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**COVER NOTE**

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| From: | Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director |
| date of receipt: | 13 January 2022 |
| To: | Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union |
| No. Cion doc.: | COM(2022) 15 final |
| Subject: | Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union |

Delegations will find attached document COM(2022) 15 final.

Encl.: COM(2022) 15 final

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2022/0006 (NLE)

Proposal for a

# COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

## on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union

(Text with EEA relevance)

{SWD(2022) 4 final}

Delegations will find attached document COM(2022) 15 final.

Encl.: COM(2022) 15 final

# EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

## 1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

The European Union is built on solidarity between its citizens and between its Member States. This universal and common value guides its actions and provides the unity needed to meet the challenges society is facing today and will face tomorrow, challenges which young Europeans are here to address by demonstrating their solidarity in practice.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on young people's education, employment, social inclusion and mental health. It has interrupted their opportunities for education and employment, and many young people have experienced isolation, anxiety and depression. At the same time, young people have shown intergenerational solidarity and support and managed to show great resilience and efforts in mitigating the pandemic's impact.

In her State of the Union Address on 15 September 2021, President von der Leyen announced that the European Commission would propose to make 2022 the European Year of Youth, 'a year dedicated to empowering those who have dedicated so much to others'. She emphasised that 'Europe needs all of its youth'. On 14 October 2021 the Commission tabled a draft proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Youth 2022. One of the Year's objectives is to promote the opportunities that public polices at EU, national, regional and local level offer young people in support of their personal, social and professional development.

The European Solidarity Corps[1] is the Union's one-stop-shop for volunteering opportunities for young people. Young people are offered numerous opportunities to take part in solidarity activities in a broad range of areas and to support national, regional and local actors in their efforts to cope with different challenges and crises.

Volunteering, both in the Union and beyond, constitutes a rich experience in a non-formal and informal learning context and enhances young people's personal, socio-educational and professional development, active citizenship, civic participation and employability. Young people's spirit of initiative is an important asset for society and for the labour market.

Transnational volunteering across the EU contains an additional dimension, namely that of helping a community in a different country, increasing intercultural understanding, learning and working in a foreign language. The European labour market values multilingualism, multiculturalism and adaptability.

On 20 November 2008, the Council adopted a Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union ('the 2008 Council Recommendation')[2]. Ten years later, the Council invited the Commission to propose an update of the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU as part of its Resolution endorsing the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)[3].
The Communication on establishing the European Education Area by 2025[4] emphasised that 'Non-formal learning, including volunteering helps gain life and professional skills and

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1 Regulation (EU) 2021/888 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme and repealing Regulations (EU) 2018/1475 and (EU) No 375/2014 (europa.eu)

2 OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 8-10.

3 OJ C 456, 18.12.2018, p. 1-22.

4 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, COM(2020)625 final, available at EUR-Lex - 52020DC0625 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

competences. These skills and competences need to be fostered, valued, and recognised in full.' It also highlights that 'there are however still barriers to cross-border volunteering mobility, including recognition of learning outcomes among employers.' The Communication announces that updated policy guidance will be provided to address the legal, financial and administrative barriers that still hinder youth cross-border volunteering and solidarity. This updated guidance will help further enhance the inclusiveness, quality and recognition of the cross-border experiences under the European Solidarity Corps.

In its new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)[5], the Council confirmed in priority area 1 that 'Fostering, valuing and recognising non-formal learning including volunteering, and enhancing the inclusiveness, quality and recognition of cross-border solidarity activities' is a concrete issue for action.

In its Report of 14 October 2021 on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy[6], the Commission refers to its review of the 2008 Council Recommendation to further support opportunities for mobility and volunteering. It highlights that this review is relevant and timely in the context of the pandemic and its emerging priorities (health and safety of volunteers, inter-generational solidarity), and that new forms of volunteering, including digital volunteering and volunteering that is partly digital and partly on site, need to be explored.

The 2008 Council Recommendation aimed to eliminate obstacles to volunteering in Europe by raising awareness, increasing the capacity to offer volunteering opportunities, reducing barriers to participation especially for disadvantaged groups and giving greater recognition to the skills gained. The Recommendation invited the Commission to support Member States through actions such as mutual learning, providing incentives through mobility programmes and creating an online portal to match volunteering demands and offers. The actions were followed up and are now a mainstream part of the EU's youth activities. Most of the issues raised in the 2008 Council Recommendation are still relevant, and their implementation should continue. However, the updated version should reflect changes that have occurred since 2008, including:

– a volunteering landscape that has evolved, particularly since the launch of the European Solidarity Corps as the main provider of transnational solidarity activities for young people at the EU level, and new national volunteering and service schemes, also with transnational elements;

