



Youth in Action
mobilising
the potential
of young
Europeans

Youth Volunteering:

personal challenges,
social objectives

The European Voluntary Service enables young people to go abroad to provide unpaid service for a maximum of one year. This is a true learning process in which young people face challenges in an unknown environment, and learn to exploit their own potential and abilities, developing self-confidence and independence that is useful at any stage of their subsequent lives.

It is for young people who want to express solidarity by engaging in culture, youth, sport, social care, civil protection, environment, post-crisis situations, etc. They derive the benefit of new experience by acquiring new skills, and they benefit local communities by helping, among others, disabled, elderly or homeless people, young prisoners, people addicted to alcohol and drugs, children or youth, and cultural institutions.



▶▶ Through first-hand experience of other cultures right around the world, the young people involved broaden their perspectives, develop tolerance, understanding, and a sense of a common identity and responsibility. The awareness of diversity also helps young people

to form decisions on their own next steps — including in professional terms — in a more informed fashion, and employers value the skills and maturity that participants acquire. This fact sheet presents some examples of the thousands of projects completed so far.



Some of the many Youth Volunteering projects completed so far

The volunteer took a first step along her pathway towards discovering her own identity, towards greater self-confidence, and towards a positive relationship with society

1. New experience giving new confidence

A volunteer from Mauritius, who had spent some years in care homes in Italy, went for two months to Portugal in 2010 as part of a tailor-made inclusion project, mentored by Cemea del Mezzogiorno Onlus. This is an organisation that cooperates with the Italian juvenile court system and with social services to support the inclusion of young offenders in society. It runs centres with activities focused on the personal development of youngsters, stimulating creativity and participation and offering the opportunity to acquire abilities and specific competencies.

The volunteer took care of young children in a centre. She supervised them, and helped the educators in the development and planning of

the activities. She played games and sports with the children, socialised with them and increased their interest in art and culture, helped them in the canteen and during lunch time, and developed workshops.

Thanks to the cooperation between Italy and Portugal, the volunteer took a first step along her pathway towards discovering her own identity, towards greater self-confidence, and towards a positive relationship with society. She subsequently felt confident enough to return to Mauritius.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Italy

Hosting organisation:

- CEMEA del Mezzogiorno onlus, Italy.

Sending organisation:

- Associação Juvenil de Peniche, Portugal.

2. Helping young people into the world of employment

Over the course of two years, ITER is giving the chance to do voluntary service to some 40 young people with few opportunities and from widely differing backgrounds. These are all people who did not complete secondary education and had no natural pathways into employment, thus exposing them to the risk of permanent exclusion.

Recent participants were six Swedish-born young people of Arabic or South American extraction, jobless and on benefits, and with histories including criminal records, drug abuse, mental illness, and troubled family relations — a target group which is difficult to reach and to motivate. For periods ranging from a few weeks to a couple of months in 2011–12, the project offers participants new experiences in a wider context, at the same time promoting employment and inclusion in society. The project prepares and motivates the young people in advance, then captures their experiences when they return home by including them in activities and coaching, and opening up new gateways to training and education. The activities — focusing on art, theatre and environment — reflect the different interests and needs of the individual participants. Cooperating partner organisations aim to engage

the young people in projects that they find both meaningful and manageable.

Participation has developed skills that improve job prospects, but the most striking achievement is the difference in the way the young people see themselves, rather than the acquisition of specific practical skills. The non-formal learning methods bring added value at European level by developing their cultural awareness and expression. ITER has received coverage in the media and distributes information in youth centres and social service offices.

The organisations involved in this project are from Estonia, France and Sweden, and the project combines funding from the European Voluntary Service and from the European Social Fund — allowing effective preparation of young people, and providing for extensive follow-up and evaluation.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Sweden

Hosting organisations:

- Continuous Action MTÜ, Estonia;
- Estonian Unesco Youth Association, Estonia;
- Association Citrus, France;
- Maison des Bateleurs — Solidarites-jeunesses Poitou-Charentes, France;
- Solidarités Jeunesse/Villages des jeunes (Vaunières), France.

Sending organisation:

- The Committee for Allocation of Social Welfare, Gothenburg, Sweden.

