

Project “ADULATION- Adult Education for Social Change”

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# MANAGING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP INITIATIVES WITH ADULT AND SENIOR COORDINATORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Intellectual Output 2 – Handbook

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## INTRODUCTION

The project **ADULATION- Adult Education for Social Change** aims to address the need of adult educators for continuous professional development with a focus on competences to support the active participation of the adult learners in society. Furthermore, the consortium wished to address the fact that traditional education methods are not attractive to all the adult learners; especially those with fewer opportunities (like people with disadvantaged backgrounds) who are often feeling uncomfortable in formal settings.

The overall aim of the project is the promotion of active citizenship through adult education. To achieve this aim, the partners worked on competence development of adult educators and introduced them to innovative educational methods and techniques.

During the needs analysis phase, the partners expressed their intention to be involved in European Citizens' Initiatives implemented with the help of volunteers on the causes the adult and senior learners care for:

- a) Human Rights and Climate Change,
- b) The right of the EU Citizens to Data protection and online privacy,
- c) Immigration and tolerance to difference,
- d) Euroscepticism.

As a first step, the partners identified the need to standardise their procedures when it comes to the design, implementation, and follow up of voluntary projects for social change. The current Handbook of good practices and tools focuses on the Human Resource Management of Adult and Senior Coordinators and Volunteers when implementing European Citizens' Initiatives.

## CHAPTER I: EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE (ECI)

### Introduction to European Citizens' Initiative

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is an important instrument of participatory democracy in the European Union, allowing one million EU citizens residing in at least one-quarter of the Member States to invite the Commission to submit a proposal for a legal act relevant to the implementation of the EU Treaties. The ECI is thus an entry door to the future of participatory politics. It constitutes an inclusive and engaging tool that allows EU citizens to get involved in the EU policy-making process and request the European Commission to address issues that concern people. The ECI programme is monitored by the European Commission, the executive-legislative and governing body of the EU.

Described as the most significant innovation in transnational democracy since the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament, ECI gives the right to EU citizens to set the political agenda for the whole Union. The active involvement of citizens in the EU decision-making process is accomplished through a bottom-up approach that allows people to start a political debate and raise awareness on issues that unite citizens across Europe. While the responsibility for the submission of pan-European legislation falls under the jurisdiction of the European Commission, the ECI constitutes an important instrument for agenda-setting, fostering more direct and participatory democracy.

This tool aims to bring EU policy-making closer to the citizens, stimulate transnational debates, and narrow the gap between the European Commission and European citizens<sup>1</sup>. The Commission conscientiously examines the ECI proposals even though it is not bound to bring the issue forward to be discussed in the EU Parliament. Citizens can develop an ECI in a broad area of subjects, provided that these subjects are under the powers of the Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Moraru, A. (2016). European Union Democratic Governance: A Case Study of the European Citizens' Initiative. *Europolicy: Continuity and Change in European Governance*. 10 (2), 137-168.

The ten areas in which citizens can shape the EU agenda:

Justice, Freedom & Security

Non-Discrimination & Citizenship

Employment & Social Affairs

Education, Training, Youth & Sport

Humanitarian Aid, Development & Cooperation

Environment & Climate Action

Energy

Agriculture & Fisheries

Public Health

Consumer Protection

This section provides an overview of ECI's regulatory framework and the steps followed from the conception of the ECI to its final approval and registration by the European Commission. This chapter includes the following sections: A. Citizens' committee, B. Registration, C. Collection of statements of support, D. Verification and certification, E. Submission and examination.

## Historical background

The concept of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is linked to strengthening citizens' involvement in the political life of the European Union. The involvement of Europeans was an issue of great importance since the '90s, a time when leaders of the Member States were determined to find the best political channels to ensure that this right would be regulated and established at the European level.

The concept of EU citizenship was introduced for the first time by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, but the establishment of a citizens' participatory tool was realised through the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Specifically, Article 11(4) of the Treaty provides for reinforcing the influence of citizens over the legislative agenda of the EU<sup>2</sup>. The proposal for establishing this initiative in the legal order of the EU

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<sup>2</sup> Athanasiadou, N. (2020). The European Citizens' Initiative in Times of Brexit In: *European Citizenship under Stress. Nijhoff Studies in European Union Law*. 16, 387-410.

was initially made by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Austria and Italy. The issue was revised during the drafting period of the Constitutional Treaty of the EU. Although it was accepted as Article 47(4), the Treaty in which it was contained was not ratified. Under the EU voting system, absolute unanimity is required to ratify a Treaty. This Treaty was rejected through referendums in France and the Netherlands.

ECI was officially established by the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in 2009, although it had been signed by all Member-States in 2007. ECI rules and procedures were designed throughout 2009. After a period of amendments, it was granted an official state in 2011 with the adoption of the European Citizens' Initiative Regulation by the European Parliament and Council. It wasn't until 2012 that the rules of the Citizens' Initiative entered into force.