– impairments to mobility linked to unforeseen circumstances (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), and the need to protect and preserve the health, safety and security of volunteers;

– an increased recognition that volunteering experience develops skills and competences that the labour market needs New tools have become available to document and validate the learning outcomes that support volunteers' personal, educational, social, civic and professional development and therefore their employability. and this needs to be made fully known to the volunteer community and also to employers;

– the need to include more young people who have fewer opportunities in a volunteering experience;

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[5] Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021 – 2030), OJ C 66, *26.2.2021,* available at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32021G0226(01)

[6] https://europa.eu/youth/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/1_EN_ACT_part1_v3.pdf

– demographic challenges, including the ageing of the European population, which provides opportunities for more inter-generational solidarity;
– the emergence of new trends in volunteering, such as digital volunteering[7] and 'commercial' volunteering[8];
– growing concerns about environmental impacts and sustainable mobility.

Numerous barriers to transnational volunteering across the EU persist. The removal or reduction of such obstacles is crucial to ensuring the effective and efficient functioning of the European Solidarity Corps programme and similar national volunteer programmes across the EU. The most important of these barriers, as reported by various stakeholders, are:
– the diversity of the national administrative and regulatory frameworks governing the volunteering field;
– the lack of practical online information on issues such as the social security coverage of transnational volunteers, volunteers' social security entitlements, procedures for applying for a European Health Insurance Card, etc.[9];
– lack of awareness of the value of a volunteering experience and the underuse of arrangements for validating the skills that a volunteer acquires through volunteering;
– lack of volunteering opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities;
– at times unclear rules for supporting and protecting volunteers, including in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic;
– lack of synergy between EU and national schemes targeting transnational volunteering activities.

The aim of the proposed Council Recommendation is to:

– facilitate transnational youth volunteering, as part of the European Solidarity Corps or other schemes at national level;
– propose policy guidance to enhance the inclusiveness, quality, recognition and sustainability dimensions of transnational youth volunteering;
– facilitate the complementarity between volunteering schemes in Member States and the European Solidarity Corps; and
– encourage mutual learning and networking in transnational youth volunteering activities.

• **Consistency with existing policy provisions in the policy area**

The proposal builds on several relevant EU youth policies. The EU youth strategy outlines the EU's role in the area of youth and solidarity activities. It covers EU youth policy cooperation for the period 2019-2027 and fosters youth participation in democratic life; it also supports

7 Digital volunteering, also referred to as virtual volunteering or online volunteering, implies volunteer activities completed through internet-enabled technology and tools, with generally no physical mobility.
8 The practice of combining volunteering and a holiday, with people participating in solidarity activities as an integral part of a holiday experience, for which they pay (also referred to as voluntourism in studies / media).
9 It should be recalled that Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security systems provides for the coordination of social security rights, including of sickness benefits, in cross-border situations and applies to volunteers moving between Member States.

social and civic engagement, volunteering and participation in solidarity activities, and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society.
Launched in 2016, the European Solidarity Corps has since 2018 been based on a self-standing Regulation and budget[10]. The European Solidarity Corps provides a single entry point for EU-funded solidarity activities across Europe and gives young people the opportunity to take part in solidarity activities in their own country or abroad. The new European Solidarity Corps for 2021-2027 put a particular emphasis on inclusion, as reflected in the recently adopted framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes for 2021-2027[11]. Youthpass[12] is the recognition instrument for non-formal and informal learning developed for youth projects run under the European youth programmes, in particular the European Solidarity Corps. Through the Youthpass certificate, learning outcomes from participation in such projects can be identified and documented.
The proposed Council Recommendation will also contribute to:

- the European Year of Youth 2022[13];
- the European Education Area;
- EU equality strategies and inclusion policy frameworks targeting specific discriminated and disadvantaged groups adopted in 2020-2021: the EU anti-racism action plan for 2020-2025, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, the LGBTIQ equality strategy, the action plan on integration and inclusion and the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities[14].

- **Consistency with other Union policies and programmes**

Youth volunteering supported at EU level has links with other youth-relevant policy areas such as education and training, employment, citizenship and democratic participation, social inclusion, integration of migrants, environment and nature protection, climate action, creativity and culture, and digitalisation. Many EU programmes and instruments support young people, in particular:

- the European Solidarity Corps, which offers young people opportunities to participate in solidarity activities across Europe and humanitarian aid-related activities globally;
- the Erasmus+ programme, which offers transnational learning mobility opportunities for young people and youth workers, and various youth participation activities;

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10 Between 2018 and 2020, the European Solidarity Corps was based on Regulation (EU) 2018/1475 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 October 2018 laying down the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps and amending Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013, Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 and Decision No 1313/2013/EU, OJ L 250, 4.10.2018, p. 1–20.
For the period 2021-2027, the European Solidarity Corps is based on Regulation (EU) 2021/888 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme and repealing Regulations (EU) 2018/1475 and (EU) No 375/2014, OJ L 202, 8.6.2021, p. 32–54.