The project offers new experiences in a wider context, at the same time promoting employment and inclusion in society

3. Promoting volunteering

The youth council of Slovakia hosted a volunteer from Portugal for eight months in 2010 in a project aimed at promoting volunteering and its value for an individual as well as for the life of a community. Through 50 local community projects across the country, more than 5 000 children and young people in Slovakia had the opportunity to become involved in a nationwide campaign entitled '72 hours without compromise'.

The volunteer promoted this event, and provided the organisations involved in it with logistical support and assistance in the media campaign,

and with guidance for the web page for networking with international volunteers taking part in the final event. She also developed a photo exhibition of volunteers' views of Slovakia, 'The others' Slovakia', as a personal project. The volunteer developed her foreign language abilities and her skills in project management and communication, and improved her awareness of other cultures.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Slovakia

Hosting organisation:

- Rada mládeže Slovenska (RMS), Slovakia.

Sending organisation:

- AAUM Rádio Universitária do Minho, Seccao Cultural de Radiodifusao e Comunicacao, Portugal.

The volunteer developed her foreign language abilities and her skills in project management and communication and improved her intercultural awareness

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4. An Estonian goes to a Palestinian refugee camp

An Estonian NGO worked with the Jafra Palestinian youth centre from Syria on a project entitled 'Euromed mosaic of art and culture'. It involved a 12-month individual voluntary service in 2010 and 2011 at the heart of the Yarmouk camp, near Damascus, containing 130 000 Palestinian residents — one of the biggest Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East. The youth centre arranges activities that allow young people in the camp to spend their free time usefully, and to learn more about their cultural origins. A volunteer from Estonia chose to go to Syria to work with Palestinian children because of her interest in Arabic culture and language. She organised and ran camps, workshops and exhibitions of arts and culture, using games, puppet shows, discussions and sports, and taught English.

There was an increase in cultural and social awareness among local youth, and a greater sense among them of their own powers

The project aimed to raise the level of cultural and social awareness among local young people, to help them realise their own ambitions. The volunteer's programmes helped fill gaps in the youngsters' knowledge of culture and arts and gave them a greater sense of their own powers. The volunteer gained too through working with refugees and developing communication and social skills and increased tolerance to people from different backgrounds. She also improved her knowledge of Arabic. After witnessing the beginning of the popular unrest there in March 2011, she took a one-month break, but then returned to Syria. She said that the longer she lives in the region the better she understands the people there.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Estonia

Hosting organisation:

- Jafra Youth Center, Syria.

Sending organisation:

- Explore NGO, Estonia.

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'With the European Voluntary Service, I can assure you that you will not be bored! You gain new experience, and learn about the culture and traditions of other nations.'

'Every week I organised language courses for small groups of children in an informal environment — we looked at cartoons, sang, read children's books and played outside.'

'Every day there is something wonderful and extraordinary. I hope to learn many more interesting things about this country and acquire skills, experiences and unforgettable emotions.'

5. Promoting understanding in Bosnia and Herzegovina

A 25-year-old volunteer from Limousin went to Bosnia and Herzegovina to promote dialogue between people of different religions in Jajce, which still, after 10 years, bears the scars of ethnic cleansing in the region. In Omladinski Centar Jajce, an association aimed at countering racism, she worked at overcoming all forms of discrimination among young people. She worked with them on contributing to its local magazine, 'Senzor', and gave classes in languages and computer use.

It was part of 'Europe in the hands of young people', which aims to bring together young people from different backgrounds to promote their sense of European citizenship, particularly by involving them in projects at local or international level that stimulate inclusion of young people.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in France

Hosting organisation:

- CRIJ Limousin, France.

Sending organisation:

- UG Omladinski Centar Jajce, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

6. Disability is no bar to helping others

A 30-year-old from Rome spent three months in Malta as a European volunteer with the NGO Razett tal-Hibberija, now part of the Foundation for Inclusion — Inspire, which helps children and adults with learning and physical disabilities to develop their potential. It offers an array of therapeutic, educational and leisure services to children and adults with physical and/or learning disabilities, free of charge. People with disabilities regularly use the facilities and participate in events. The NGO initially hesitated, because the young Italian himself has suffered from a physical disability since birth. Working with a foreign volunteer who has a disability was a new concept for the centre's staff and volunteers.

