

VERSO

VOLUNTEERS FOR EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT

POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS. VERSO – VOLUNTEERS FOR EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT



POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

VERSO – VOLUNTEERS FOR
EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT:

**HOW VOLUNTEERING
IMPROVES EMPLOYABILITY**

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POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

VERSO – Volunteers for European Employment: How Volunteering Improves Employability

I. GOAL

The VERSO project was set up with the aim of answering the question of whether volunteering can help enhance employability in Europe, at a time when the problem of unemployment, especially among young people, is the main challenge facing European governments.

An affirmative response to this question would lead us to conclude that governments must commit to strengthening policies that promote and foster volunteering because, among other aspects, this commitment will also constitute an investment towards improving employability and employment in our neighborhoods, in our cities, and in our countries.

II. VOLUNTEERING AND EMPLOYABILITY

The VERSO project, thanks to a complex working methodology that combines scientific, systematic criteria proposed by the knowledge partners and political criteria proposed by various public authorities, concludes that volunteering does indeed help to enhance employability, both for the users served and the participating volunteers.

In this regard, and from the user's point of view, the project's main conclusions reveal that volunteering fosters capacity-building among volunteers, equipping them with tools and resources, knowledge and skills, and ultimately allowing them to reach the requisite level to enter the labour market. The VERSO project maintains this aspect and clearly identifies volunteering as a human bridge that unites people at risk of exclusion from society and the labour market. The responsibility of bringing people to the starting line where policies concerning integration into the labour market, begin to fall on volunteers, as does the responsibility of welcoming people that are outside the usual integration circuit

and only find solace and support in volunteering.

Thus, volunteering makes people “employable” who would not otherwise be so because they do not meet the minimum requirements (studies, language, knowledge, etc.), are not independent (lack of personal and interpersonal skills), do not have self-confidence (lack structure or motivation that excludes them from opportunities), and that are on the sidelines or directly neglected of many employment policies aimed at other groups (women over 50 years of age, the long-term unemployed, young people, etc.)

From the point of view of the volunteers that participated in the projects, VERSO has shown that this experience builds their social and instrumental skills to undertake their work (leadership, communication skills, empathy, self-esteem, solidarity, etc.), which exponentially enhances their future employability, increases their chances of finding a job or of improving their current job.

III. PUBLIC POLICIES COMMITTED TO VOLUNTEERING

Based on these considerations, we recommend that European governments– local & regional authorities, national governments in Europe provide support to individuals volunteering and volunteering organisations, implement public policies which demonstrate this commitment in various ways, this includes applying the European Youth Guarantee (note the Youth Guarantee in April 2013 (Council Recommendation). <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079>)

The different facets of support for volunteering organisation and NGO's could be described as follows:

- Recognition of Volunteering Organisations & NGO's
- Support for Volunteering
- Promotion of Volunteering
- Publicity of Volunteering

Public policies to be implemented in these domains must be aimed at different stakeholders who are involved in the region or municipality, endeavoring to make these policies multi-faceted, to involve all the necessary stakeholders, each with their own role and responsibility, and to promote concerted actions.

However, before outlining the recommendation of the VERSO project for the public policies, it is essential to adhere to some basic principles for their implementation.

- Public authorities' commitment to volunteering as a solution to certain social issues must be accompanied by a policy that calls on the public authorities themselves, but also on companies, universities and other agents to carry out responsible actions in the same direction. Volunteering should be part of a global commitment of shared work. Volunteering cannot become the solution, but rather part of it.
- Volunteering cannot be the tool or instrument that brings public policy to combat social exclusion and the promotion of employment for the most disadvantaged groups. In this regard, the burden of public policies that seek solutions to the problem of unemployment among the most disadvantaged groups of the population cannot be carried by volunteering and its action. Overloading volunteering with expectations and responsibility and establishing it as the backbone of these policies would be a mistake.