11 Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27 | Erasmus+ (europa.eu), adopted 22 October 2021

12 Youthpass

13 Register of Commission Documents - COM(2021)634 (europa.eu)

14 COM(2020) 565 final, 18/09/2020, COM(2020) 620 final, 09/10/2020, COM(2020) 698 final, 12/11/2020, COM(2021) 101 final, 03/03/2021)

- the reinforced Youth Guarantee supporting young people with a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education, and

- the quality framework for traineeships, which is an EU instrument to improve the quality of traineeships and combat abusive traineeship practices, including the replacement of normal entry-level jobs.

## 2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY

### • Legal basis

The proposed Council Recommendation is in conformity with Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

According to Article 165(1) of the TFEU, the Union shall 'contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of their education systems'.

The aim of Union actions under the fifth indent of Article 165(2) of the TFEU shall be to 'encourage the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and […] encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe'.

The second indent of Article 165(4) of the TFEU provides that in order to help achieve the objectives referred to in this Article:

- the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, will adopt recommendations.

According to Article 166(1) of the TFEU, states the Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of Member States for the content and organisation of vocational training.
The aim of Union action under the third indent of Article 166(2) of the TFEU shall be to facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people.
The last part of the paragraph 4 of Article 166 of the TFEU provides that the European Parliament and the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendations.

The initiative does not propose any extension of EU regulatory power or binding commitments on Member States. Member States will decide, according to their national circumstances, how they implement this Council Recommendation.

### • Subsidiarity (for non-exclusive competence)

The present proposal is in conformity with the principle of subsidiarity as provided for in Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

Evidence shows that the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by action undertaken by the Member States. This is because of the European scale of the

proposed action, which specifically aims at addressing the obstacles to transnational youth volunteering in Europe and at enhancing the impact of the European Solidarity Corps and the impact of other transnational volunteering schemes.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, the proposal outlines a way forward for enhancing transnational youth volunteering in the Union and proposes recommendations to this end

- **Proportionality**

The present proposal is in conformity with the principle of proportionality as provided for in Article 5(4) of the TEU.

Neither the content nor the form of this proposed Recommendation exceeds what is necessary to achieve its objectives. The commitments Member States will make are of a voluntary nature and each Member State remains free to decide which approach to take. The proposed Recommendation respects the diversity of the forms of youth volunteering activities in the European Union.

- **Choice of the instrument**

To contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in Articles 165 and 166 of the TFEU, this Treaty provides for the adoption of recommendations by the Council, on a proposal from the Commission.

A Council recommendation is an appropriate instrument within the field of youth, where the Union has a supporting responsibility, and it is an instrument that has been frequently used for European action in these areas. As a legal instrument, it signals the commitment of Member States to the measures presented and provides a stronger political basis for cooperation in this area, while fully respecting Member State authority in the field of education and youth. The Commission proposes to replace the Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union by the present Recommendation.

## 3. RESULTS OF *EX POST* EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- ***Ex post* evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation**

An evaluation of the EU youth strategy and the Council Recommendation of 2008 was carried out in 2015-2016[15]. It concluded that the Recommendation addressed some of the very relevant and persistent issues pertaining to and obstacles facing transnational volunteering, but that it could be more ambitious and better linked to the current EU funding instruments.

The need for better recognition of a volunteering experience was still an issue at the time of the evaluation, even though the Recommendation has contributed to the increasing popularity and recognition of the Youthpass certificates and the opportunities provided by the Europass online platform. The inclusion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds was identified as a pressing issue in 2015, including visa applications and attitudes towards migrants. Other needs identified included better quality assurance for volunteering projects, stable funding and capacity-building opportunities for organisations and the digitalisation of volunteering. There was only moderate response in Member States and youth organisations to step up opportunities with their own resources (beyond the then Erasmus+ European Voluntary

[15] Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers (europa.eu) SWD (2017) 281

Service). Over time, Member States' priorities shifted to fighting the very high level of youth unemployment resulting from the financial crisis, where it was recognized that increased volunteering opportunities could also help.

- **Stakeholder consultations**

The evaluation of the 2008 Recommendation and the EU youth strategy included stakeholder surveys and a public consultation in 2016[16]. Volunteering was discussed during 'the year of listening' held ahead of the renewal of the EU youth strategy. The study on obstacles to solidarity activities[17] included focus groups and surveys of youth organisations and organisations dealing with solidarity activities throughout Europe carried out in October 2019 (around 700 NGOs replied). A public consultation was held in the spring of 2021[18].