But the experience proved valuable to everyone. The volunteer worked in the animal park with its rabbits, a donkey and a deer. He cleaned the enclosure, looked after animals, and welcomed visiting groups and allowed them to pet the animals. With the inmates at the centre, he helped during swimming sessions, and even went shopping to buy food for the centre. Overcoming his physical barriers and discovering his abilities strengthened his self-confidence and independence. And his commitment to perform the work assigned to him impressed everyone he worked with. He became an inspiration himself, and on his return home he resumed university studies.

Project funded by
the Youth in Action national agency in Malta

Hosting organisation:

- Razzett tal-Hibberija, Malta.

Sending organisation:

- Sezione Laziale della UILDM (Unione Italiana Lotta alla Distrofia Muscolare) ONLUS, Italy.

Overcoming his physical barriers and discovering his abilities strengthened his self-confidence and independence

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‘This experience has been a benchmark: both for my physical independence and as a challenge for me. I had the pleasure of meeting extraordinary people and working with a harmonious group of volunteers. I covered more than three kilometres per day, always on foot, and for me who has always used a car it has been a true rediscovery of my abilities. Some days I returned home with several kilos of shopping and arriving home was a real victory for me. I hope other people with disabilities can find the courage to have this experience, because, as I say to myself, nothing is impossible if you really want it.’

‘The volunteer integrated well with the team. His smiles, jokes and positive attitude were welcomed by all, and he impressed everyone with his sensitivity and his determination to make the best of the work assigned to him.’



7. Building a library in Angola

The project 'Teach in order to learn' in Luau, a provincial town in Angola, focused on development, cooperation and non-formal education. Twelve volunteers from Portugal — along with Angolan young people — took part in this month-long group project in 2010, which started with an exploration of the education and training needs among local children and young people. They visited local schools and hospitals to get to know the context they were operating in. On that basis, the volunteers built a library from scratch. Three hundred cases of books were delivered during the project, and the volunteers classified and catalogued them and organised their incorporation into the new library, along with materials that young people from Luau could use there. The library became a cultural centre for extra-school activities, led by the volunteers — with plenty of outdoor activities too. They also worked with local teachers in developing cultural and artistic activities and providing teaching materials ranging from health to information technology.

The results in terms of skills were improved communication capacities among the young volunteers. They also gained a clearer sense of what European identity means — something that they continued to display on their return home, in a series of meetings with and presentations to their peers. But a deeper understanding was also attained among Portuguese and Angolan young people of their respective cultures — with enhanced openness and tolerance and a greater sense of civic participation. The project also promoted international youth work and the concept and practice of volunteering, and brought some new ideas to local teachers. Its visibility was reinforced by coverage in local newspapers, newsletters and the radio, and by videos that the volunteers made with their partners during the project, and that they distributed widely on their return.

Project funded by
the Education, Audiovisual and Culture
Executive Agency in Brussels

Hosting organisation:
• Missão Católica de Luau, Angola.

Sending organisations:
• FEC — Fundação Evangelização e Culturas, Portugal;
• Associação Leigos Voluntários Dehonianos — ALVD, Portugal.

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A deeper understanding was attained among Portuguese and Angolan young people of their respective cultures



Youth in Action

mobilising the potential of young Europeans

Youth in Action is the European Union programme that has helped young people since 2007, through non-formal learning and wider mobility, to boost their skills as well as giving them new opportunities to develop their personal capacities. It is open to all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural backgrounds. It encourages intercultural dialogue and the inclusion of all young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. It strengthens European values everywhere it operates — in the EU and in 140 countries beyond. It funds a wide variety of youth activities, including exchanges, initiatives, democracy projects, and a voluntary service. It also supports youth workers and civil society organisations through training and networking, and promotes European cooperation in the youth field.

Noticeable results

Youth in Action has a global budget of EUR 885 million for the 2007–13 period, and by the end of 2010 it had fully used the EUR 549 million allocated so far. Its basic premise is that investment in young people is the best business case for the European Union and it is also the way to make a success of the European integration project. Over the four years 2007–10, more than 527 000 persons took part (390 000 young people and 137 000 youth workers); 61 000 project applications were submitted and 30 100 projects were approved for grants; and Youth in Action involved around 20 000 youth organisations, informal groups of young people, or public bodies every year as promoters of projects. The intense involvement of non-governmental organisations and social enterprises is a stimulating example for young people of what it means to be an active player in society, and many participants in projects later become involved themselves in social work.