In 2015 the Commission adopted the first report on the application of the Regulation on the Citizens' Initiative and launched a review of the rules. ECI rules were revamped in 2017 following the Commission's adoption of a relevant proposal. This resulted from stakeholders and open public consultations, suggestions made by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. In 2018 the Commission adopted a 2<sup>nd</sup> report on the application of Regulation on the Citizens' Initiative, and in 2019 the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted new legislative rules.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of ECI rules. Thus the Commission adopted temporary measures to address the complications due to the restrictive measures imposed. The new rules allow for an extension of the collection periods of citizens' initiatives.

## Differences from referendums

A European Citizens' Initiative is a democratic mechanism that constitutes a call to action from citizens to the EU Institutes. An initiative can be launched by at least seven EU citizens (nationals of an EU country) who live in seven different EU countries and are old enough to vote in European elections<sup>3</sup>. The main prerequisite for a proposal to be considered by the governing bodies of the EU is the collection of at least 1 million signatures. As long as the parameters and provisions of the Initiative process are followed, the EU Parliament or the Commission are obliged to consider the issue, whether

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<sup>3</sup> EU. (2019). Guide to the European Citizens' Initiative. Publications Office of the European Union. Luxembourg.

they decide to take further action or not. In this way, citizens' participation within the decision-making institutes is strengthened along with the legitimacy of certain Commission proposals being initiated from citizens across the Union<sup>4</sup>. Within the Citizens' Initiative context, people have the liberty to propose legislation to EU Institutes, while a referendum is a tool used mainly by governments of member-states addressed to people. Another key difference is that through referendums, citizens are asked whether they ought to accept or reject a law. On the contrary, ECI initiatives are only proposals directed to EU Institutions to consider an issue for examination, to adopt a new law. Still, they are not allowed to ask for the rejection of a legislation. Moreover, referendums take the form of a Yes or No question, whereas the Citizens' initiatives allow a broader framing of the issue.

Citizen initiatives are democratic mechanisms that let citizens propose and vote on laws and policies. By gathering a certain number of signatures, citizens can demand a binding vote on a proposed policy or legislation. With the European Citizens' Initiative, citizens can invite the Commission to look at the proposed policy or legislation; it is not obliged to act. Citizen initiatives differ from referendums in which citizens only can accept or reject a law or policy proposed by parliament. Also, it has been stated by the European Commission that an ECI can only be the subject of the acceptance/creation of a law, but it cannot ask to reject a law

## The Procedure of a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)

An ECI passes through a number of stages. Before launching an initiative key, practical aspects should be considered by the citizens who wish to run an initiative. The ECI development process involves the formulation of a Citizens' Committee, the Registration, the Collection of Statements of Support, the Verification and Certification and finally, the Submission and examination of the proposal. A step-by-step description of the process is reviewed below.

### *Citizens' committee*

The first stage in the ECI process is the establishment of a citizen's committee. This body should be composed of at least 7 EU citizens living in 7 different EU countries. This measure is an indication that this initiative aims to bring together citizens on Europe-wide issues and not on matters of national

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<sup>4</sup> Athanasiadou, N. (2020). The European Citizens' Initiative in Times of Brexit In: European Citizenship under Stress. *Nijhoff Studies in European Union Law*. 16, 387-410.



interest only. The committee's members must be eligible to vote in the European elections and be over 18 years old. A representative and a substitute must be appointed as contact persons for the initiative. These seven people can also set up a legal entity in one of the EU countries to manage the initiative. It is worth noting that members of the European Parliament (MEPs) can be registered members of the initiatives' committees but cannot be counted as one of the requisite seven citizens, meaning that they may not be mentioned on the committee registration form<sup>5</sup>.

### *Registration*

Once the committee is settled, the initiative must be registered before the Commission. For this, the committee members need to create an organiser account first, and then they must ask the Commission to register it via the European Citizens' initiative website. The application form should include, according to the "Guide to the European citizens' Initiative", the title of the initiative, a description of its objectives, the provisions of the EU Treaties considered relevant for the proposed action, personal details of the minimum seven organisers, indicating the representative and the substitute, as well as their email addresses and telephone numbers, the names of the other members of the group of organisers and proof document on all sources of funding and support for the initiative. The registration is not done until the Commission has conducted further examination. The Commission will check the proposal, in particular, to ensure that:

- the group of organisers has been formed
- the Initiative falls within the Commission's powers to act
- the Initiative is not abusive, frivolous, or vexatious or contrary to the EU values described in the EU Treaties or the rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>6</sup>

The period for the proposal examination is two months, and after that, the Commission will either register or reject the initiative. However, if the proposal does not fall entirely under the jurisdiction of the Commission, a second examination period is applied, and the initiative organisers have an extra two months to revise their proposal.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://participedia.net/method/4344>

<sup>6</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8abe3729-640f-11ea-b73501aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF>

### *Collection of statements of support*

When an initiative gets registered, the committee may begin the collection of signatures. The ECI provisions require at least 1 million signatures, with minimum numbers in at least seven EU countries. The signature is collected through a specific statement of support form. The period for signatures collection is 12 months, and the collection shall begin within six months since the ECI registration. Signatures can be collected either on paper or electronically. Ready-made forms for each initiative are available for printing in the organiser account. It should be noted that the description of the initiative, along with the relevant documents and forms, are translated into all official EU languages by the Commission in an attempt to support the initiative's cause. To collect electronic signatures, the Initiative organisers can use the Commission's free central online collection system, which includes customisation options. There is an option for building their own online collection system, but it must follow some technical requirements and be certified by the national relevant authorities in the EU country where the data is collected. Throughout the signature collection period, the legislation on data protection must be followed.