- **Collection and use of expertise**

The study on 'Removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities' by PPMI Group[19] was carried out between June 2019 and January 2020. The study's recommendations were fed into an expert group[20] of Member State representatives and the main stakeholder organisations. The expert group completed the evidence base for the review with examples and experiences from administrative practices and with feedback from youth and volunteering organisations[21].

- **Impact assessment**

Given that the proposed activities were complementary to Member State initiatives and were voluntary and given the scope of the impacts expected, an impact assessment was not carried out.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

Not applicable.

- **Fundamental rights**

The proposed Council Recommendation respects the fundamental rights and observes the principles recognised by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union[22], which acknowledges that solidarity is one of the universal values on which the EU is founded. In particular, this proposal takes full account of:

- Article 8 (right to the protection of personal data),

16 Youth volunteering – working on projects in other EU countries (update) (europa.eu)

17 Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities, PPMI Group in cooperation with EPRD, 2020, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1a7042cb-e678-11ea-ad25-01aa75ed71a1

18 https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12774-Youth-volunteering-working-on-projects-in-other-EU-countries-update-/public-consultation_en

19 Idem footnote 18.

20 'Promoting the mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity, a practical toolbox for actors and stakeholders in the field of youth and recommendations for policymakers', developed by the expert group set up by the European Commission to support the process of reviewing the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers, 2021 (work carried out between September 2019 and September 2020).

21 Expert Group on the mobility of Young volunteers and cross-border solidarity, Background paper to support the Commission in reviewing the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers, Ecorys, February 2020.

22 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (OJ C 326, 26/10/2012, p. 391).

- Article 14 (right to education),
- Article 15 (freedom to choose an occupation and right to engage in work),
- Article 21 (non-discrimination),
- Article 26 (integration of persons with disabilities),
- Article 31 (fair and just working conditions) and
- Article 32 (prohibition of child labour and protection of young people at work) of the Charter.

## 4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

This initiative will not require additional resources from the EU budget.

## 5. OTHER ELEMENTS

- **Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements**

To support implementation, Member States should include progress in the regular updates done under the EU youth strategy, in particular as part of the future national activities planners (FNAPs). The Commission proposes that it will report on the use of the Council Recommendation in the context of the work on the implementation of the EU youth strategy and of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond.

- **Outline of the Recommendation and staff working document**

The draft Recommendation proposes orientation and actions that Member States can pursue to further facilitate transnational youth volunteering across Europe. It sets out the European Commission's commitment to complement and support Member State actions in this area. The accompanying staff working document describes a wide range of evidence to support the proposed Recommendation.

2022/0006 (NLE)

Proposal for a

# COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
# on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165(4) and 166(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

(1) On 15 September 2021, President von der Leyen announced in her State of the European Union[23] address that the European Commission would propose to make 2022 the European Year of Youth, 'empowering those who have dedicated so much to others'. The European Year of Youth shall, among other things, be aimed at promoting opportunities for young people arising from the public policies at EU, national, regional level and local level in order to support their personal, social and professional development in a green, digital and inclusive world.

(2) As highlighted in the European Parliament Resolution on the impact of COVID-19 on youth and on sport (2020/2864(RSP))[24] young people have been at the heart of solidarity-motivated activities to respond to the needs of their communities in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, from leading awareness campaigns to working on the front line as part of the European Solidarity Corps, to other volunteering initiatives.

(3) Through their volunteering actions in the European Solidarity Corps and other schemes, young people are giving concrete effect to the Preamble of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which highlights the desire by the signatories to deepen solidarity between the peoples of Europe, and to Article 2 TEU, which mentions solidarity as one of the values common to the Member States.

(4) The experiences with the European Voluntary Service (1996-2018) and the European Solidarity Corps, while successful, have shown the need to further facilitate transnational volunteering. In this context, the Council has called for the review of the Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union ('the 2008 Council Recommendation') in order to strengthen the potential of the European Youth Programmes in reaching out to young people and helping to build a community[25]. This is expressed in particular in Annex 4

[23] https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/soteu_2021_address_en_0.pdf

[24] Texts adopted - The impact of Covid-19 on youth and on sport - Wednesday, 10 February 2021 (europa.eu)

[25] OJ C 456, 18.12.2018, p. 1–22.

on the Work Plan for the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021. Furthermore, the Commission's Report on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy of 14 September 2021[26] referred to the review of the 2008 Council Recommendation.

