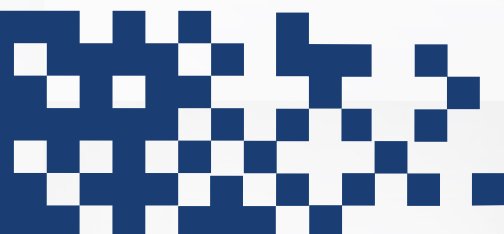


INEAR



Inclusion, Equality and Rights in Volunteering

SEMINAR

Report

March 7th 2022



The event began with a presentation of the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 (BEV203) and the associated advocacy plan. The plan emphasises the need to highlight the importance of inclusion, equality and rights in relation to volunteering and solidarity in Europe.



Following the introduction, the participants had the opportunity to interact with each other and expert resource persons in different thematic corners.

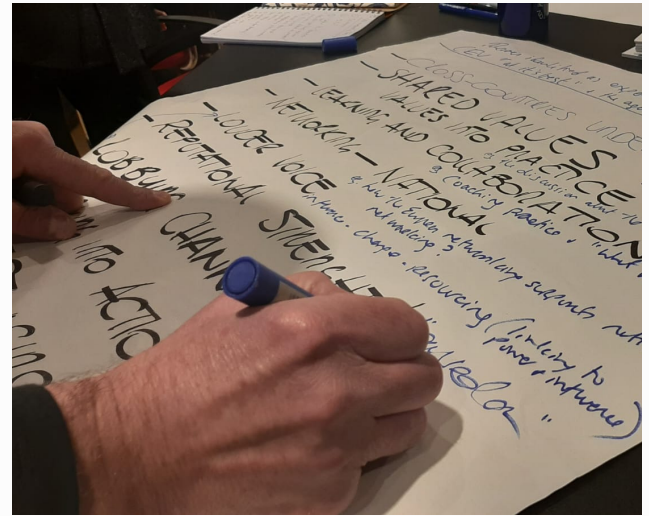
1) Changes in volunteering “post COVID19”

This group discussed what are the welcome and unwelcome changes as a result of the COVID19 pandemic and how are individual volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and volunteer infrastructure organisations dealing with them. The questions of whether there is enough support from public institutions to ensure that volunteering remains accessible to all and if there are enough suitable volunteers to meet the needs of our communities and society were also addressed.

The main conclusions were that whilst a lot of volunteering was forced to stop during covid, and now there is a crisis with the refugees coming from Ukraine and a consequential huge reliance on volunteering support, the volunteering sector is now stronger than before and has been able to show the flexibility and resilience to deal with changes. It was also agreed that the image of volunteering has improved and that more informal volunteers are engaging and that there is better recognition of informal volunteers who are often people who have started volunteering for the first time. However, the continuation and sustainability of the formal volunteers is seen to be higher than the informal ones. It was concluded that this could be due to the fact that a lot of people who were not working took their free time to help but now with more normal working patterns returning their volunteering engagement is decreasing.



There is a concern in many countries as to whether the older volunteers who had to stop their activities due to shielding requirements especially in the period before the vaccine became available will return to their roles and tasks. Volunteering organisations are making efforts in this regard to find the best balance for an individual's personal situation and to keep in touch and show a duty of care to these "lapsed" volunteers.



In some countries where volunteering engagement has been traditionally dominated by younger people it was noted that more people older than 35 years old have been volunteering.

The growth and positive image of online volunteering as well as volunteering in general was also raised. Online volunteering has allowed mentoring to continue for example and has brought more younger people into volunteering. The growth of online volunteering has been very fast and offered more ways to volunteer and many services offered by volunteers were moved completely online. It was observed that this allowed in many cases the provision of a more specialised service tailored to the needs of individuals. The fact that digitalisation has opened up increased possibilities for cross-border experiences and in general saved expenses on travel costs and removing physical distance as a barrier between those issues that need volunteer support and the volunteers available to provide the support was highlighted as a positive consequence of social distancing measures caused by the COVID19 pandemic situation. The experiences during the pandemic have also been seen to allow more local opportunities to grow and caused some organisations to change focus including in ways that have been positive for the organisation and their rate and extent of impact. It was noted that the use of social media messaging tools had played a huge role in facilitating communication and organisation between different groups for self-help and also for external support in spontaneous and non-formal ways. These tools and the enforced social distancing together with restrictions placed on formal volunteering have provided an effective methodology for citizens to engage themselves in meeting needs.



