



ACKNOWLEDGING AND PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING IN PORTUGAL – A STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

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Ten years after the creation of the Political Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (PAVE), the European Centre for European Volunteering (CEV), through its members of Civil Society Europe (CSE) approved, last September, the European Volunteering Plan 2030 (BEV2030 – Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030).

The Political Agenda of Volunteering in Europe (P.A.V.E.), produced within the scope of the Closing Conference of the European Year of Volunteering (EYV 2011), established recommendations for a more efficient and active European political framework in support and promotion of volunteering, supporting and promoting volunteers and organisations that promote volunteering.

Emphasising the involvement of all parties involved, in a partnership approach, this agenda acknowledged volunteering practices as a vehicle of active citizenship, a demonstration of European values with significant contributions to economic growth and social capital.

PAVE highlighted, among others, the need to improve access to statistical data and other information regarding volunteer opportunities, promoting their visibility and knowledge of their value and impact. In Portugal, this orientation was materialised with the publication in 2012, in collaboration between the National Institute of Statistics (INE) and CASES, of a pilot survey on Volunteer Work. This instrument thus allowed finding out about volunteering practices that had little statistical visibility until then, with dispersed information and data that were not harmonised or systematised. In 2018, new results of the Volunteer Work Survey (ITV 2018) were published, which, albeit not subject to direct comparison with 2012 data due to a methodological change,

presented the critical elements to describe volunteering in Portugal, namely the number of volunteers, socio-demographic features, institutional framework, type of task and number of dedicated working hours.

This strategic instrument also pointed to the involvement of all stakeholders – volunteers, organisations promoting volunteer work and representative structures – in the promotion of volunteer work. In Portugal, this strategy was implemented by CASES and by the signing of a protocol between the latter and the Portuguese Confederation of Volunteering (CPV), thus establishing a framework for cooperation between these two entities aimed at promoting, encouraging and enhancing volunteering in Portugal.

Thus, since 2011, several actions have been implemented, in Portugal and in other European countries, which have promoted understanding, visibility and acknowledgment of the value of volunteering. However, in many parts of Europe, there is still lack of investment and lack of public support for Volunteering, a situation that led to the preparation and approval of the Blueprint for European Volunteering 2030.

This instrument takes advantage of PAVE's strengths, incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and acknowledges the impact and results that volunteering had on our society during the covid19 pandemic and recovery process.

In fact, citizens responded promptly, adapting and launching numerous volunteer initiatives and formulating local policies in direct articulation with municipal structures.

This Blueprint is intended to be a support and guidance tool for all stakeholders, ensuring greater focus, intensity and speed of investment and development of volunteer work.

Recognising that volunteering is a space where volunteers and organisations that promote volunteering find their way with minimal interference from the public sector – thus respecting the autonomy of volunteering and its representatives, the State is required to acknowledge the social value of this practice – as an expression of free exertion of active and solidary citizenship – guaranteeing its autonomy and pluralism, as well as promoting, alongside other stakeholders, five thematic areas:

1. INDEPENDENT AND INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

The protection and support of volunteering is proposed by granting financial support to the different structures that promote said practice, but also by involving them in the design and implementation of public policies, internationally (transnational cooperation), nationally and locally, promoting permanent and structured dialogue between all stakeholders and co-creation of solutions.

2. INVOLVEMENT OF NEW VOLUNTEERS AND METHODS

Acknowledging informal volunteering and new forms of volunteering (digital volunteering, Voluntourism – Volunteer Tourism) is proposed, encouraging the creation of new offers and opportunities for volunteering by organisations promoting volunteering and the creation of new training, awareness-raising and information instruments that promote the involvement and recruitment of new volunteers.

