via Books" project is going better than expected. The project has received a lot of positive feedback and support from the local community and has exceeded the initial expectations of the volunteers. A big number of people from local communities have reached out and donated books.

The volunteers have been able to collaborate with local schools to identify areas of need. They have also been able to engage with the broader community to raise awareness about the importance of reading and the benefits it brings to young people.

As the project continues to progress, the volunteers will continue to evaluate its impact and make adjustments as necessary. They are optimistic about the future of the project and the positive changes it can bring to the community. Overall, the development of this project is a testament to the power of community engagement and youth-led initiatives in addressing social challenges and promoting social cohesion.

Outcomes

The project has achieved significant outcomes since its launch in 2022. So far, the project has collected over 700 books through various donations from the local community.

The project has already distributed these books to 3 local schools in middle and high school classes.

Visual content



5.2 - Hellenic Institute Of Cultural Diplomacy (The Netherlands)

The Temporary Stimulation Voluntary Work Programme

The Temporary Stimulation Voluntary Work Programme "Tijdelijke Stimuleringsregeling Vrijwilligerswerk" 2001-2005 was an initiative of the Dutch government, which allowed local authorities to embark on projects to support volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. Fifty per cent of the costs were met by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports. Varying according to the number of

inhabitants in each municipality, and the characteristics of each project, the programme aimed at:

- ✚ Improving volunteers' skills;
- ✚ Recruiting new volunteers, especially from under-represented groups, such as young people or ethnic minorities;
- ✚ Supporting the administrative work of non-profit organisations;
- ✚ The programme was developed until January 2005, in line with other local policies.

5.3 - Industry Disruptors Game Changers (Greece)

Elder people in care homes and nursing homes, living with some form of dementia.

The team of Thallo states: Our first contact with the Third Age group and with people living with some form of dementia was 7 years ago, through a pilot social program in local nursing homes. In the years that followed, we indulged in a research process with the aim of creating a method that would concern every person regardless of age or stage of dementia, easily adaptable to different populations, inside and outside nursing homes.

We noticed that the participation of the elderly in the program - and especially those living with dementia - became more energetic, noticeable and often with the presence of a sample of logical flow of thought when the message was conveyed in the form of consecutive associations. These associations were either verbal or visual, in any case combined sensory.

Following this finding in practice and changing the intervals between the associations, we noticed that regardless of their mental state and their experiential, life and social history, the elderly were increasingly involved in the action, socialized and their mood improved dramatically.

We stood on this finding and continued to experiment with frequent visits to groups of seniors, both on a group and individual level. Consequently, we developed our own theory which we called the Associative Thinking Principle which we continue to apply and evolve."

In its application, the Thallo method is a combination of recreational activities implemented through the Principle of Associative Thinking. Examples include: Board Games, Music, Music Movement, Singing, Sensory Memory, Cooking, Gardening, Crafts, Isolated Listening and Virtual Reality. These actions are integrated into the flow of each meeting while adapting to the dynamics and needs of each group of beneficiaries with the aim of their active and not passive participation.

Every week, hundreds of guests are entertained in aged care facilities.

Since March 2020, the visits to nursing homes have been suspended for the safety of the beneficiaries and the action of Thallo has been adapted and implemented digitally with the help of technological means.

Outcomes

Thallo team, consists of young people who volunteer for the elders. During the pandemic, they developed new technological means to entertain, interact and volunteer for the elders living in nursing homes. Some of the means they use are 3D masks, online communication applications, electronic equipment etc.

At the same time, they implement a calling centre for these people, where volunteers are there to talk and discuss, even on a daily basis.

Visual content





5.4 - Associazione InCo Molfetta (Italy)

In May 2020, amidst the heights of the pandemic, a group of volunteers gathered to clean the public beaches of the city. The goal was not only to win back a piece of the coast for public use, but also to send a message to everybody during those hard times that taking care of common goods was not less important than other services as the health system or basic groceries for people in need. It was through this and many other small initiatives that social cohesion was preserved during the pandemic and helped boost volunteering after it.

Development

During the first months of lockdown everybody's attention was directed at easing the needs of vulnerable people, while other aspects of community life had to be put on hold. After a few months this resulted in an increased perception of abandonment in public spaces, where littering was starting to accumulate faster than the public cleaning company was able to remove it. It sparked a sense of initiative among private citizens in order to take action in first person in favour of the environment. Soon after a group of people coordinated with the public cleaning company and started to meet regularly in their free time to proceed and clean several public spaces, starting from the coast.

Outcomes

After a few months this initiative grew bigger and by the month of June a full calendar of events for the following summer period, linked to the clean ups, was put in place. To this day regular clean ups are still taking place and they keep involving private citizens (mostly young people), volunteering associations and public authorities. This kind of initiative was fundamental to strengthen a common sense of belonging to the community, while improving the quality of the surrounding environment. Furthermore, the same volunteers moved to explain their values to the schools, providing a good example to follow for the next generations.

Visual content



5.5 - Opcina Kalnik OpcinskoVijece Kalnik (Croatia)

The Križevci Youth Center participated as a partner in the organization of the half marathon organized by the Sports Association of the City of Križevci and the City of Križevci as well as the Municipality of Kalnik.