(5) Most of the issues raised in the 2008 Council Recommendation are still crucial and have been retained in this proposal. The update of the 2008 Council Recommendation has become necessary because of several developments since 2008. An important one is the launch of the European Solidarity Corps in 2016 and the creation of new national volunteering schemes, also with transnational elements that sometimes offer very similar opportunities for young people. The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027[27] invited Member States and the Commission, within their respective fields of competence, to seek complementarity and synergies between EU funding instruments and national, regional and local schemes.

(6) An evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the 2008 Council Recommendation[28] identified the need of inclusion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds as a more pressing issue in 2015 than it had been in 2008. Other needs identified but not addressed by the 2008 Recommendation included quality assurance for volunteering projects, capacity-building opportunities for organisations and a better monitoring of the implementation of the Recommendation. An expert group came up with further policy recommendations[29], covering also knowledge-sharing and networking, access to volunteering, administrative obstacles, awareness, recognition, digital volunteering and the environmental context, which informed the proposed Recommendation.

(7) Since 2008, the impact of crises, for instance those that disrupt the transnational physical mobility of volunteers, has been severe. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of ensuring the health, security and safety of all participants at all times, including making provisions for managing the potential impact of unforeseen circumstances. Moreover, for a long time, the concept of 'transnational volunteering' referred in practice exclusively to activities involving the physical mobility of volunteers. However, with technological progress and under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, new volunteering trends have emerged. Digital volunteering has revealed its potential to complement 'standard' volunteering associated with physical mobility or even to become an alternative form of volunteering altogether, especially for young people who are not in a position to travel physically. The inter-generational dimension of volunteering has also clearly shown its importance in tackling the demographic challenges of our society. Concerns for the environment and climate change are at the top of the EU political agenda and need to be reflected in activities that involve transnational mobility.

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26 https://europa.eu/youth/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/1_EN_ACT_part1_v3.pdf

27 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42018Y1218(01)&qid=1578414694481&from=EN

28 Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers, 2017.

29 "Promoting the mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity, a practical toolbox for actors and stakeholders in the field of youth and recommendations for policymakers", developed by the expert group set up by the European Commission to support the process of reviewing the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers, 2021 (work undertaken from September 2019 to September 2020).

(8) The Communication on establishing the European Education Area by 2025[30] emphasised the importance of inclusiveness, quality and recognition of the cross-border experiences under the European Solidarity Corps. Guarantees of quality of the available opportunities and provisions of appropriate support to participants at every stage of their volunteering experience constitute a prerequisite for the volunteering activities to benefit communities as well as young volunteers.

(9) One of the first difficulties that young people interested in transnational volunteering experience encounter is access to user-friendly information about their status and rights as volunteers, on a dedicated national website, so that they can start their transnational volunteering activity fully aware of what impact it will have on their social security rights and entitlements in the host Member State as well as in the Member State of their usual residence[31]. Pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 October 2018 establishing a single digital gateway to provide access to information, to procedures and to assistance and problem-solving services, the Commission and Member States are already obliged to provide user-friendly online information to EU citizens on rights, obligations and rules laid down in Union and national law in the field of volunteering in another Member State[32].

(10) Many issues related to transnational mobility cannot be tackled at national level alone, as the activities involve both sending and hosting Member States. Framework conditions, such as relating to social security coverage, can vary between Member States and may represent important obstacles to cross-border mobility. The 2008 Council Recommendation already called for the examination of 'relevant social protection provisions through the appropriate existing EU fora with a view to making full use of the possibilities under EU and national legislation'.

(11) The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Action Plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027[33] recognizes the role of volunteering in integration and inclusion of those with fewer opportunities. For many of them, volunteering activities may represent the most accessible option for engaging in cross-border mobility. Third-country nationals may face administrative and practical obstacles to cross-border volunteering if they need to apply for a long-term visa or residence permit for the purpose of voluntary service in another Member State.

(12) A volunteering experience provides volunteers with learning outcomes that increase their employability. National or EU frameworks (that is to say, Youthpass[34] and

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30 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, COM(2020)625 final, available at EUR-Lex - 52020DC0625 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

31 It should be recalled that Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security systems provides for the coordination of social security rights, including of sickness benefits, in cross-border situations and applies to volunteers moving between Member States.

32 OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 32, annex I, section E. Implemented through the "Your Europe" portal: Your Europe (europa.eu)

33 COM(2020) 758 final

34 Youthpass is the main recognition and validation instrument available for all Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps participants to reflect the learning process and document their learning outcomes in the Youthpass certificate.

