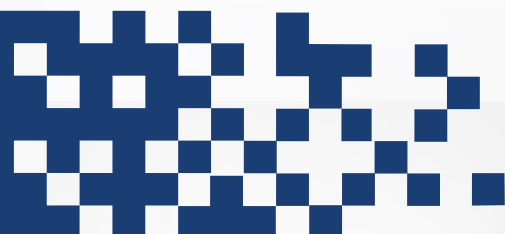


INEAR



Inclusion, Equality and Rights in Volunteering

WEBINAR



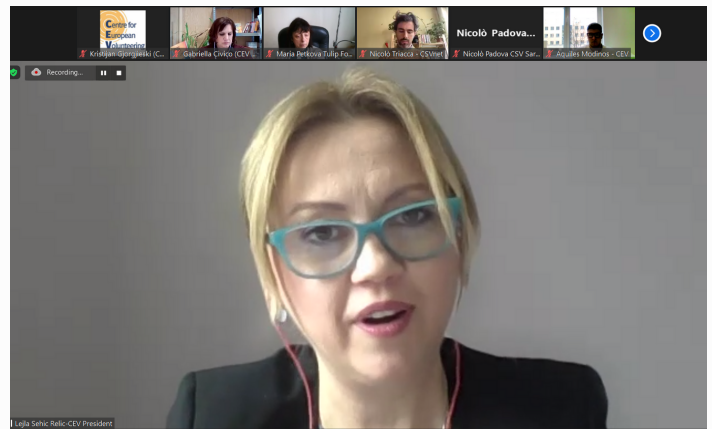
Independent and Inclusive Engagement Report

March 31st 2022



The event was opened by the CEV Director Gabriella Civico who welcomed everyone to the event and gave technical details about the meeting. Following that, the **CEV President Lejla Sehic Relic gave a keynote address on “Independent and Inclusive Engagement - The basis for all Volunteering?”**. She emphasised that it was important that the first Chapter in BEV2030 was dedicated to this theme of democratic and inclusive engagement as this is the basis for all volunteering. She highlighted that volunteering is an essential component for European democracy and an expression of European Values and that the active engagement of citizens both in practical actions and in policy development leading to systemic change is crucial. She went on to describe how important and significant volunteering is when it's connected with democratic values and that dignity and freedom are at the heart of volunteering. She underlined that volunteering is a free will, and with a free will comes the potential of stronger solidarity in our society and more democratic society. She reminded participants that dignity & freedom are the basis of human rights and they play a crucial role in volunteering, that's why these themes, topics and issues are addressed as part of this Blueprint.

Another aspect of her presentation was to recall that volunteering has to contribute to social justice and reaching a fairer society that will be based on European values and be open, inclusive and accessible to all. She emphasised that it is important for the state to be transparent and democratic in state funding and that in times of crises if CSOs and other stakeholders want volunteering to be the main actor, then free and sustainable space has to be given to them.



Lejla Sehic Relic, CEV president

She went on to say that when it comes to local communities, for CEV it was very important to say that both volunteering and the democratic practices are starting from the local level and that volunteering can contribute to more prosocial dynamics in our communities. Furthermore, these communities should support more horizontal networks and more solidarity, where volunteering will be an important part.



The CEV President underlined that now with Ukraine it can be seen how “Transnational cooperation & solidarity” can play a key role in times of crises, and that this was also obvious with COVID19. She concluded by drawing attention to the fact that now we are witnessing the increase of activism and volunteering that is crossing borders and connecting people who are motivated to respond to global challenges in a voluntary capacity based on their own free will and wish to engage with their fellow citizens in response to needs.

The next part of the webinar benefited from the case study of Berlin European Volunteering Capital 2021. The example was presented by Friedemann Walther, Head of the Berlin Senate Chancellery Civic Engagement and Democracy Promotion.

He described how in Berlin some Ukrainian refugees have already arrived and that the city, together with NGOs, had organised registration, accommodation and education for the children. They are thinking about how they can support people who want to move and stay in Germany. There are also ongoing discussions with the policymakers and authorities about midterm participation and integration. He shared that Berlin CSOs started communication with CSOs in Ukraine and representatives from those organisations that are now in Berlin. He drew attention to the importance of the fact that now, at the main transport hubs in the city i.e. bus/train station and the airport they have introduced a sustainable volunteer management system that will better match offers of support with need in a sustainable way.



*Friedemann Walther,
Head of the Berlin Senate Chancellery Civic
Engagement and Democracy Promotion*

Recognition of the importance of introducing a system where the inclusion begins from the first day was highlighted as an essential and core component of the strategy in Berlin. This fact is connected with the basis on which they also introduced a good preparation system for the neighbourhood. He underlined how a lot of people approached them and offered to help with food and accommodation and that local volunteer centres are engaging in this part with coordination in every local community.