- A firm and determined commitment to volunteering on the part of public authorities cannot result in the mistake of professionalising it (understanding professionalization to mean giving volunteering the responsibility for tasks characteristic of a job profile), borrowing its essence. Volunteering should be promoted whilst respecting its nature of social transformation based on personal commitment. The commitment to volunteering cannot simply imply giving volunteering a share of responsibility, but making it grow on account of its intrinsic value and the values that bear an impact on society. Citizens organised through volunteering will be capable of solving their share of responsibility but will do so in accordance with its principles and its nature.
- Governments' promotion of volunteering must be broached as the promotion of policies to prevent severe social exclusion. It is obvious that volunteering often acts as a palliative to certain situations, but public policies must see the commitment to volunteering as the commitment to a strategic element within prevention policies. Therefore, public policies must be designed so as to lend support to the network of associations and their volunteers from this standpoint, not overlooking the fact that volunteering often assumes a three-fold task simultaneously:
 - Prevention work: so that it's very execution empowers citizens and through its action creates friendly environments characterized by social and community cohabitation and cohesion.
 - Palliative work: so that it does not let the groups served weaken and deteriorate.
 - Awareness-raising work: so that it creates social awareness of values such as solidarity, joint social responsibility, justice, activism and pro-activeness.
- Investment in the development and promotion of volunteering must be accompanied by a public policy of integration into the labour force that is coherent and powerful, underpinned by the principles and values of volunteering, which takes the human factor into account to afford continuity to volunteering work with the most excluded groups and chooses a model of society that seeks social cohesion. If the commitment to volunteering does not have continuity in relation to employment policies, the investment made will be inefficient and it will no longer hold true that volunteering enhances people's employability.

Volunteering is, without doubt, a key element in improving employability but its efforts are wasted if people do not manage to find employment. If there is no policy for integration into the labour market, employment that enables continuity and there are no real employment opportunities, volunteering will only be playing the role of social control and deferment.

The proposals for social policies to be implemented in each of the areas are as follows:

RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTEERING ORGANISATIONS AND NGOS'

- Give impetus to actions aimed at making volunteering actions visible to generate a more active and participative citizenship and to increase the number of volunteers.
- Foster and lend support to volunteering promotion campaigns, to raise citizens' awareness to help mobilize and involve them as volunteers, laying special emphasis on the promotion of volun-

teering among the unemployed.

- Promote participation in volunteering projects among specific groups (students over 18, the unemployed, women, immigrants, etc.) and among society at large.
- Foster participation in volunteering activities among those in retirement or early retirement, to foster the transmission of knowledge linked to the labour market among people that they support.
- Draw up a government strategy on volunteering that brings together the values and philosophy of volunteering, which is implemented across the board by different stakeholders.
- Foster the business world's recognition of the volunteer's skills and capacities in undertaking their voluntary work.
- Highlight citizens' voluntary work, especially sporadic and massive social involvement actions, recognise their role of social proactiveness, and socially reward good volunteering practices.
- Encourage companies to promote internal policies that promote volunteering among employees, with measures that facilitate the working day in order to achieve participation and direct contact with projects run by third-sector institutions.
- Promote the values of volunteering among the young, especially through the methodology of service-learning, as a first step towards mobilizing them towards volunteering.

SUPPORT OF VOLUNTEERING

- Provide economic or material support to bodies or institutions that drive volunteering actions aimed at citizens. To give precedence to financial support for volunteering projects run by institutions that have volunteers' learning process – formal and informal – structured properly.
- Have the different authorities involved agree on a system of formal recognition of the different skills, knowledge and learning acquired by volunteers in carrying out their work.
- Foster and lend support to institutions' in developing volunteering training plans.
- Provide free guidance to institutions and bodies that foster volunteering.
- Offer support, guidance and resources to local authorities to help develop and implement networking strategies among companies and volunteering institutions to execute joint projects aimed at enhancing employability in the territory.
- Foster and lend support to volunteers on training plans within institutions.
- Provide support to companies to identify possible forms of collaboration with the third sector and to identify and become acquainted with its constituent institutions, to forge sustainable alliances.
- Provide European funds to support volunteering and volunteering organisations.
- Include volunteering organisations as a partner in combatting of social exclusions in existing and future EU funds.
- We ask local government and regional bodies to work with NGO's to innovate and promote programs worthy of EU funding.