Europass[35]) supporting the identification, documentation and validation of learning outcomes of volunteering activities exist. The Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning[36] invited employers, youth and civil society organisations to promote and facilitate the identification and documentation of learning outcomes acquired at work or in voluntary activities. The evaluation[37] of the 2012 Council Recommendation identified areas where further action is needed to achieve the goals of the 2012 Council Recommendation, to provide people with access to more and better validation opportunities, enabling them to access further learning and to put their skills to good use in European society and the labour market. The Europass Decision of 16 April 2018 defines volunteers among its target groups.

(13) New developments since 2008, evidence about barriers to transnational volunteering and the policy recommendations of an expert group regarding the promotion of the mobility of young volunteers, call for a new Council Recommendation on volunteering, with a view to facilitating and improving the quality of transnational youth volunteering and encouraging mutual learning, networking and synergies between volunteering schemes in Member States and the European Solidarity Corps.

(14) This Recommendation fully respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

**RECOGNISES THAT:**

1. For the purposes of this Recommendation, the same definition of 'volunteering' is used as in Regulation (EU) 2021/888 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme, namely a solidarity activity that takes place, for a period of up to 12 months, as a voluntary unpaid[38] activity that contributes to the achievements of the common good. Where transnational schemes existing in the Member States foresee solidarity activities of a duration exceeding 12 months that otherwise correspond to the definition of volunteering, these are to be considered as volunteering for the purposes of this Recommendation and thus included in its scope.

2. Youth volunteering under this Recommendation comprises volunteering across the EU by EU nationals or third-country nationals who are residing in one Member State and moving to a second Member State for the purpose of voluntary service, under the European Solidarity Corps or any national cross-border volunteering scheme in Member States. To the extent possible, the actions undertaken by Member States and the Commission in response to this Recommendation should also take account of volunteering activities between Member States and third countries. Voluntary activities should not have an adverse effect on potential or existing paid employment, nor should they be seen as a substitute for it. The terms 'youth' and 'young' cover the age bracket of 18 to 30 years.

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35 Decision (EU) 2018/646 of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 April 2018 on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC (OJ L 112, 2.5.2018, p. 42–50.) establishes a European framework to support the transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings, including through practical experiences, mobility and volunteering.

36 OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1–5.

37 Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers (europa.eu) of March 2016

38 Volunteers are not paid for their time but expenses usually limited to travel, food or accommodation and/or other small personal expenses may be covered.

3. Young people with fewer opportunities means young people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, a migrant background or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reasons, including those that can give rise to discrimination under Article 12 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities[39].

**HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT THE MEMBER STATES:**

Continue to promote transnational volunteering in Europe and beyond, while having due regard for national frameworks and legislation in the field of voluntary activities, and Member States' overall national priorities, existing local opportunities and public expenditure regimes.

Facilitate the development, for that purpose, of the following lines of action:

1. Consider measures contributing to the development of an adequate and clear legislative and implementation framework for the health, safety and security of participants in transnational volunteering activities by:

   (a) ensuring that organisers involved in the implementation of volunteering activities have clear and reliable procedures in place to care for and assist volunteers in case of crises, emergencies and other unforeseen circumstances;

   (b) ensuring that all volunteers can benefit from adequate and continuous social security coverage (including through developing insurance options for specific groups of volunteers, for example young people with disabilities, in close cooperation with insurance providers);

   (c) examining further relevant social protection provisions through the appropriate existing EU fora with a view to making full use of the possibilities under EU and national legislation.

2. Provide information and raise awareness about volunteers' rights as stipulated in the dedicated framework set out above, in particular:

   (a) making practical and comprehensive information for volunteers relating to the national legal and administrative rules governing volunteering and the impact of volunteering in another Member State on existing and future social security rights and entitlements[40] of the volunteer (both for incoming and outgoing EU volunteers) available on a dedicated national website that is accessible for persons with disabilities;

   (b) encouraging organisers of existing national cross-border volunteering schemes to point to relevant national and European websites[41] that inform volunteers about their rights, obligations and applicable rules with regard to volunteering in another Member State.

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39 See the same definition in Regulation (EU) 2021/888, Art. 2 (4)

40 Including information about the procedures for applying for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) and detailed information on what is and is not covered by national health care systems

41 The multilingual 'Your Europe' portal under Regulation (EU) 2018/1724, OJ L 295; the Youth Wiki section of the European Youth Portal; information on the europa portal, e.g. on EHIC: Applying for a card - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)

3. Enhance the quality of volunteering opportunities by supporting organisers of volunteering activities under national schemes in their capacity-building endeavours. In particular, that can be achieved by:

   (a) encouraging organisers in both sending and receiving Member States to cooperate, including by providing sufficient information about the volunteering activity, its organisers and the volunteer, so as to enable both parties to make an informed decision about the activity's sustainability and to meet any legal requirements;

   (b) encouraging organisers of volunteering activities, including those organizing volunteering activities on a commercial basis[42], to put emphasis on quality, among other things by basing the organisation of volunteering activities on an analysis that supports identifiable needs and leads to beneficial outcomes in local communities.