The projects supported range widely across youth activities — everything from raising the profile of young people in the media and giving them more of a say, to organising environmental protection projects at local level, creating documentaries on social issues such as young people with HIV or exclusion of minorities, or helping inmates in young offenders' institutions to boost their own self-esteem and to make efforts themselves to integrate into their community and into wider society.

A significant impact

Youth in Action has had a demonstrable impact on the hundreds of thousands of young people it has involved. The programme has enabled many of them to experience other countries first hand, thus developing a greater sense of openness and understanding of other cultures. And it has provided the young people who have taken part with new skills and confidence.

This is all the more important since for many of the projects, the participants are deliberately selected from communities and social groups with fewer opportunities. The whole programme has a strong social dimension. It makes specific provision for involving young people from disadvantaged groups (with disabilities, health problems, or social, economic or geographic obstacles, unemployed, with educational difficulties, such as early school leavers, or from different cultural backgrounds). The engagement of many different social groups is important in ensuring that the European integration project is not restricted only to elites in European society.

Attractive learning

Youth in Action makes extensive use of non-formal learning, through attractive methods (such as workshops, interviews or simulations), and based on personal experience outside schools. This promotes individual-based teaching, with the emphasis on talents and strengths. Professional facilitators ensure the learning process is conducted mainly by young people themselves, through participation and peer learning. The non-formal learning experience that Youth in Action provides is recognised through a specific certificate called a Youthpass.

In the different environment offered by projects, young people discover their own potential and abilities, and exercise new levels of independence and decision-making. The experience boosts their personal development and widens their horizons, helping them make choices about their further personal and professional life. And they acquire competencies that are increasingly valuable in an evolving labour market. ■

A survey in March 2011 among a representative sample of participants revealed that:

91 %

of young people considered participation increased their competences in foreign languages;

75 %

said they improved their abilities to identify opportunities for their personal or professional future;

73 %

declared they felt more European;

92 %

of youth workers considered they gained skills and knowledge they would not have otherwise acquired;

73 %

of youth organisations said they were doing more international projects.

In addition

the 2010 survey showed that participants in the programme have a significantly higher voting record in European elections than their peers. For instance in 2009, **60 %** of participants voted, compared to an average of **29 %** for all young people across Europe.

60 % / **29 %**

Who can take part

in European Voluntary Service projects, and how do they work?

The scheme is open to young people 18–30 years old (and to disadvantaged young people 16–30). An individual activity involves one volunteer. A group activity involves from 2 to 30 volunteers. Volunteers benefit from specific training throughout the activity and agree in advance on their expected learning outcomes, processes and methods. Participation is free for the volunteers (except for a possible contribution of a maximum of 10 % of the travel costs), who receive board and lodging, insurance cover and an allowance for the duration of the project. Special conditions apply to encourage the participation of young people with fewer opportunities.

Applications can be made by non-profit or non-governmental organisations, regional or local public bodies, international governmental organisations, European bodies active in the youth field, and profit-making entities which organise events in youth, sport or culture. Projects involve a partnership between a sending organisation, a host organisation and the volunteer, and one of the organisations plays a coordinating role in the grant process. Core

values and quality standards are laid down in a charter to which organisations must be accredited.

Mobility takes place mainly within the 33 programme countries: the 27 Member States of the European Union, as well as Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey, but also within the 22 neighbouring countries (eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the Mediterranean region, and south-eastern Europe) and 118 other countries of the world. Projects receive grants via Youth in Action national agencies in programme countries, or via the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels.

Youth Volunteering in figures:

	2007	2008	2009	2010
Submitted projects	2 819	3 133	3 460	3 731
Funded projects	2 094	2 223	2 358	2 422
Successful grant applications (%)	74.3	71.0	68.2	64.9
Committed funds (million EUR)	37.101	41.472	45.025	45.692
Number of participants	4 287	5 836	6 368	6 907

Youth in Action: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm



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