PROMOTION OF VOLUNTEERING

- Promote networking among companies and voluntary organisations, so that companies become acquainted with, identify and appreciate the values, capacities and skills acquired by volunteers.
- Promote the inclusion of student participation in voluntary projects within the university curriculum.

- Promote the inclusion of participation in trans-border voluntary projects within the professional and training curriculum.
- Promote voluntary projects and their organisations that incorporate project users as volunteers.
- Promote volunteering practices at a local level, organised as a key aspect of employability and as a measure for preventing social exclusion.
- Promote company initiatives that foster active citizen participation, solidarity and collaboration with institutions in their own territory.
- Promote actions aimed at citizens that encourage the involvement of people in voluntary activities and voluntary organisations.
- Promote socially responsible territories (local world, business world, institutions and educational agents) as a tool for social cohesion, providing meeting spaces among all the stakeholders in each territory.
- Create a link between volunteering and labour market policy.

PUBLICITY OF VOLUNTEERING

- Disseminate virtual material that brings together examples of volunteering projects directly linked to improving employability.
- Promote the dissemination of volunteer recruitment campaigns and reports in the various media, highlighting the importance and values of voluntary work.
- Foster virtual spaces of dissemination, shared between different stakeholders, to facilitate knowledge and networking.
- Promote digital newsletters and websites specialized in the field of volunteering and policies implemented for their support, guidance and improvement.

Have companies disseminate and publicise the corporate social responsibility policy and their own strategic volunteering action with internal communication aimed at employees and external communication aimed at the business sector.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The VERSO project recommends that public authorities at all levels deploy these efforts. It is advisable, in order to reap the benefits of these proposals, both from the point of view of the human capital involvement and in terms of economic investment by the governments themselves, that governments would have to accompany these social policies to promote and support volunteering with policies for integration into the labour markets that make employment real. Otherwise, the efforts will have been in vain.

For this reason, the VERSO project recommends rethinking the society model towards a model that implements social and economic policies aimed at achieving more cohesive societies, which are more participative and with greater social justice, well-being and equal opportunities.

The VERSO project recommends this dual action:

- To accept that the dignity of people, for which volunteers fight every day when they carry out

their transformative action, is the priority of both governments and companies.

- To foster a Europe that affords more importance on social justice than charity.
- To foster a Europe that affords more importance on preventative policy than to palliative care.

Not to adopt this dual action would be to perpetuate social inequalities against which organised citizenship fights through voluntary action.

The document was prepared by the VERSO Project Political Board, and approved on 24. Sept. 2014

Ms. Vibe Klarup Voetmann
P1- Aarhus University, Denmark

Mr. Ramon Terrassa
P7-Region of Catalonia, Spain

Mr. Kaj Johansen
P2- Municipality of Middelfart, Denmark

Mr. Nacho Sequeia Aymar
P8-University Autonoma de Barcelona, Spain

Mr. Odysseas Potsis
P3-Region of Epirus, Greece

Mr. Dénes Sándor
P9- Municipality of Zalaegerszee, Hungary

Ms. Aikaterini Ramioti
P4-Univeristy of Epirus, Greece

Mr. Dénes Sándor
P10-Business School of Budapest, Hungary

Ms. Chris-Dore Richter
P5-Detmold, Germany

Mr. Bert Bouwmeester
P11-Municipality of Coevorden, Netherlands

Ms. Judith Leech
P6-East Riding, Berveley, UK

Ms. Aneta Georgieva
P12-Municipality of Sofia, Bulgaria

PARTICIPANTS IN THE VERSO-PROJECT:

KNOWLEDGE PARTNERS

Aarhus University
www.au.dk

University of Ioannina
www.uoi.gr/en

Budapest Business School
www.gkz.bgf.hu

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
www.uab.cat

PUBLIC AUTHORITY PARTNERS

East Riding of Yorkshire Council
www.eastriding.gov.uk

Generalitat de Catalunya
www.gencat.cat

Municipality of Middelfart
www.middelfart.dk

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