3. EMPOWERMENT

Integrating volunteering in school curricula and plans is proposed at different education levels, promoting awareness and visibility of volunteering, removing psychological and physical barriers to its practice, and creating strategies that ensure stability and continuity of support measures and adequacy and evolution of the legal framework and legal and political structures in light of contemporary social and behavioural changes.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND APPRECIATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF VOLUNTEERING

Creating opportunities for public acknowledgment of volunteering is proposed, such as awards and events, in addition to promoting training and the acquisition of skills associated with the management of volunteering by those responsible for organisations promoting volunteering, and conducting research and studies that highlight the contributions of volunteering to the well-being, health, safety and social connections of citizens and, consequently, the value of volunteering for the individual and society, especially in the post-pandemic period and in a comparable way in European countries.

5. RESOURCES AND COORDINATION

Providing resources and financial support to the different structures that promote volunteering is proposed, as is support for the training of managers and mentors in legal and health matters relevant to volunteers, widespread application of personal accident and civil

liability insurance, obtaining resources to develop market products that provide such insurance regardless of one's circumstances and including careful and responsible development of online mailing systems to ensure that quality and protection measures are at the forefront, integration of volunteering in the planning processes for crisis prevention and response and articulated implementation of volunteering policies, based on dialogue between the different sectors, different levels of decision-making and in articulation with the broader and more comprehensive European volunteer policy.

Taking such steps and policies will allow, according to CSE, acknowledging the real role of volunteering in society, as a visible expression of promoting solidarity and social inclusion, building social capital and producing a transforming effect on society, as it contributes to developing a resilient and prosperous civil society capable of finding innovative solutions to common challenges and issues. Furthermore, it is a source of economic growth, a path to integration and employment, a positive result in itself and a mechanism to improve social cohesion, reducing economic, social and environmental inequalities.

Volunteering thus has significant impact on the lives of current and future generations, promotes inclusion and tolerance, encourages an intergenerational approach and allows citizens to be directly involved in the development of society through sharing common duties and values.

There are several personalities, researchers and heads of organisations promoting volunteering and organisations representing volunteering who acknowledge the role of volunteering, in the following ways:

- Participation in carrying out community activities and services, responding to pressing and immediate needs and mitigating social problems, having a significant impact on the well-being of the local population and on the local environment;
- Active participation in the development process of the local communities where they operate, responding to social and environmental challenges, ensuring access to rights by people belonging to vulnerable groups, thus promoting social cohesion, social inclusion and the integration of both beneficiaries of the actions as of the volunteers themselves;
- Acknowledgment of existing responses in the community and the social value of civil society organisations;

- Identifying new ways of facing society's challenges and creating new responses and solutions, translating into an element of social innovation that can deploy people's creativity to develop solutions and make better use of scarce resources;
- Personal development of volunteers, associated with gaining confidence, autonomy and self-esteem and learning new transversal skills, such as organisation, communication, group work, self-organisation, self-management, personal management, learning to learn and digital skills. Indeed, the skills and competences acquired through volunteering can be transferred to professional settings, volunteering being a useful way, especially for young people, to test potential careers and therefore make an informed choice about their future;
- Non-formal social and civic development, promoting the development of critical thinking and a culture of participation, development of professional skills and strengthening of community ties, promoting the acquisition of social awareness and feelings of belonging to the social or collective community;
- Promotion of social solidarity, social capital and quality of life, work as a means of promoting human dignity and satisfaction.

Bearing in mind the strategy defined at BEV2030, the role of volunteering and seeking to preserve and facilitate the civic space of intervention in such a way that we can respect, value and nurture this renewable energy, three concrete challenges are identified:

1.

RAISING VOLUNTEERS' AWARENESS ABOUT THEIR ROLE IN COMMUNITIES

Volunteers should be acknowledged for their contributions, which naturally go beyond their position in service delivery, towards their potential as a force to promote common good.

In this sense, there is a need to increase the level of awareness of volunteers about their rights and responsibilities, issues related to the services they provide of a more technical and operational nature (with specific target audiences or intervention areas), issues associated with their personal development, whether in formal or informal spaces, but still guided towards the results and impact of their action/intervention.

As such, promoting greater awareness, critical thinking and solidarity allows consolidating the gradual increase in their social responsibility, broadening social horizons by contacting groups that

they would not normally relate to, problematizing public issues, whether political, social economic, acknowledging the rights of disadvantaged groups and the need to act or solve specific problems, while promoting the acquisition and solidification of values – solidarity, sustainable development, human dignity, equality and subsidiarity, thus promoting European identity – and skills, whether they are focused on individuals or on work.

