



European
Commission



Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities

Executive summary

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate B — Youth, Education and Erasmus+
Unit B.3 — Youth, Volunteer Solidarity and Traineeships Office

E-mail: eac-youth@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities

Executive summary

Prepared by PPMI Group
in cooperation with EPRD



Acknowledgement

The study team thanks external experts Ms Susie Nicodemi and Dr Max Fras for their contribution.

Getting in touch with the EU

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:

- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11
(certain operators may charge for these calls),
- at the following standard number: +32 22999696 or
- by email via: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

LEGAL NOTICE

This document has been prepared for the European Commission; however, it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020

© European Union, 2020

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is regulated by Decision 2011/833/EU (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EU copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

Image(s) © European Union

Print ISBN 978-92-76-15325-2 doi: 10.2766/308380

PDF ISBN 978-92-76-15326-9 doi: 10.2766/7285

Introduction

Purpose and scope of the study

The Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union was one of the key European policy initiatives supporting volunteering activities. The Council Recommendation recognised the existence of obstacles to the cross-border mobility of young volunteers, and proposed a number of recommendations for the Member States and the European Commission to set up a framework and to facilitate cross-border cooperation in volunteering activities. The Work Plan for the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021 includes a review of the 2008 Council Recommendation (during the second half of 2020) and the establishment of an Expert Group on the subject. This mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) **study supports the review of the Council Recommendation** by complementing the work of the Expert Group. The **purpose of the study** is to identify the key obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities that persist at policy and organisational levels across the EU Member States, and to formulate concrete policy recommendations that can be fed directly into the review of the Recommendation.

For the purpose of the study, solidarity activities are defined as the engagement of young people in activities that contribute to strengthening cohesion, solidarity and democracy in Europe, with a particular emphasis on promoting social inclusion. Solidarity activities may take the form of volunteering, jobs or traineeships.

This assignment was carried out by PPMI Group (www.ppmi.it) with the assistance of EPRD (Office for Economic Policy and Regional Development) as a subcontractor, as well as individual external experts. The project commenced in June 2019 and ended in January 2020.

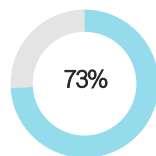
Methodological approach

The study was informed by evidence gathered and analysed using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. These included extensive desk research and the mapping of information at country level, resulting in the preparation of 28 country fiches; analysis of administrative and monitoring data on European Solidarity Corps projects and the Commission's survey of European Voluntary Service participants; interviews with officials from the EC, stakeholders at EU level, National Agencies and National Authorities, as well as representatives of the schemes/projects selected for good-practice case studies; a survey of organisations that hold the European Solidarity Corps Quality Label or are accredited under Erasmus+ youth volunteering. In addition, five good-practice case studies were prepared and a workshop with the Expert Group on the mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity was organised in Brussels to discuss the study's findings and to support the development of study recommendations.

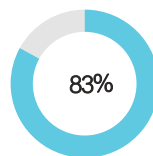
Scope of cross-border solidarity activities in the EU

EU possesses an active volunteering environment, but obstacles persist

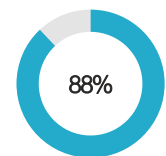
Overall, the EU possesses an active volunteering environment in which one-third of young people indicated to have volunteered in the last 12 months (2019 Flash Eurobarometer 478) and 8% participated in cross-border volunteering (2017 Flash Eurobarometer 455). According to the study's survey results, the majority of volunteering organisations agree that sufficient opportunities exist for both in-country and cross-border volunteering. Most EU Member States possess one or more national/regional level schemes supporting cross-border volunteering and solidarity activities among young people, but due to the varying scope and content of these schemes, the **European Solidarity Corps remains one of the main instruments for cross-border solidarity activities in many (and especially in smaller) EU Member States**. However, marked differences exist between the Member States with regard to the popularity of volunteering, volunteering opportunities, and the development of volunteering culture. Numerous obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities persist despite being addressed by the 2008 Council Recommendation, indicating that further actions are required both at EU and national level.



of survey respondents claim volunteering is popular (32%) or that a tradition is developing (41%)



of survey respondents say that there are enough opportunities to volunteer in-country



of survey respondents say that there are enough opportunities to volunteer abroad

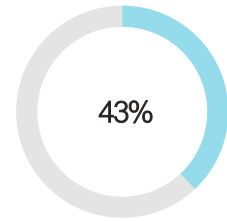
Obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities

The conclusions on the key obstacles and corresponding recommendations provided in this section apply to cross-border solidarity activities in general, but the removal of such obstacles and the implementation of the proposed recommendations is also crucial to ensuring the effective and efficient functioning of the European Solidarity Corps programme. The key obstacles summarised in the chapters below are also highly relevant to inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

Marked differences exist in administrative and legal frameworks on volunteering across the MS