   (c) encouraging organisers of transnational volunteering activities to put adequate emphasis on the learning dimension of volunteering activities, including the language learning in transnational volunteering;

   (d) supporting organisers of volunteering activities in a more systematic and generalized use of existing national or EU frameworks (i.e. Youthpass and Europass) to support the identification, documentation and validation of learning outcomes of volunteering activities;

   (e) recognising youth work as one of the main tools for quality development of volunteering activities in the EU and contributing in this way to the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda[43];

   (f) supporting the training of youth workers, recognising their key role in accompanying and guiding young volunteers through a high quality volunteering experience;

   (g) encouraging organisers of transnational volunteering activities to apply for the European Solidarity Corps quality label;

   (h) developing and promoting general quality standards for volunteering while drawing inspiration from the comprehensive system of quality, support, inclusion and certification measures contained in Regulation (EU) 2021/888[44], wherever feasible in the national context;

   (i) adopting measures to ensure that volunteering activities do not lead to job substitution.

4. Ensure that access to transnational volunteering activities is a realistic opportunity for all young people, including those with fewer opportunities, including by:

   (a) supporting the creation and/or operation of national gateways and regional and local structures to provide information and guidance regarding existing

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42 The practice of combining volunteering and a holiday, with people participating in solidarity activities as an integral part of a touristic experience, for which they pay.

43 Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda (2020/C 415/01)

44 Regulation (EU) 2021/888 of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme and repealing Regulations (EU) 2018/1475 and (EU) No 375/2014 (OJ L 202, 8.6.2021, p. 32)

volunteering opportunities, in formats that are accessible to persons with disabilities, to young potential volunteers, including young people with fewer opportunities, civil society/solidarity organisations, and other stakeholders in the field. These structures can include alumni networks and local youth workers, using their capacity to empower and support potential volunteering candidates, and, where relevant, could work in connection with the National Agencies implementing the European Solidarity Corps;

(b) facilitating the access to transnational volunteering experiences for young people with fewer opportunities through promoting targeted information and outreach by relevant organisations and networks[45], including through the raising of awareness regarding the importance of intercultural competences and language learning as a stepping-stone to transnational mobility;

(c) encouraging organisers of volunteering activities to promote social inclusion, in particular of disadvantaged young people, including by insuring the provision of reasonable and suitable accommodation, as well as ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities;

(d) supporting relevant organisations and networks in the promotion of short-term, part-time and local volunteering activities as a potential first step towards participation in transnational activities and providing additional targeted support for the development of volunteering opportunities that cater for young people who cannot participate in physical transnational mobility for various reasons, in particular by offering digital or blended volunteering opportunities;

(e) supporting organisers of volunteering activities to develop aspects of inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities for their projects[46], among other things by putting them in touch with experts from services in charge of the promotion of social inclusion who could support and train them;

(f) providing targeted support to the development of volunteering activities, specifically promoting inclusion, equality and empowerment of disadvantaged groups or groups at risk of discrimination, incentivising young volunteers from these communities to engage in volunteering and act as role models in their own community;

(g) further promoting existing transnational tools that can help youth mobility, such as mobility cards and encouraging their use in all transnational volunteering activities[47];

(h) resolving, where possible and without prejudice to the Schengen acquis and Union law on entry and residence of third-country nationals, administrative and practical issues that create difficulties in obtaining long-term visas and/or

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45 See Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for guidance on how to do this: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity_en

46 In line with EU equality strategies and inclusion policy frameworks targeting specific discriminated and disadvantaged groups adopted in 2020-2021: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025 (COM(2020) 565 final, 18/09/2020), EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (COM(2020) 620 final, 09/10/2020), LGBTIQ equality strategy (COM(2020) 698 final, 12/11/2020), Action plan on integration and inclusion (COM(2020) 758 final, 24/11/2020), Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COM(2021) 101 final, 03/03/2021).

47 This is already the good practice of the former European Voluntary Service and now the European Solidarity Corps, which provides a European Youth Card to every volunteer for free.

residence permits for third-country nationals for the purpose of voluntary service.

5. Increase awareness on the benefits of transnational volunteering activities, through information, guidance and outreach activities. Pay particular attention to equally reach out to young people with fewer opportunities. That includes promoting that:

   (a) volunteering activities provide young people with a concrete way of contributing to tackling societal challenges;

   (b) a volunteering experience enhances the personal, educational, social, civic and professional development of young people and helps them develop skills and competences needed and valued by the labour market;

   (c) frameworks exist to support the identification, documentation and validation of learning outcomes of volunteering activities (including Youthpass and Europass), in particular through action involving national stakeholders in the education, training, employment, social services and youth sectors.