The goal was to promote a healthy life and sports as well as the event itself. Then find volunteers to hand out water at key points in the race as well as hand out prizes. Many young people in the city are involved in sports, and this was an ideal opportunity for them to volunteer in their area. In cooperation with the aforementioned, we reported on the upcoming event as well as on the same event from previous years through social networks and local portals. We successfully collected a large number of applications for competitors as well as dozens of volunteers.

Development

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Outcomes

This whole project only strengthened the ties between us and the sports association as well as the city, which brought us more cooperation on similar projects, but also new ideas for the premiere of the same in 2023.

Visual content



5.6 - Associação Juvenil de Deão (Portugal)

Learning from change

This project aimed to promote activities in the context of intergenerational solidarity and civic participation, promoting entertainment, dissemination of information and assistance to the local community, especially the elderly.

Development

In 2020, for three months (July, August and September), a group, consisting of six young people from AJD in collaboration with the Parish Social Center of Deão, the group of Cavaquinhos of AJD (Ao Toque do Cavaquinho) and the group of concertinas of Sta. Leocádia, brought traditional Portuguese music to the home of the elderly, who had been in social isolation for almost four months. This project, Learning

with change, promoted by AJD under the Generation Z program, was funded by the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth.

Outcomes

- Honourable Mention at the Young Volunteering Good Practice Awards | North Region | Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth.

- From July 2020 until September 2020, the project reached the majority of elderly people from Deão and acted as a response to social isolation, promoting culture, the spirit of mutual aid, and civic participation of the entire community, especially providing moments of leisure and entertainment to the elderly.

Visual content





5.7 - Municipality of Athienou (Cyprus)

The Kleanthios Community Home for the Aged, the Konstantineleneio Center for Adults, the Community Nursing Center, and the Social Welfare Committee are all exemplary voluntary programs that operate under the guidance of dedicated Volunteering Management Committees. These programs provide essential care, support, and social services to a diverse range of individuals in need, including the elderly, children aged 0-3, and those requiring social benefits and care.

With the support of over 60 permanent and occasional sponsors, as well as local companies committed to increased social responsibility, these voluntary programs are able to provide high-quality services to those in need. The programs also engage numerous volunteers, who play a critical role in supporting the day-to-day operations of these organizations.

Beyond their core services, these programs also promote intergenerational interaction and cohesion through a range of voluntary activities that are open to the public. By fostering a sense of community and encouraging active participation in

voluntary work, these programs help to promote the wellbeing of our society as a whole.

In recognition of the vital role that volunteering plays in maintaining the health and wellbeing of our society, our municipality is committed to the ongoing development and promotion of voluntary programs. Through the moral satisfaction of offering one's time and resources to help others, we can all benefit from the positive impact of intergenerational cooperation and community involvement.



5.8 - Municipality of Altea (Spain)

Violet Point and Rainbow Point.

Altea is committed to preventing gender violence and LGBTQphobia. With the aim of promoting equality and respect for all individuals regardless of their gender, sexual orientation or identity, the city provides a range of resources and support for those who may be at risk of discrimination, harassment or violence.

There are several associations and NGO's in Altea that are dedicated to promoting women's rights, preventing gender violence and providing support to those who have experienced violence. These organizations offer a range of services, including counseling, legal advice and emergency assistance. Some of the most prominent associations and NGO's in Altea include the Women's Association of Altea, the Feminist Collective of Altea, and the Association for the Prevention of Gender Violence.

In addition to supporting women, Altea is also committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment for the LGTBQ+ community. The city provides resources and support for those who have experienced discrimination or violence based on their sexual orientation or identity. There are several associations and NGO's in Altea that are dedicated to promoting LGTBQ+ rights, including the LGTBQ+ Association of Altea and the Rainbow Association.

Altea is committed to showing institutional support for women and girls and ensuring that they feel safe and secure in the city. The local government provides resources and support for victims of gender violence, including emergency shelters and counseling services. The city also has a specialized police unit that is trained to handle cases of gender violence and provide support to victims.

Similarly, Altea is committed to showing institutional support for the LGTBQ+ community and providing a safe and secure environment for all individuals. The city has implemented policies and programs to promote diversity and tolerance, including training for public officials and initiatives to raise awareness about LGTBQ+ issues.

Development

Acting before it happens, through the Violet Point and the Rainbow Point. The aim is to prevent, inform and educate, citizens on gender equality and LGTBQ+ rights. Especially, at times of large influx of people in the street, such as local festivals and music concerts. Until now, these Points have professionals from Social Services and associations, but our intention is to also incorporate young people from secondary schools. We think that if these Points can count on young people, this will make it easier for other young people, to approach them more naturally and confidently during the festivities. We are currently carrying out awareness workshops on Equality

and LGBTI+ in high schools. We also have a design contest for the 8M and 25M posters for high school students, with significant youth participation. We are designing a brief training itinerary for young people, who want to collaborate in the Violet Point and the Rainbow Point and see how to channel this future volunteering.

Visual content