However, many volunteers, while welcoming the opportunities available to them via online means, continue to express clear preferences face-to-face volunteering. It can also be observed that some organisations don't want to continue with digital volunteering and prefer to limit opportunities to face-to-face ones now that it is possible again. Caution was urged concerning how we can manage the situation for vulnerable and marginalised people who may have difficulties to adapt and/ or access digital tools needed for online volunteering either because of connectivity and/ or hardware issues.

The pandemic experience has led to better cooperation between authorities and NGOs that engage volunteers and organise volunteer support in almost all cases but there has also been a rise in bureaucracy in some cases making the environment more challenging for smaller organisations with less capacity. The fact that an increasing number of volunteers want to give once in a while, "one shot volunteering", is also complicated for smaller organisations in terms of their sustainability and planning capacities. Fewer occasions to meet is also creating distances between organisations and their volunteers and there are concerns about the impact of this on motivation and engagement levels in the longer term.

Almost all organisations noted the increased interest in, and need for, a better understanding and preparedness for emergency and crisis volunteering. A number of countries have invested more seriously in improved online matching tools for volunteers and volunteer vacancies that include capacity for efficient matching of offers and needs in emergency situations.

2) European Year of Volunteers 2025

2011 was the European Year of Volunteering and the focus (much needed at the time) was on exploring and reaching closer common understanding on the concept of volunteering. The new campaign to establish 2025 as the European Year of Volunteers aims to focus on the people who volunteer.



The participants agreed that this campaign and the year could help all stakeholders, as well as policy makers to better understand what is the motivation of volunteers and the impact of volunteering on health and well-being in Europe & for the recovery and prosperity in general. The group discussed how to better celebrate and reinforce positive recognition of volunteers in Europe through this campaign. The group noted that this idea was being promoted by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and had been included in their recent Opinion on "Volunteers - Building the Future of Europe". Furthermore, the group learnt that the proposal is included on the online platform for the Conference on the Future of Europe and in the conclusions and recommendations of the Civil Society Convention for the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The participants recognised that achieving this ambition would be challenging but that the rewards for the sector could be huge, not only from achieving the main goal but also the process in getting there. The experience of EYV 2011 had taught that there is immense potential in the coalition building and cross sector and cross field collaboration that is necessary for a successful European year and it was felt the European Year of Volunteers had the potential to give the same results at a timely junction in the process of development of volunteering and civil society in Europe.

The participants agreed, as expressed on the Conference on the Future of Europe platform, that EY2025 would be a fitting tribute to the efforts and impact of all volunteers but especially those who had responded to needs during the COVID19 crisis and the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. In addition, it would highlight their importance to health and well-being in Europe and their role in the recovery and the future of Europe. The European Year of Volunteers 2025 would focus on the people who volunteer. It would seek to explore further and better understand their motivation and their impact on health and well-being in Europe.





Studies show that volunteering can bring a new sense of purpose, identity and sense of belonging and that it improves life satisfaction, reduces loneliness and isolation and decreases symptoms of depression and anxiety both amongst volunteers themselves and those that they support. It is of great importance for the European Union that citizens who volunteer based on solidarity, respect, equality and

shared values are taking care of their own wellbeing and mental health, and, through volunteering they are giving back to the community and contributing to the wellbeing of others.

The participants agreed that the European Year of Volunteers 2025 will shine the spotlight on the essential collective actions of volunteers and furthermore would lead to increased health and well being in Europe as well as providing a suitable framework to better celebrate and reinforce positive recognition of volunteers in Europe as essential for inclusion, equality and rights in Europe.

The discussions on what the EY2025 could look like in practice identified several factors that would be at the core of the year:

1. The preparation of the Year would complement the lead up and follow up to the EP elections in 2024 focusing on the contribution of individual citizens to inclusion, equality and rights in Europe. It can be an opportunity to pay tribute to millions of volunteers across Europe who have demonstrated their social role, especially those who were involved in the activities to combat COVID-19 effects and those who currently take enormous effort to help Ukrainian refugees.
2. 2025 will be an excellent opportunity to follow up for the European Year of Youth 2022 and good preparation for the 10th anniversary in 2026 of the launch of the European Solidarity Corps by President Juncker.
3. It can be the year to launch a pilot European Exchange programme for older volunteers as called for by the Conference on the Future of Europe - this would also respond to issues raised in the Council Conclusions from the German Presidency.