He concluded by stressing that for Berlin - Integration and participation is a society question and that the new Governor mayor of Berlin is in contact with and in coordination with all stakeholders and CSOs who can do something in this field. She has established a new Permanent Secretary in the Senate Chancellery who is responsible for active citizenship and democracy support and firmly believes that in these challenging times it is important for all issues to be consulted and processed between public institutions, social partners and local CSOs in a collaborative way.

Exploring BEV 2030 Chapter “Independent and Inclusive Engagement”

In this part of the webinar the subsections of this Blueprint chapter were explored more deeply.

Democratic Engagement: Volunteering is an essential component for European democracy and an expression of European Values. The active engagement of citizens both in practical actions and in policy development leading to systemic change is crucial. In this part CEV introduced the 2 outcomes which are currently of highest priority and most relevance at the EU level, namely: *“Article 11 of the “Lisbon Treaty” concerning structured dialogue with European civil society is implemented in full”* and *Civil society partners that are experts in volunteering are engaged in regular structured dialogue with policymakers on all matters related to and impacting on volunteers & volunteering”*. When it comes to policy and advocacy actions, on a European level CEV has the closest relationship with EESC as a member of the formally constructed EESC Liaison Group with European Civil Society Networks and is a member of Civil Society Europe - the Coordination body for European Civil Society Networks. It was noted that the most recent success in this field that showed a big step towards achieving the outcomes envisaged in BEV2030 has been that the incoming EP President Metsola has taken formal responsibility for relations and dialogue with civil society and has named a Vice President of the Parliament in charge of dialogue with civil society in her absence.

This is a big improvement on previous formulations which only focussed on communication to citizens rather than actual dialogue with representative civil society organisations. Jan Verdee, CEV Board member and representative of “Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk vzw”, shared his experience in Belgium on structured civil dialogue, where it formally exists in the frame of the High Council for Volunteering, but that in reality it doesn't really function as well as it should.



Friedemann Walther added that in Germany in the Parliament they have Committee for Democracy and Engagement and there they have regular hearings with public society. Monica Popow from the City of Gdansk intervened with the situation in Poland, where on local level there are often councils for cooperation with civil society, but on a district/regional level and nationally this is more scarce.

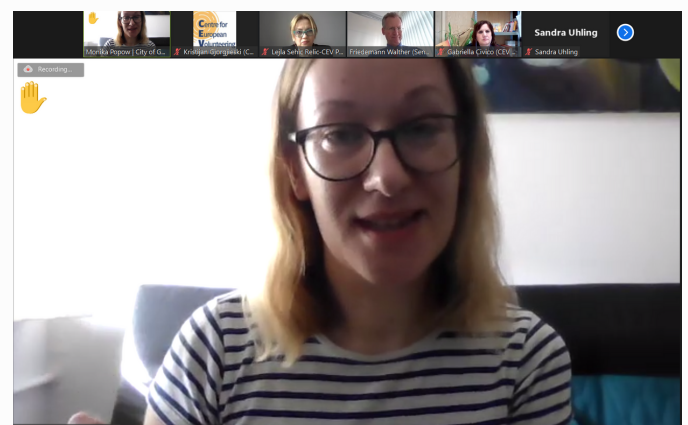
Dignity and Freedom: The contribution of volunteers should be accepted as a key part of the team effort and a trusted partner for social cohesion. Volunteers should be seen as actors in their own destiny engaging in participatory democracy alongside representative democracy to improve quality of life for all. Volunteering can contribute to social justice and reach a fairer society that will be based on European values and be open, inclusive and accessible to all. This subsection includes 3 outcomes: *"Volunteer organisations are always included in the design and delivery of social cohesion policies"; "The basic principles of volunteering are protected by policymakers and all stakeholders" and "The dignity of volunteers and those being supported by volunteers is protected"*. Jan Verdee presented an example from Belgium in relation to an experience during the COVID19 pandemic. He described that some vaccination centres started taking volunteers during the pandemic and had no experience in managing the the volunteers, there was a risk that they were used as "cheap labour" and that the principles, ethics and core values that volunteering should be based on eg volunteers not replacing paid staff were not always adhered to. Monica Popow highlighted that volunteering organisations across the EU and especially in Poland should advocate and lobby more on national level and present their ideas not only in their bubble-in their sector, but go for more mainstream dialogue for a wider audience and target group. Ilaria Ferraro concluded this part of the discussion by sharing the situation in Italy, where volunteering organisations who helped in the COVID19 crisis are not that ready with the Ukrainian crisis and there is no strong network between them.

The remaining subsections of the Blueprint (**Transparent and Democratic State Funding; Collaborative Networking and Local Community Development**) were covered as transversal and crosscutting topics throughout the whole webinar.