It is therefore important to carry out awareness-raising and training actions on volunteering, and promote the creation of spaces for reflection and practical communities for sharing experiences.

2.

ACKNOWLEDGING VOLUNTEER PROMOTING ORGANISATIONS THAT PROMOTE AND IMPLEMENT VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Organisations that promote the practice of responsible and qualified volunteering acknowledge the role of volunteers in creating responses and implementing solutions, in complementarity with human resources, thus contributing to improve the quality of services provided by organisations. The testimony and involvement of volunteers in organisations, as a collective project, promotes external acknowledgment of organisations, namely the role they play in meeting human, social, intergenerational or environmental needs and concerns.

In this sense, there is a need to give greater social visibility to organisations that integrate volunteers and implement processes of recruitment, monitoring, assessment, acknowledgment and others that guarantee the physical, emotional and social safety of volunteers and the beneficiaries of their interventions. It is also important to promote the publicising of good volunteering and volunteer management practices, especially those that promote improvement of procedures, achievement of the rights of volunteers and measurement of quantitative (volume of hours of volunteer work or number of people) and qualitative aspects (personal development, change generated and organisational growth). It will also be important to promote awareness-raising and training actions for representatives and staff of organisations promoting volunteer work, creating spaces for sharing and articulating among organisations so as to maximise synergies and achieve greater dimension and visibility for volunteering practices and make available support and resources aimed, in turn, at creating a favourable environment that facilitates volunteering and a culture of managing impact.

3.

GIVE VISIBILITY TO ENTITIES THAT PROMOTE VOLUNTEERING
AT LOCAL, REGIONAL OR NATIONAL LEVEL

Volunteering has been promoted at European, national and local level by structures that may or may not be organisations that promote volunteering, that is to say they integrate volunteers and provide conditions to coordinate their activity, aim to strengthen the infrastructure of volunteering, make it more effective and represent the interests of all stakeholders – volunteers and organisations that promote volunteer work.

Such structures have a critical role in acknowledging the role and importance of volunteering, creating spaces for debate and reflection, preparing studies and publicising good practices with a view to supporting and strengthening volunteering, as well as participation and active citizenship through sharing, dialogue and growing a network of contacts.

Whether at European level with CEV, at national level with CPV or at local level with Local Banks and Volunteer Exchanges, these structures contribute to the promotion, organisation and deepening of volunteering, providing a meeting space for people who express their availability and willingness to be volunteers and organisations that promote volunteer actions and create conditions to integrate volunteers and coordinate their activity.

Hence, there is a need to promote the creation of prizes that value and acknowledge the work carried out by these structures, support and make available resources necessary for their activity and allow greater articulation between local, national and European volunteer activities. This calls for actions aimed at stimulating and encouraging the involvement of all those who take part in this effort, be they volunteers, volunteer organisations and other grassroots organisations, in the design, monitoring and joint assessment of policies and initiatives that promote volunteering and aim to improve its quality.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that these challenges, more or less structured or expressed, have underlay the intervention of CASES, within the scope of its attributions in the area of volunteering, in recent years.

In fact, CASES has made available on its website information about the legal framework, rights and duties, available financial support lines and initiatives, as well as volunteering initiatives taking place

in the country, especially during the pandemic period; it has held awareness-raising sessions for volunteers and organisations that promote volunteering, promoted articulation with actors in the local public sector, with a view to promoting volunteering, by creating and supporting Local Volunteer Banks, presented a proposal to introduce volunteering as a work theme in the subject of citizenship education, implemented a financial support line to support and reimburse organisations that promote volunteer work for the expenses they bear with the insurance of the volunteers they cover (personal accident and civil liability).

However, we acknowledge that there is still much to be done and only through articulation between all interlocutors who work in volunteer work and the establishment of partnerships can we guarantee...

...Dynamic, Responsible and Qualified Volunteering

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