The study concludes that the key barrier in relation to the administrative and regulatory frameworks governing the volunteering field is their diversity, which results in a lack of alignment among EU Member States. Most Member States have legal acts and definitions of volunteers and volunteering in place, but they differ significantly and do not ensure a clear legal status for volunteers. In addition, the lack of regulation of open-market traineeships in most EU Member States complicates the promotion of the traineeships and jobs strand of the European Solidarity Corps. These provisions and regulations fall under the

competence of various institutions and policy areas on the national level and thus imply a need for strong cross-ministerial collaboration. **The study recommends strengthening collaboration between Member States to achieve the better alignment of the administrative and legal frameworks that regulate volunteering and open-market traineeships both at national and at EU level, as well as the clarification of the legal status of volunteers and participants in other solidarity activities.** These objectives could be achieved through continuous and close cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation and information-sharing between policy-makers and key stakeholders, encouraged by the EC through peer-learning; the exchange of good practices; guidelines, toolkits and recommendations provided by the EC outlining at least minimum standards at EU level on the legal status of volunteers and participants in other solidarity activities, as well as minimum requirements for social protection.



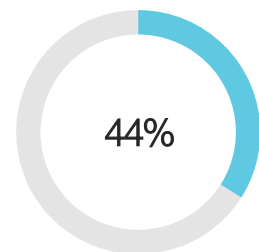
of survey respondents claim that there is no clear legal framework defining volunteering in their countries

Volunteers face difficulties in obtaining visa and residence permits

In many Member States, no special provisions exist to regulate the entrance of volunteers from third countries, and thus visa applications become an unclear and burdensome process. The 2008 Council Recommendation and Directive 2016/801, which include provisions for the issuing of visas to third country nationals, contributed to the development of visa and residence permit facilitation in some Member States, but problems still persist. This **report recommends that Member States clarify immigration and other related laws** by including volunteering and other solidarity activities as a ground *per se* to obtain a visa and residence permit, and by creating a fast-track visa procedure.

Provision and portability of entitlements and benefits to volunteers are not uniformly ensured

The provision and portability of entitlements and benefits such as health insurance and unemployment or disability benefits, along with the taxation of various reimbursements, are important factors for long-term cross-border volunteers. Lack of social protection provisions for volunteers, together with the possibility of losing entitlements and benefits – and their lack of portability – were identified by the study as obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities. To address these issues, **Member States should clarify the entitlements and benefits available to volunteers.** To ensure the portability of entitlements and benefits, Member States should work towards a better-defined and aligned legal status for volunteers, aiming at increased consistency across the EU in the legal status of cross-border volunteers. The European Commission or the Presidency of the Council could support and mediate these efforts by developing a roadmap with specific recommendations for the Member States to implement the minimum European standards agreed



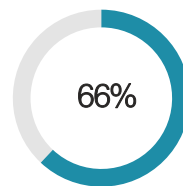
of survey respondents say that young people receiving state welfare payments might lose them if they become volunteers

for volunteers' benefits and entitlements. Furthermore, **better cross-sectoral cooperation at national level** is required to ensure that issues relating to entitlements and benefits that fall under different policy areas and ministries, such as those relating to social welfare or taxation, can be solved effectively.

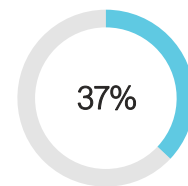
Awareness of cross-border volunteering opportunities and the recognition of volunteering experience are lacking

Even though the majority of volunteering organisations agree that sufficient opportunities exist for both in-country and cross-border volunteering, the fragmentation or lack of efforts to raise awareness of the value and benefits of cross-border volunteering experience, as well as of opportunities to volunteer abroad, is a further obstacle identified by the study. **Better dissemination of information on volunteering opportunities could be achieved by creating 'one-stop shop' websites; linking the European Youth Portal to sources of information about volunteering schemes at national level; promoting volunteering activities in formal and secondary education institutions; and involving key stakeholders and employment agencies to popularise volunteering as a career-development opportunity.**

Another closely related obstacle is the lack of unified national frameworks for the recognition of the skills and competences acquired through volunteering, and a lack of recognition for the impact of volunteering. These issues should be addressed by **encouraging the Member States to use existing European instruments (Youthpass/Europass/Diploma Supplement) for the recognition of competences and skills acquired through volunteering. The benefits and the value of volunteering to communities and to the society should be further promoted by highly visible initiatives and events at national and EU level.**



of survey respondents say that information on cross-border volunteering is not adequately disseminated



of organisations surveyed say that young people perceive long-term volunteering in another country as a 'lost year' in their employment record

There is a need to ensure the quality of volunteering and increase the capacity of organisations

The study also identified the need to ensure the quality of volunteering placements. The survey results show that the majority of volunteering organisations in the EU hold a positive view of their capacity to implement volunteering activities. However, the lack of stable funding to implement cross-border solidarity activities was identified as a relevant obstacle. To ensure the high quality of cross-border volunteering experience and to encourage the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, **the European Commission could support the further development of quality standards for volunteering that clearly define the status and tasks of volunteers, as well as identifying specific tools and strategies to reach and include young people with fewer opportunities.**

Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities is lacking

Desk research confirmed that in a number of countries volunteering is still widely considered to be an activity for upper/more affluent classes, and people with fewer opportunities are underrepresented in the sector. However, 67% of the organisations surveyed positively assessed their capacity and willingness to include young people with fewer opportunities in solidarity activities. **The study recommends that the Member States and the Commission further develop tools and long-term strategies to increase the inclusion and participation in solidarity activities of young people with fewer opportunities.** This could be achieved by improving the outreach of volunteering schemes and supporting capacity building within organisations.