6. Support and promote community-building activities related to volunteering. That includes:

   (a) encouraging the operation of networks of volunteers active under existing national schemes, especially those that have a long-term vision, that is to say are not linked to or limited by the duration of individual projects;

   (b) promoting existing European networks linked to volunteering, in particular the European Solidarity Network and Europeers, as well as other resources and platforms accessible via the European Solidarity Corps Portal on the European Youth Portal;

   (c) encouraging former volunteers to share their experiences through youth networks, educational establishments and workshops in roles such as ambassadors or as members of a network, as well as to train current or future volunteers;

   (d) encouraging the organisers of volunteering activities to support volunteers in their integration in the host community during their activity and in continuing their engagement in volunteering activities after their return home, with special focus on accompanying young people with fewer opportunities.

7. Explore new trends and alternative dimensions and formats of volunteering, including through:

   (a) promoting, testing of formats and gathering of evidence on digital volunteering, including in a transnational context as a complement to physical mobility or as a stand-alone format of volunteering activities. That may be particularly relevant for improving access to volunteering for young people with fewer opportunities;

   (b) acknowledging the value of and promoting inter-generational volunteering as a valuable contribution to the challenges faced by an ageing society as well as a way of engaging young people in an inter-generational dialogue, facilitating inter-generational knowledge-transfer and improving the social cohesion.

8. Create synergies, complementarities and continuities between volunteering schemes and initiatives existing at European level and (at various levels) in individual Member States. That includes, for example:

(a) exchanging information amongst Member States on existing volunteering schemes, including national civil service schemes where they exist, and transmission of such information to the European Commission, with a view to facilitating the publication on the European Youth Portal, the Youth Wiki, and the development of best practices;

(b) considering measures that would promote and support the transfer of best practices from other volunteering schemes.

9. Support volunteering activities that make a meaningful contribution to tackling climate and environment-related challenges, by:

(a) encouraging the integration of green practices into all volunteering projects and activities as well as promoting environmentally sustainable and responsible behaviour among participants and participating organisations;

(b) promoting the reduction of the environmental footprint of volunteering activities, for example by reducing waste, recycling and using sustainable means of transportation;

(c) promoting the development of volunteering activities that address the topic of environmental protection, sustainability, climate goals and disaster prevention and recovery.

10. Include information about progress in following this Recommendation in regular updates made under the EU Youth Strategy, in particular as part of the Future National Activities Planners (FNAPs).

**HEREBY INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:**

1. Support the Member States to follow this Recommendation through the cooperation mechanisms and tools of the EU Youth Strategy and the EU youth programmes, in particular the European Solidarity Corps.

2. Facilitate mutual learning and exchanges among Member States and all relevant stakeholders at various levels through activities such as peer learning, peer counselling, expert groups, networking and other cooperation structures, including with a focus on synergies and complementarities between EU and national level schemes, including national civil service schemes where they exist. For this purpose, make use of existing spaces such as the Youth Wiki and the European Youth Portal where resources and knowledge can be shared amongst Member States and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at different levels.

3. Explore new trends and formats of volunteering, through gathering of evidence, development of best practices and preparation of guidance and handbooks, in particular regarding digital or blended volunteering and inter-generational volunteering.

4. Promote and inform about European opportunities for youth volunteering, including for people with fewer opportunities, through the European Youth Portal, which contains the registration tool for solidarity activities under the European Solidarity

Corps. In cooperation with Member States, include on the European Youth portal links to relevant national websites[48].

5. Facilitate transnational volunteering of young people with disabilities by proposing, by the end of 2023, a European Disability Card with a view to be recognised in all EU Member States. In the proposal, build on the experience of the ongoing EU Disability Card pilot project in eight Member States[49] and upon the European parking card for persons with disabilities.

6. Further develop, promote and provide support for the use of existing EU tools that support the validation of outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, in particular Youthpass and the Europass platform, including through European digital credentials for learning.

7. Support research and data collection on the long-term impact of volunteering and solidarity activities for individuals and organisations, as well as on society, including lessons learnt and insights from the COVID-19 pandemic on the volunteering sector and its preparedness for similar crises, through studies, surveys, statistics, research and data analysis.

8. Use the FNAPs to gather information on Member States' progress in following this Recommendation.

9. Report on the use of this Council Recommendation in the context of the work on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy and of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond.

This Recommendation replaces the Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council*
*The President*

[48] With information foreseen under point 2 a) of this Recommendation, as well as information on national volunteering schemes.

[49] EU disability card - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission (europa.eu)