It was noted that transparent and democratically distributed state funding to democratic and inclusive volunteering initiatives with clear and transparent procedures is essential for quality volunteering to thrive and that the absence of state support for civil society and volunteers leaves space for individuals and groups to take advantage of the vulnerabilities of others and promote their ideological and political agendas in connection with the distribution of funds. It was added that focusing on pre-existing and trustful cross-sector collaboration has proved crucial in enabling communities to respond to existing and new requests for help and assistance.

In the last subsection on **Transnational cooperation and Solidarity**, it was highlighted that good cross-sector collaboration at the local level between the public and private sectors, for communities of all sizes and situations, has high potential as a driver of value creation that is crucial for sustainable development, as well as for disaster preparedness and risk reduction. The specific role of public sector actors at the local level, the co-creation of public policies to become the norm and the opportunities offered by participatory decision making process and special attention to be paid to the links between the public and private sectors were identified as outcomes in this subsection. The participants concluded that transnational cooperation and solidarity across borders we need now more than ever when we look at the Ukrainian refugees situation.

Monica Popow described the situation in Poland when the war started in Ukraine. The City of Gdansk created a website "Gdansk helps Ukraine" and over 1000 people signed up to host refugees, and others offered food and clothes. Through a special process the city had to verify the families and in the end they chose 300 apartments/houses that were safe and suitable for housing refugees. Others had been placed in hotels and other kinds of accommodation such as student residencies.

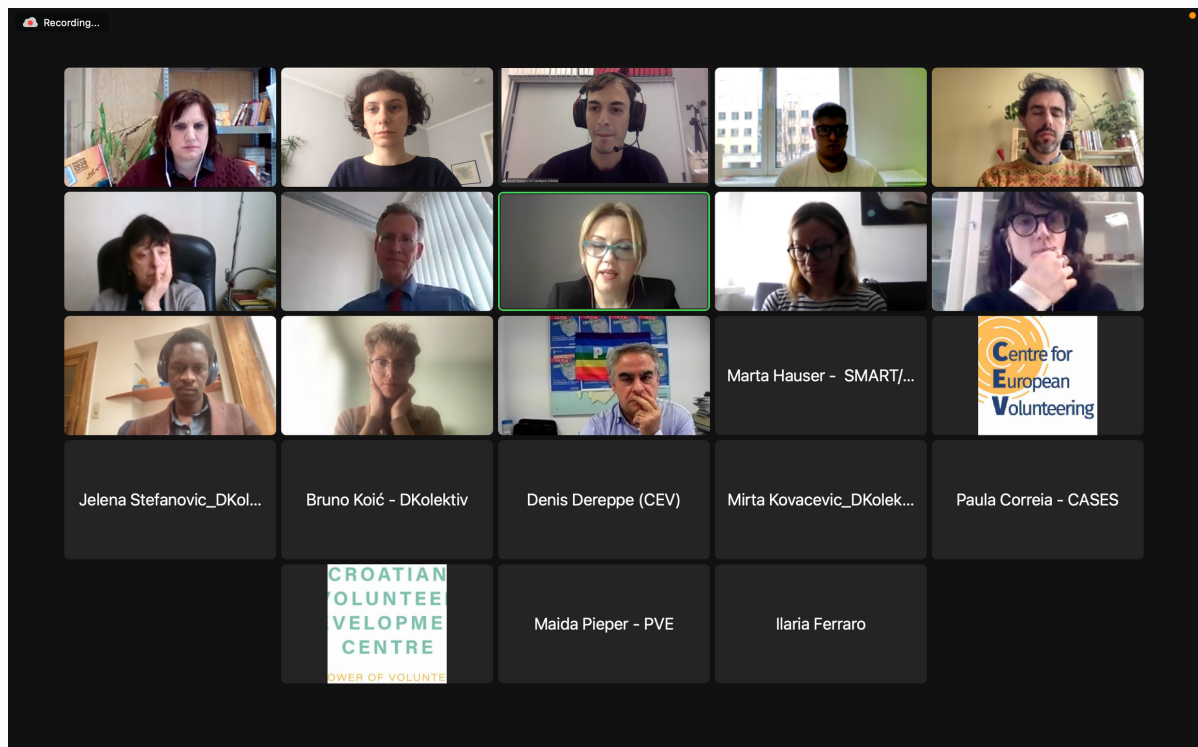


Monica Popow,
Gdansk Municipality



Besides the direct support offered by individual citizens, many restaurants and event organisers have shared their venues food and drinks. As part of the longer term inclusion process the city is offering the refugees a Polish language course, so they can learn the language and find a decent job, so they can have a better chance to more fully integrate in the Polish society.

Giulia Bordin from CEV presented a video on how to endorse the European Year of Volunteers 2025 #EYV2025. In the end there was evaluation & feedback conducted on Mentimeter. You can see the results [here](#).



Participants

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