

Empowering social inclusion through the validation of non-formal and informal learning



Organised by: CEV, EVBB & EESC LMO

Report

In the session, the speakers Tatjana Babrauskiene (Labour Market Observatory – EESC member) and Johanna Baeyens (EVBB) moderated by Gabriella Civico (CEV) discussed the importance of volunteering as a significant source of non-formal and informal learning, playing a pivotal role in lifelong learning and personal development, European democracy and the embodiment of shared European values.

The session started with a mentimeter activity where participants were asked a number of questions as an opportunity to reflect upon the topics of social inclusion, volunteering and learning. In reply to the question have you ever volunteered?, 95% of participants in the session confirmed that they had.

The participants were asked a second question: "Which skills do you believe can be developed through volunteering?" The options included Empathy, Time Management, Problem Solving, Communication, Leadership, Teamwork, and None of the above. Participants were allowed to select only one option, with Empathy receiving 38% of the votes and Communication coming in second. Attendees voiced their opinion that all of these skills are attainable through volunteering and that they complement each other with similar importance.

The third question posed was: "Do you believe there is a connection between validating non-formal and informal learning through volunteering and promoting social inclusion?" Among the respondents, 76% affirmed this connection, while 2% disagreed, 8% responded with uncertainty, and 14% opted for the response "I am here to find out."

Active citizen engagement through practical actions and advocacy was highlighted as vital for promoting and supporting social inclusion. It was noted that the learning acquired by volunteers in the civil society sphere could enhance their chances of social inclusion and mitigate the risks of social exclusion, especially when such learning was validated and certified. Learning outcomes ranged from vocational skills to essential transversal skills such as flexibility, empathy, teamwork and creativity.

Emphasising the role of volunteering in lifelong learning, it was deemed essential for education, skills and employment policies to integrate the benefits derived from volunteering experiences comprehensively. This integration could be facilitated by understanding and implementing the newly updated **European Guidelines for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.**

The session explored how validation could drive the promotion and support of social inclusion, addressing necessary changes at systemic, organisational and individual levels to unlock its potential fully. Discussions encompassed the impact of the European Year of Skills 2023/2024, the inclusion of validation

in National Skills strategies, and the <u>accessibility of these processes for volunteers</u>. Additionally, the transformative opportunities presented by microcredentials and how validation could foster a Green and Sustainable economy and society inclusively were deliberated.

Policy recommendations from the project **European Quality Standards in Validation of Learning from Volunteering** (EQVAL) were reflected upon deepening the understanding of how validation could contribute to the objectives outlined in the Skills and Talent Mobility package, particularly in promoting and supporting the social inclusion of newcomers to Europe.

The concept "Voluntourism", blending volunteering with 'tourism', was put on the table and discussed due its mixed impacts. Evaluating the quality of the project is crucial to understanding its potential impact in the broader community and the volunteers involved. Studying this new trend requires careful consideration of ethical implications and long-term sustainability strategies. The moderator and panellists highlighted the importance of the management of the projects to offer genuine needs-based community impact and real learning and validation of skills through this experience.

The workshop served as a dynamic conversation where insights from the intersection of volunteering, vocational education and lifelong learning converged to chart a course for a more resilient, adaptable and socially inclusive European workforce.

The session ended with a Q&A round after reflecting the last 3 questions of the Mentimeter that were:

Participants were asked about the primary advantages of validating non-formal and informal learning for social inclusion and personal development. While "Inclusion" emerged as the most frequently mentioned term, other notable answers included "Experience," "Tolerance," "Cooperation," "Asperger," "Critical Thinking," "Disability," "Empathy," "Empowerment," "Participation," and "Recognition."

The second question of this second round was "How can we enhance validation processes for non-formal and informal learning to boost social inclusion and personal development?" and people replied openly in free text: "Multi-Stakeholder approach", "take advantage of digital transition", "Volunteering accessible in all the sectors", "Better collaboration between all the actors", "Co-design". The response emphasised by many was the "Learning process," underscoring the importance of a step-by-step approach towards transitioning to more inclusive and robust validation processes.

A call to action through the last question was discussed, the question was "What will you do after this session connected to this topic?" and the replies were: "Volunteer", "learn more", "Share what I have learned", "Foster Cooperation". Responses included commitments to "volunteer," "further learning," "share newfound knowledge," and "foster cooperation." Overall, participants expressed gratitude for the session, finding it instrumental in promoting self-reflection and motivating them to seek out additional information and concrete ways to collaborate.