4. Pan-European comparative measurement of the contribution and impact of volunteers could be started with the collaboration of Eurostat.
5. The Member States should get the possibility to exchange best ideas and practices and could contribute to a report about how volunteers have been supported by the New Generation EU funds. The report would be published in 2025/2026.

3) Volunteering as a UNESCO intangible heritage

The campaign “Volunteering Heritage of Humanity” promotes the call, already endorsed by more than one hundred Italian signatories, for the transnational candidacy of volunteering as an intangible asset of humanity to be recognised by UNESCO. Supporting volunteering and active citizenship is key to creating enabling environments for social cohesion and social equity and in this way we can give substance to the essential principles of common good and general interest.



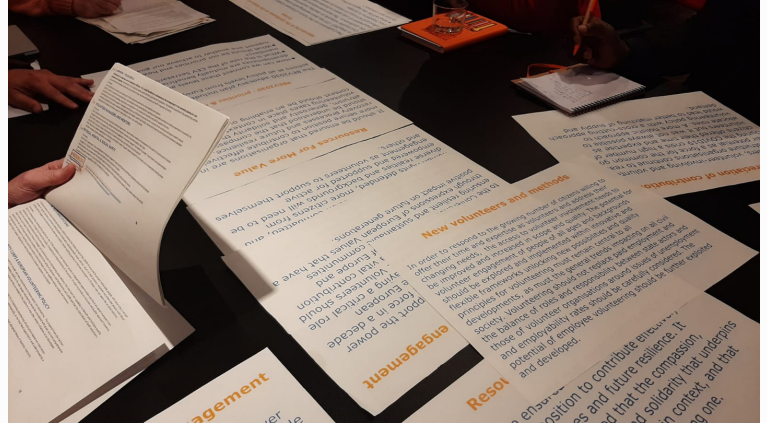
The participants appreciated the opportunity to find out more about the initiative and how to get involved in the campaign.

The campaign leaders from European Volunteering Capital Padova 2021 explained that according to the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)”, ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’ means the **practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills** – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – **that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.**

Furthermore, this intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is **constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity**, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.



It was also explained that for the purposes of the Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.



The participants shared the perspective that cultural heritage **is not only monuments and collections of objects but also all the living traditions transmitted by our ancestors: oral expressions, including language, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festivals**, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe. traditional crafts, and that this intangible cultural **heritage is crucial in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of globalisation and its understanding helps intercultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect** for different ways of life. The participants agreed that its importance does not lie in the cultural manifestation itself, but in the wealth of knowledge and skills that are transmitted from one generation to the next.

There was consensus that volunteering is an indispensable energy of society that is a **community-generated asset that reverberates on the quality of our lives, starting with those who are in need**, or struggling to overcome obstacles to exercising their rights. Everyone agreed that without volunteering the emergencies generated by the pandemic could not have been dealt with.

Looking to the future the participants took the view that without the social networks animated by extensive volunteering and active citizenship, it will not be possible to **construct that change in the priorities of our civil life that is so sought after** and so clearly necessary to ensure that we are not found unprepared for the new social demands and to **guarantee the quality of our democracy, which is increasingly in need of education for the common good.**



There was recognition that volunteers are involved in **many fields of action**, from assistance to **civil protection, culture, leisure time, conservation of the artistic heritage, competitive and non-competitive sport, and conservation of the artistic heritage, scientific research and cooperation, and in the general interest, they give their time and skills to the community** for free for the benefit of the community. This is a precious heritage to be preserved and highlighted at the highest possible level.

The steps for the Transnational candidacy were presented:

1. Use 2022 to formalise the candidacy with the governments of 4-5 European countries other than Italy by preparing an appropriate dossier.
2. 2023 will be the year in which the official request is sent by the governments to the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.
3. The objective is to achieve the nomination of intangible heritage of humanity during 2024 on the occasion of the possible European year of volunteering.

It was agreed that the preparation of the candidacy becomes an opportunity to contribute to the broader European campaign for better recognition of the contribution of volunteering to inclusion, equality and rights.

The next steps to create the application dossier were formulated:

1. **Define the cultural area to be protected and the specific elements of intangible heritage.**
2. Identify and define well the practising communities;
3. Explore the application of one or more good practices.

