



## Workshop 8

### The role and economic value of volunteers in the road to recovery and beyond

4 March 2021 | 16:00 – 18:00 | EESC - Brussels

*Organised by CEV (Centre for European Volunteering) and the EESC Section for  
Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)*

This online workshop focused on opening up a discussion on how European policy makers should consider and involve the voluntary sector within the framework of the Next Generation EU recovery fund and the European Resilience and Recovery Facility (RRF), owing to the huge contribution volunteers make both in an economic and social sense, across Europe. This discussion comes at a particularly important time for Europe as we look towards how to rebuild and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, while it is thematically fitting given that 2021 is the 10th anniversary of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, giving us chance to reflect on the progress made since 2011, the challenges still to face, and how this can contribute to recovery plans.

The workshop consisted of four speakers, with SOC president Laurențiu Plosceanu giving an opening speech talking more broadly about the contribution of volunteers and the value of the voluntary sector to civil society. Following this, CEV President Lejla Sehic Relic presented the draft “Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030” which, produced by CEV and other stakeholders, highlighted the five pillars which should be at the heart of volunteering policy in Europe if we are to truly appreciate and support the sector. Krzysztof Pater, EESC member, followed this with a presentation specifically on the economic value of volunteering, highlighting the difficulty in comparing and assessing this due to lack of standardised data while also giving examples of the contribution of volunteers in Poland. Prof. Dr. Lucas Meijs then presented on how to make volunteering energy sustainable and circular, to ensure that society harnesses the altruism and generosity of volunteers, while not underappreciating their contributions, in a way which keeps the flow of volunteer energy.



These opening presentations were followed by three breakout groups who each discussed a specific topic before joining back to the main meeting and feeding back the conclusions to the rest of the workshop. The breakout groups were as follows:

**Group 1:** Policy and programme support for volunteering in the framework of the Next Generation EU Recovery Fund

*(Facilitated by Pavel Trantina, Board member, Czech Scout Foundation)*

This group, focussing primarily on the policy aspect of volunteering and the European Resilience and Recovery Facility, concluded that civil society organisations were only involved in preparations for the national recovery plans to a limited extent. This should be reversed, allowing for more involvement of CSOs, especially given the contribution of volunteers. Targeted support for volunteering is needed to enable volunteers to address the specific needs of communities across Europe, and build resilience as part of the recovery.

**Group 2:** Better measuring the value of volunteering in Europe to have a stronger evidence base for current and future policies and a better understanding of the economic contribution of volunteering to the recovery process

*(Facilitated by Katja Jäger, Researcher at the project office EVC Berlin & betterplace lab)*

This group focussed more on the economic contribution of volunteers, but also looking at the need for research and evidence to understand this and better inform policy-making. The group highlighted primarily that the lack of meaningful, reliable, and crucially, comparable data and research holds back informed policy-making and therefore prevents us from making the most of the volunteer energy. Policy-makers need to, along with strengthening data collection, work more closely with stakeholders to better understand volunteering and its economic contribution.

**Group 3:** Volunteering as an expression of European values contributing to the future of Europe based on democracy and active citizenship on the 10th Anniversary of EYV 2011 and beyond

*(Facilitated by Costin Dedu, Vice President of Volonteurope network, & president of Asociatia Imago Mundi)*

The final group considered volunteering through the more social aspect, considering its place in civil society and how it reinforces European values, with special consideration for the legacy of EYV 2011. They firmly concluded that volunteering is an essential expression of European values, particularly solidarity, social inclusion, and belief in an equal democratic society. Volunteers are an example and a force for change in this respect, encouraging others and highlighting the positives of these values. Policy-makers should therefore consider volunteering through lenses other than hours invested, and look at their social contribution as well as the, still important, economic aspect. The 10th anniversary of EYV 2011 should provide the opportunity for reflection on this, and to assess what challenges volunteering still faces in the European context.



**Overall conclusions:** While much progress has been made on supporting the voluntary sector since EYV 2011, this workshop highlighted that there is still much work to be done. The lack of comparable, reliable data and research was frequently brought up and addressed, as this has negative implications for the ability of policy-makers to create informed policy around volunteering. The lack of data also leads to an underestimation of the value of volunteering, which manifests through economic value and social value through not only the physical contribution of volunteers in specific communities, but also as an expression and example of the positives of European values. When preparing the Next Generation EU agenda and RRFs, civil society organisations should be more heavily involved and valued as an integral partner and contributor to post COVID-19 pandemic recovery.