Specific challenges for the European Solidarity Corps

The flexibility of the Corps and, as a result, its inclusiveness could be improved

The study determined that the obstacles and challenges faced by the European Solidarity Corps are similar to those pertaining to cross-border solidarity activities in general, outlined above. However, several additional challenges exist that relate specifically to the development and successful implementation of the Corps. The inclusion in the Programme of young people with fewer opportunities was identified as a challenge that could be addressed by improving awareness of the various flexible opportunities available under the scheme. **The Corps should promote more strongly the short-term volunteering opportunities it offers, which may be attractive to young people with fewer opportunities who lack resources for long-term cross-border volunteering activities.**

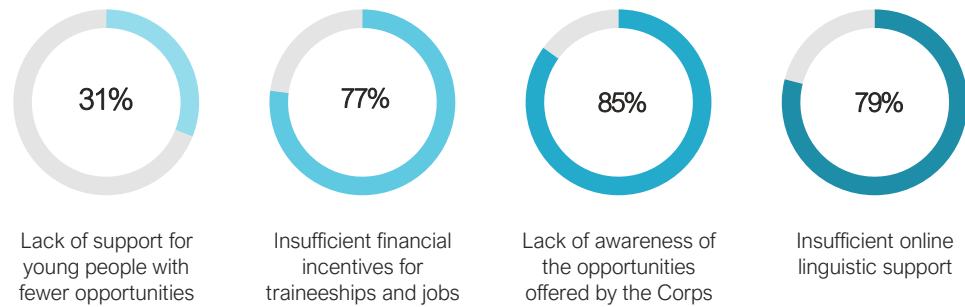
Solidarity traineeships and jobs are not sufficiently attractive

The study found that the popularity of the jobs and traineeships strand of the European Solidarity Corps is low. This stems from several issues, including the fact that the strand is relatively new; a lack of understanding as to what solidarity jobs and traineeships entail; and a lack of capacity/willingness among host organisations to cover the costs of traineeships. Another obstacle is the lack of clear legal definitions for open-market traineeships in many Member States, which can lead to the poor quality of such traineeships, or in some cases even make them illegal. This report recommends that the **Member States and other stakeholders should consider various possibilities for the co-funding of traineeships/jobs projects under the Corps programme**, in order to improve their attractiveness to organisations.

Young people lack awareness of the opportunities offered by the Corps

Lack of outreach and awareness of the European Solidarity Corps programme was also identified as an issue. Outreach could be improved by further developing the European Solidarity Corps communication strategy, in order to establish the Corps as a well-known and reliable brand with a strong identity. Furthermore, remodelling and simplification of the European Youth Portal, including the establishment of an active alumni network, would contribute to the promotion of the programme, especially among young people with fewer opportunities. The Corps could also make itself more accessible to this group by improving its Online Linguistic Support tool or providing alternative language support and training.

The organisations surveyed identified the following issues in relation to the European Solidarity Corps



Implementation and review of the 2008 Council Recommendation

The 2008 Council Recommendation has achieved a limited impact and that awareness of it has been low

The study concludes that the overall impact of the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers has been limited, due to its non-binding character, the lack of specific measures indicated, and an absence of follow-up tools for its implementation. Awareness of the Council Recommendation was also lacking among policymakers. It should nevertheless be acknowledged that the Recommendation has contributed to the development of national youth strategies and to the unblocking of some obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities, such as visa issues, in certain Member States. In general, the participants in the Expert Group workshop on the mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity agreed that the importance of volunteering on the policy agenda has increased over the last decade, both at national and at EU level (for example, the introduction of the dedicated EU-wide, cross-border programme the European Solidarity Corps marks a huge change). Along with the recommendations described above, which may be taken into account when revising the current Recommendation, this study also proposes that **the revised Council Recommendation should be more ambitious. It should include precise goals and targets and a clear implementation strategy with monitoring tools. Considering the diversity of volunteering cultures across the EU, Member States should set their own targets and prioritise specific areas from the Council Recommendation that are relevant to their national context. Regular cooperation between key stakeholders and policymakers should be supported both at national and at EU level to ensure their awareness of the Recommendation.**

Finding information about the EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at:
https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en

EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications at: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publications>.
Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

