



SOLIDARITY4HERITAGE

“SOLIDARITY OF THE FUTURE” WHITE PAPER ON A FRAMEWORK FOR FOSTERING VOLUNTEERING ACTIONS

The Solidarity for Heritage Network has been established within the framework of the “Solidarity for Heritage” project funded by the EACEA under the Europe for Citizens, 2014 – 2020 Strand 2 Measure 2.2 ‘*Network of Towns*’. The Municipality of Strumyani is the coordinator of the international initiative and the partners are Association EUni Partners, Bulgaria, Municipality of Agia, Greece; Naxxar Local Council, Malta, Municipality of Novo Mesto, Slovenia and Municipality of Caltanissetta, Italy.

1. Introduction

Municipalities and towns situated in rural areas, have rich cultural heritage, traditions, and authentic lifestyle. Nevertheless, these areas have limited resources for maintenance, preservation and tourism development around this heritage, the main ones being poor economic development, lack of human resources due to depopulation, and insufficient infrastructure. There is evidence, though, that taking action to promote and facilitate the involvement of voluntary workers in heritage preservation and valorization enhances these areas’ growth and development as it provides solutions to the lack of human resources challenge. For this reason the current document aims to:

- To initiate policy reform for better recognition and validation of voluntary service as working and training experience,
- Promote the involvement of voluntary service in activities related to heritage preservation and valorization.
- Foster both local and transnational volunteering and solidarity by establishing several tools to promote and facilitate solidarity initiatives.
- Improve working and living conditions for volunteers, through implementing regulatory and standardization procedures for voluntary workers and placement conditions.



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- Achieve greater recognition of the value of voluntary activities and the skills it promotes, with focus on formal and practical aspects of the recognition of voluntary service as a valid working experience.
- Establish a sustainable network of transnational volunteering between the participating cities and beyond, helping public bodies to become more active in creating opportunities and placements for volunteering.
- To improve quality, safety, and responsibility standards for volunteering and solidarity activities.
- Promote and disseminate the opportunities for voluntary service both on local and European level among the general population.
- To strengthen transnational Solidarity and Volunteering and achieve better quality of volunteering experience.

The current White Paper is the result of the cooperation of six European towns and Civil Society organizations (CSOs), during the course of the implementation of the Solidarity for Heritage project, funded by the Europe for Citizens programme of the European Union. The White Paper development engaged local authorities, experts and citizens, in order to encourage citizens' participation in the democratic life and civic participation in decision and policy-making. The process involved gathering of public opinions among the citizens and discussion with decision makers, CSOs, citizens, educational/ training organizations to guarantee that citizens are given the opportunity to further influence the development of a sustainable and inclusive society.

People of different ages and backgrounds devote time and energy to voluntary activities for the public good all around Europe. Even though the primary motivation for volunteers is their willingness to support their communities, while gaining new skills and experiences, a formal recognition of their contribution, as well as the knowledge and competences gained remains essential. Often volunteering takes place within the community centres, through the social service providers, cultural, youth and elderly clubs, as well as through civil society organizations. They are usually supported by the local authorities in terms of material, logistics, etc, but the latter have no means to recognize the skills, competences and/ or working experience acquired.

For this reason the Solidarity4Heritage Network has focused its efforts to initiate a policy reform on European level, which will define and regulate the process of formal validation and recognition of volunteering as working experience, allowing people who have volunteered for their communities for long periods of time to be able to receive social benefits in return, such as retirement pension support if needed, etc.

On the other hand, this initiative steps on the clear need for validating non-formal and informal learning on EU level and giving criteria, tools and methods to the national, regional and local authorities and/or sectoral bodies to do so. Although efforts in this direction have



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been made, still, there is no common policy for identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for such validation by 2018. These will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.¹

The need for validation and recognition of skills and competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning has been acknowledged in a number of other EU strategic and policy documents.

In order to initiate a change, starting from the local level, the Solidarity4Heritage network has created the following strategy, containing the challenges, identified throughout the project, the short-term and long term objectives of the Network, as well as measures to be taken in order to address the challenges and meet the objectives.

The needs and challenges defined, as well as the measures to be taken in order to achieve the above-listed aims are as follows:

Major challenges:

- Insufficient funding for voluntary actions.
- Inefficiency regarding the valorization and continuation of the volunteering experience.
- Insufficient promotion of volunteering in activities, related to heritage preservation and valorization.
- Insufficient visibility of the volunteering opportunities in local authorities offer.
- Limited resources for maintenance, accommodation and management of volunteering actions.
- Lack of human resources to assist in promoting and managing volunteering actions.
- Insufficient communication and cooperation among the different stakeholders on local, national and international levels
- Insufficient tools and mechanisms to promote and facilitate solidarity and voluntary initiatives.
- Insufficient regulatory and standardization procedures for voluntary workers and placement conditions.
- Lack of formal recognition of voluntary service as a valid working and learning experience.
- Limited social and health benefits for long-term volunteering
- Existing gap in EU legislation regarding fostering cooperation between municipalities and NGOs.
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¹ European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning – 2016 update





