

Partner organisations from Ireland - Volunteer Ireland, Denmark - FriSe, Germany - BBE, Belgium - CEV, Slovenia - Slovenska Filantropija, Croatia - Volunteer centre Osijek have implemented an Erasmus+ project

## “Making it matter – the impact of volunteering on social inclusion”

Project “Making it matter” enabled the creation of methods and indicators for impact measurement that will help volunteer involving organisations to understand the key benefits, and shape the most inclusive volunteer programmes. It also assists institutions and decision-makers to formulate policies and support programmes through comparable systematic data on the circumstances in which volunteering is useful for personal development, empowerment and inclusion of young people.

### The project outputs:

- 1) The research report as a source of information for volunteer involving organisations and decision-makers that provides detailed picture of volunteering of disadvantaged young people and social inclusion in partner countries;
- 2) The Manual on Measuring the Impact of Volunteering on social inclusion, created and piloted in volunteer involving organisations, supporting organisations to demonstrate the benefits of volunteering;
- 3) The curriculum as a transnational educational tool supports the capacity building of volunteer involving organisations and volunteers;
- 4) Policy Paper with the set of recommendations to improve the legislative and strategic framework for inclusive volunteering and influence the development of more opportunities for young disadvantaged volunteers;
- 5) Three international events involving decision-makers, researchers, practitioners, and volunteer involving organisations.

In the long term, the project contributes to the improvement of social and organisational capacities for the development of high quality, innovative and community-oriented services that support the empowerment and inclusion of young people at risk of social exclusion through volunteering.

# Policy Paper on Inclusive Volunteering

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Engagement of disadvantaged youth in diverse activities in local communities supports their personal and professional development and empowers them to actively participate in society. However, disadvantaged youth are still facing different social, economic, educational, physical and / or cultural barriers and are volunteering less than other young people – a loss for themselves and society at large.

EU institutions have stressed the importance of making volunteering more inclusive through policy papers since 1983. Recent initiatives and strategies such as the European Solidarity Corps and “EU Youth Strategy 2019 – 2027” strongly support the involvement of disadvantaged youth.

Despite EU policy frameworks and recommendations, the practice in Member States varies and there are few specific national documents targeting volunteering of disadvantaged youth. There is also a lack of mechanisms specifically developed to encourage and support disadvantaged youth to volunteer, or to motivate and support non-profit organisations to create inclusive programmes.

Therefore, it is important to create and practice open and inclusive policies at all levels on national and EU level and to use narratives that will challenge stereotypes, discrimination, alienation and decrease exclusion. This will help increase diversity, develop a culture of solidarity and respect, increase civic participation and create ownership and belonging for all members of a community.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

During the “Making it Matter” project significant evidence was gathered in favour of inclusive programmes that support disadvantaged and marginalised youth to participate actively in volunteering in whatever way they can. The success of social inclusion depends not only on the kind of volunteering activities on offer, but also on the kind of support and conditions that governments, volunteer development agencies and volunteer-involving organisations can provide.

Therefore, it's important to consider the following recommendations:

### **1. Remove psychological and physical barriers**

Create and support inclusive programmes to overcome key barriers to provide the extra support disadvantaged volunteers may need. Inclusive programmes require special attention in terms of identifying volunteer roles, volunteer management, additional support and infrastructure. It's also important to increase public awareness of the positive impact that volunteering can have for both communities and disadvantaged youth.

### **2. Develop a support system**

Support local organisations to include disadvantaged youth as volunteers. The support should address three mutually reinforcing issues: the challenge of motivating the disadvantaged youth; the need of volunteer-involving organisations for additional resources, knowledge and methods; and new partnerships between organisations, and between organisations and municipalities. Such measures will lead to more coordinated efforts and the improvement of practice in both quantity and quality.

### **3. Strengthen national volunteer organisations and volunteer centres**

National volunteer organisations and volunteer centres should be supported to embrace social inclusion as one of their core values and to invest more in the motivation, education and mentorship of volunteer-involving organisations. In this way, they will increase their understanding of the issues and their capacity to support the delivery of inclusive volunteer programmes by the local organisations they work with.

### **4. Gather the impact and show the value**

Support and assist volunteer-involving organisations to monitor the impact that their inclusive programmes bring to the volunteers and the organisations. They should be supported with the adequate resources and the necessary tools to do so. In this way, organisations will collect data and testimonies regarding disadvantaged youth volunteers in order to provide further evidence regarding the improvement of wellbeing, social capital and socio-economic added value of volunteering.

### **5. Together we are stronger**

Support the development of transnational partnerships and networks in order to share practice and knowledge, and develop new methods to create more successful programs and ways to include disadvantaged youth as volunteers. In this way, they will further increase their understanding of the issues and their capacity to support the local organisations implementing inclusive volunteer programmes.

### 3. ANNEX I RATIONALE FOR THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### The potential is great for all involved

The goal of “Making it Matter”, a project co-financed by the Erasmus+ programme involving partner organisations in 6 countries, is ultimately to support, through volunteering, the empowerment and inclusion of young people at risk of social exclusion.

The partnerships’ shared experience and knowledge as well as our extensive research, shows that volunteering for disadvantaged youth is a powerful tool for social inclusion that ensures equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background. It increases young people’s confidence in general, and in their abilities, skills and knowledge. It generates a sense of belonging, fights loneliness and it increases their physical and psychological well-being. Their social networks and social capital also improve. Youth outside the labour market or the education system can gain access to and / or tools to help them find a job or acquire a formal education.

The project research also found that many disadvantaged youths want to volunteer, and many volunteer-involving organisations are implementing inclusive programmes successfully and are interested in doing more. Most volunteer-involving organisations (over 70%) already include disadvantaged youth as volunteers, although this has not been a result of conscious planning - 60% of organisations do not have a specific focus on recruiting or written policy about the involvement of disadvantaged groups as volunteers. The benefits for the organisations when involving disadvantaged young people could be more diversity amongst and increased awareness of the young people’s resources and added value.

Furthermore, inclusive volunteer programmes help develop the local community and reduce gaps between citizens – stereotypes are broken, a culture of dialogue is established, and there is better communication about taboo subjects.

However, disadvantaged youth still face different barriers and the organisations need resources, knowledge and support because it takes a lot of effort and dedicated engagement, as well as a structured approach to create a supportive environment to involve disadvantaged youth as volunteers.

A much more coordinated effort is therefore needed to improve infrastructure, approaches, knowledge and methods, to establish new collaborations, to create & extend networks and to expand efforts towards disadvantaged youth that need additional support to start volunteering.