



Policy brief on mobility in Volunteering

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Introduction - On enhancing volunteering mobility in Europe

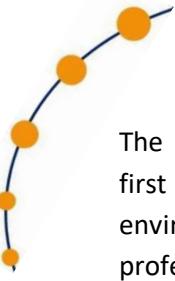
This policy brief is based on findings from the MOVE research (May 2015 – April 2018). The overall aim of MOVE is to provide a research-informed contribution towards improving the mobility of young people (aged 18-29) in Europe and to reduce negative impacts of mobility by identifying good practices, thus fostering sustainable development and wellbeing.

This policy brief provides an overview of the main results within qualitative and quantitative approaches regarding **Volunteering** mobility field. Qualitative research (narrative interviews) was conducted in Romania (n=19) and Germany (n=15) and analysed by teams at the University of Hildesheim (UH) and at Academia de Studii Economice din Bucuresti (ASE) in a research tandem process. The key findings and suggestions are based on the MOVE results in recent and ongoing publications listed at the end of this document (section “Further readings”).

Key Findings

The analyses show that voluntary work has the capacity to create social capital and promoting the values of active citizenship and social responsibility, while also stimulating personal and professional development. The mobility experience increases the desire, in both German and Romanian youth, to become mobile once again, whether for professional reasons or leisure: e.g. due to connections with international peers. In both countries, mobility is closely linked to manifold relationships to peers. According to the interviewees, their mobility for voluntary work results in changing the way in which they perceive and relate to their social and cultural environment.

For the majority of the German respondents, mobility for the purpose of voluntary work is usually their first international experience of this type, inspired by the wish to take a break, go abroad and gain new experiences in a new environment. The German volunteers mention multiple actors involved in their decision-taking. This shows that mobility is embedded in their everyday context, both influenced by them and influencing them in turn. For the young German volunteers, the topic of “peers” is closely linked to the topic of “belonging”: e.g. their belonging to youth groups, peer groups, a circle of colleagues, or family – and also to a privileged social group, which can afford international mobility, as opposed to others who cannot become internationally mobile due to financial, bureaucratic or personal constraints.



The Romanian set of interviews signals the presence of two broad categories of respondents: the first one are those who look for new experiences in a foreign cultural and/or geographical environment, and the second group are more mature young people who have already started a professional career or have had experience volunteering for several years in their home country. Regarding funding and logistical support for mobility, both the German and Romanian volunteers get support from various national and international associations, but in some cases, they have to rely on family support. The Romanian interviews revealed that it was not always clear from the beginning when or how they would receive the grant and if they would have to advance the cost of international transport. German interviewees complained that they too had to advance the costs of transport, did not receive the grant on time or did not know whether their expenses would be reimbursed at all.

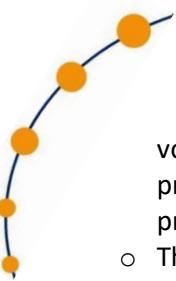
The majority of the young volunteers interviewed – both outgoing German and Romanian volunteers, as well as the few incoming volunteers interviewed – described the initial stages of coming to terms with an unfamiliar environment and living without their families in a new culture (or being confronted by a variety of cultures if they had to cooperate with volunteers from different countries).

Despite the challenges indicated above, the experience itself is perceived as enriching. The main effects highlighted by a great majority of Romanian respondents include its "eye-opening" effect and personal growth, as well as gaining maturity in the process. Volunteering has an impact on both a social level, through developing a good working relationship with international peers, and on a personal level, by getting to know themselves better. In most of the interviews with both German and Romanian volunteers, it is evident that the mobility experience contributes to self-reflection and to revisiting the way one perceives the environment: including relations with peers, encouraging the development of new peer-relations that gain more importance and serve as inspiration for further mobility experiences. Many of the young German volunteers describe the wish to become active themselves on their return to Germany and some take up activities related to their voluntary service.

A voluntary activity (especially a long-term voluntary service) gives youth a unique opportunity, since participants are able to acquire detailed information about the new country through work experience and personal development. Due to the international connections created, the experience often increases the wish to become mobile again.

Recommendations

- Young people should be *made aware* of existing voluntary mobility possibilities *beyond Europe* (e.g. Erasmus+). These options must be better advocated via youth ambassadors and campaigns on social media channels.
- It is necessary to *monitor the participating organisations* (whether on the EU or national level) and to offer advice and pedagogical support to volunteers within their service, so that the experience will be evaluated positively. Especially for long-term voluntary activities, the experience depends highly on the hosting organisation. It is also necessary for volunteers not to be exploited as a "cheap labour force", with those organisations not fulfilling the requirements being placed under stricter control and more easily excluded.
- Young people must be *informed of the new European Solidarity Corps* programme via different media channels and the transition should be clear and precise. As the European Solidarity Corps also offers the option of *volunteering in the country of residency*, this aspect should also be pointed out. This possibility offers potential in countries where volunteering is unpopular in society and for young people who initially may not want to go abroad; after their internal



volunteering experience, they might be more interested in going abroad. Therefore, this new programme should be widely promoted and should offer easy access and simple registration procedures.

- The *promotion of volunteering opportunities* should be carried out in cooperation with different local actors to ensure maximum impact and diffusion of the information: schools, NGOs, youth clubs, youth information centres, as they are key stakeholders when it comes to voluntary mobility.
- To promote more systematically and on a wider scale *the official recognition of volunteering* as a professional experience.
- To develop systems for measuring/evaluating the *development of various competences* through the volunteering experience and to work towards finding ways for evaluating the relevance of these competences/the expertise developed e.g. for various professional, study or work-related contexts.
- To investigate to what extent there are *national systems for recognising and certifying learning and skills development* through volunteering.
- To find more effective ways for *correlating organisational needs for voluntary work* with the offer and availability of youth to get involved in volunteering activities.
- To offer more support (including financial support) to organisations involved in the *management of outgoing and incoming volunteers*, and to *enhance their visibility*, so that more youth can access their projects.
- To allot more funds (and, in general, to provide more support) for *disseminating information* on volunteering opportunities, activities, projects, and to give more visibility to the benefits of volunteering.

Further Readings

- Altissimo, Alice; Herz, Andreas & Schröer, Wolfgang (2017). Jugendmobilität: europäische Zivilgesellschaft stärken 01/2017. WISO Direkt, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
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- Samuk, Sahizer; Nienaber, Birte; Bissinger, Jutta & Vysotskaya, Volha (2018). MOVE Deliverable N°6.7–Final Public Project Report.

Project website

<http://move-project.eu>

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