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Measures to be taken to address the challenges

I. Short-term strategic priorities

1. To sustain a Network of towns, aiming at facilitating and promoting opportunities for societal and intercultural engagement and volunteering, with major focus on the valorization of the cultural heritage that rural areas have preserved (monuments, traditions, lifestyle, music, etc.);
2. To contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its history, diversity and shared values;
3. To increase citizens' knowledge on European policies and the opportunities that the EU provides;
4. To stimulate further involvement of citizens in policy-making, decision making and social life;
5. To affirm principles of unity and co-operation of the member communities in the light of solidarity and volunteering;
6. To create opportunities for citizens to know each other's culture and traditions to raise the awareness of the heritage preservation and to provide tools, policies and instruments for facilitating citizens involvement in volunteering.
7. To optimize the volunteering experience through the exchange of good practices;
8. To stimulate the members to co-operate in different projects and to exchange good practices in different areas;
9. To provide tools, policies and instruments for facilitating citizens involvement, of both young generation and seniors, through solidarity and voluntary action;
10. To enable all stakeholders involved in heritage preservation, as well as volunteering in each locality to actively participate in the project activities.
11. To initiate policy reform for better formal recognition and validation of voluntary service as a valid working/training experience

Strategic priorities for the period 2018 – 2022.

1. Building Visibility

This group of strategic priorities is geared for improving awareness of the Network activities'. It includes the following:

A. To create and promote Joint Bulletin of volunteering opportunities

The Joint Bulletin of volunteering opportunities would be the most comprehensive expression of the core idea of the S4H Network, including the opportunities available for volunteers in the municipalities of the Network.



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Actions to undertake:

- Each municipality will provide opportunities for volunteering and also benefits for volunteers.
- Promotion of volunteering offers in each municipality in the Network.
- Engagement of volunteers through Social media.
- Promotion of the local territories through their local cultural events, celebrations and traditions in order to allow the members to emphasize their cultural heritage, thus reaching and engaging more people.
- Promotion of local events and initiatives - Cultural and traditional Heritage Celebrations: the partnering towns' cultural diversity provides great opportunities for its joint thematic promotion and exchange of good practices, contacts and offers for volunteering.

B. To engage stakeholders through the use of the World wide web

Thanks to advances in technology, there are numerous opportunities to use digital technology to reach wider public. For example, materials and announcements in different Social media. In order to be able to reach the younger generations the opportunities and placements for volunteering should be announced through the media they are comfortable with – Social media pages, web sites, etc.

Measures to undertake:

- Development and enrichment of ICT based promotional and dissemination materials
- Creation of thematic joint ICT based volunteering offers
- Organization of information and education campaigns targeted at local communities using ICT based promotion

C. To promote the Network throughout Europe and enlarge it to other municipalities:

The expansion of the Network to other European communities will highly enhance its visibility. The new members will increase the influence of the Network through creating more opportunities for volunteering, exchange of good practices, policy reform on European level.

Actions to undertake:

- Invite each partner's international partners (twinned towns, etc.)
- Promote the Network – Committee of Regions, Associations of Towns, etc.
- Involve new partners in future Network initiatives.
- Cooperate with the volunteering networks.

2. Enhancing existing Assets:



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The partners' existing volunteering actions can be significantly enhanced if their diverse assets are grouped in packages that appeal to different types of volunteers.

Actions to undertake:

Enhancing the volunteering experience:

- Raising the attractiveness of the available volunteering opportunities
- Encouraging volunteering actions through international and cross-sectoral cooperation.
- Finding better approaches for promotion of volunteering and solidarity, emphasizing on the rich experience one gains through volunteering.
- Provision of recognition of volunteering as valid working/training experience.

3. Creating new assets:

A. To facilitate networking and clustering of bodies and stakeholders active in heritage preservation

Measures to undertake:

Extending the collaboration among different stakeholders in the Network:

- Public-private partnerships
- Joint cultural products, initiatives, campaigns aiming at the promotion of heritage preservation
- Joint promotional initiatives
- Joint projects in the field of volunteering inter-generational activities

B. To develop a Long term 'agenda' – a set of events, themes and concepts – both international and regional – on which Volunteering offers can be built

Actions to undertake:

- Initiating development of a shortlist of events and 'unifying concepts' around which experience-based offers can be built and promoted.
- Stimulating productive communication among the Network members to build volunteering opportunities that are attractive and motivating.
- Stimulating effective communication with the authorities and providing suggestions for future investment in volunteering in the sphere of the heritage preservation.
- Implement regular, thematic meetings with the stakeholders to share insights and ideas around volunteering opportunities and to stimulate joint initiatives development and collaboration.



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4. Creating a consortium for further collaboration on regional, national, and international level

Ensuring the sustainability and future collaboration of the network is the long-term objective that will strengthen the achieved results and will contribute to the successful preservation of the cultural heritage through volunteering and solidarity actions on local, national, and international level

Actions to undertake:

- Develop common strategies and approaches that will be utilized in the long run as well
- Encourage discussions of the common vision for the future development of the Network



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