Draft Definition for the purposes of the UNESCO campaign:

"Voluntary action contributes to the creation and strengthening of intangible cultural heritage through the production of relational goods, the creation of bonds of trust, the dissemination of a culture of reciprocity, all aimed at expanding the areas of inclusiveness and interculturality."



4) Volunteering & the Conference on the Future of Europe / BEV2030 next steps

The BEV2030 advocacy plan includes proposals for actions at all policy levels from European to local. The group discussed how to connect these levels and ensure that developments are mutually beneficial to all actors. The role of the CEV Secretariat and of the members in supporting this was also addressed. The question of agreeing on the priorities and how stakeholders can support one another to achieve shared goals was considered crucial.

The goal of the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030 that was adopted by the CEV General Assembly in September 2021 is to: increase the focus on the heart and soul of volunteering; what values are being expressed through volunteering; and how volunteering is an expression of democracy and solidarity. It aims to bring to policy makers the vision that volunteers are not just a source of people-power for essential and meaningful tasks in society, but they play an important role in social cohesion, interpersonal relationships, social transformation, and paving the way to making European Values a reality. The advocacy has been planned in a number of phases:

PHASE 1 included the Identification of the problems/ challenges and the things we want to achieve together to promote and support volunteering in Europe and this phase has already been completed.

PHASE 2 has been focussed on building a broader support base and raising awareness about the existence of the Blueprint with a wide stakeholder group. The Blueprint has been endorsed by a number of external organisations and key individuals and presented in several face to face and online events from local to global levels.



PHASE 3 is dedicated to working towards specific policy changes and seeking to leverage the potential of existing processes such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, the follow up to the EESC Opinion on "Volunteers - Building the Future of Europe" and the Council Conclusions of October 2020 "Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of Digitalisation", specifically article 46, together with the related Green Paper and Synopsis report. The role to be played by the existing and upcoming EU Presidency processes was also addressed.

The potential of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CofoE) that finishes in May 2022 was considered to be crucial and participants learnt more about how CEV has been engaging with other European Civil Society networks to develop recommendations for the Conference and how the recommendations stress the importance of civic space in Europe and of the voluntary effort and activism of citizens to maintain democracy and civic freedoms in Europe. The participants exchanged ideas on what could and should be the legacy of this unique participatory democracy process. The participants agreed that the series of webinars that would follow the event in the first part of 2022 aimed at exploring each chapter of BEV 2030 in detail would play a crucial role in enabling CEV members and other stakeholders to fully address the issues connecting inclusion, equality and rights to volunteering.

5) Membership development/ network outreach

Exploring together the added value of CEV membership gave the opportunity to ensure that members' needs could be better understood and met by the CEV secretariat and Board and that membership growth would be able to strengthen CEV's collective capacity building and advocacy potential and outreach. The group concluded that CEV Membership allows for participation in online and face to face events with other stakeholders that facilitates cross-country and cross-cultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a wider volunteering community across Europe.





These opportunities for participation and engagement lead to learning, collaboration, exchange of good practice and capacity building. Collaboration based on shared values enables national, regional and local organisations to have a strengthened reputation at member state level allowing them to be more effective at lobbying for the recognition of and support for volunteering as an expression of EU values and a way to ensure inclusion, equality and rights in Europe for all. Acting together as part of the CEV network enables members to build on their individual advocacy plans and have a priority channel to EU Institutions and relevant stakeholders. The members expressed their interest and motivation to engage in the new opportunities being offered due to the co-financing from the EU through the CERV programme. In particular, the focus on capacity building for inclusive volunteering was considered essential for bringing more inclusion, equality and rights in volunteering itself.

After these small group discussions and a short break that allowed for transfer to the second venue for the next part of the event the BEV2020 video was shown and participants were reminded of its existence and of other communication and advocacy materials and tools and their availability and usefulness for their advocacy activities going forward.

The campaign for the European Year of volunteers 2025 video was shown and there was an intervention from Lejla Sehic Relic, the CEV President and from Krzysztof Pater, EESC with an EY2025 Call to Action.

The last part of the event allowed participants to explore the outcomes of the earlier corner discussions in a walking exhibition while enjoying some refreshments and connecting and exchanging further with the other participants in a less structured manner that facilitated the development of innovative and unexpected ideas and suggestions for future collaboration and exchange.

The event concluded with announcing the follow up events that would take place mainly online in the form of INEAR webinars focussing in turn on each of the chapters of BEV2030 and how they connect to the development of Inclusion, Equality and Rights in Europe.

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#BEV2030



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