### *Verification and certification*

Once the minimum number of signatures is collected, the relevant national authorities in each EU country should certify the number of valid statements of signatures for that country. The statements of support, which are the final document with the total number of all signatures collected, should be submitted for verification within three months of the end of the collection period. For signatures collected through the online collection system, the Commission will be responsible for transferring the statements of support to the national authorities.

### *Submission and examination*

Once the verification process is completed successfully and the minimum number of statements of support has been obtained, the initiative can be officially submitted to the Commission for examination. The examination period can last up to 6 months, and when the reviewing procedure is finished, the Commission will invite the Initiative's organisers for a public hearing in the Parliament. This is an opportunity for the ECI members to present their views on the concerning issue and discuss the reasons for which the EU must act upon. Parliament may then hold a debate and adopt a resolution helping the ECI gain political support.

## CHAPTER II: CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESSFUL EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

So far, 86 initiatives have been presented since ECI's launch, 13 are currently ongoing, and 6 have successfully collected more than 1 million signatures from across the European Union. This section provides an overview of the initiatives and the factors that led to their success.

### 1. End the Cage Age



This ground-breaking European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) launched on 11 September 2018 and, in a year's time, managed to gain over 1.6 million signatures calling for a ban on cruel caged farming in the EU. More specifically, End the Cage Age exceeded the minimum number of signatures threshold in 18 EU countries, out of seven required. The Initiative brought together over 170 organisations and individuals across Europe who joined forces to advocate for the ban of caged farming.

#### ECI Result

The three year-long campaigning period has led to the decision by the European Commission on June 30, 2021, to change EU legislation with a commitment to advance a legislative proposal by the end of 2023 to reduce and gradually ban the use of cages for farmed animals (hens, mother pigs, rabbits, ducks, calves, geese)<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, the European Commission has committed to ban caged farming across Europe by 2027 to ensure that all imported products in the EU comply with future cage-free standards and to support European farmers financially to adapt to the new practice of cage-free farming.

#### End the Cage Age in numbers:

- 6<sup>th</sup> ECI to succeed in the last eight years
- 3<sup>rd</sup> with the highest signature count

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.endthecageage.eu/#ourCampaign>

- 1<sup>st</sup> ECI for animal welfare that has successfully led to a commitment from the EU Commission to ban the use of cages for farmed animals across Europe by 2027<sup>8</sup>

This initiative and its successful outcome mark a victory for the 1.4 million EU citizens who made their voices heard and proved that ECI actions have the potential to enhance active citizenship and influence the decision-making process of the European Commission. The Cage Age campaign will continue to advocate for its cause and ensure that the European Commission will deliver on its commitments while strengthening its efforts to put pressure on the EU Member States to put a ban into their national law.

## 2. Minority Safepack



**MINORITY  
SAFEPAK  
INITIATIVE**

This ECI aims to advocate for the protection of persons who belong to national and linguistic minorities and enhance cultural and linguistic diversity in the Union. The initiative's members ask the EU to adopt a series of legislation for the preservation of regional and minority languages, propose policy changes in the fields of education and culture, regional policy, participation, equality, and regional support and develop appropriate audiovisual and other media content. The Minority Safepack campaign has gathered 1,320,000 statements of support, from which 1,123,422 statements have been approved by the national authorities of the EU Member States involved. The campaign received support from 11 EU countries. In January 2020, the initiative was registered at the European Commission, and in February, the initiative's committee had the opportunity to present their proposals before the Commission. The Public Hearing in the European Parliament took place in October 2020, and following a plenary debate, MEPs decided to adopt a resolution.

### 9 Minority Safepack Proposals, registered by the European Commission:

1. EU-Recommendation for the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity
2. Funding programmes for small linguistic communities
3. The creation of a Language Diversity Centre

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.endthecageage.eu/#ourCampaign>

4. The objectives of EU's regional development funds to include the protection of national minorities and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity
5. Research about the added value of minorities to our societies and Europe
6. Approximating equality for stateless minorities, e.g. Roma
7. A single European copyright law so that services and broadcast can be enjoyed in the mother tongue
8. Freedom of service and reception of audio-visual content in the minority regions
9. Block exemption of regional (state) support for minority culture, media and cultural heritage conservation<sup>9</sup>.

The Commission responded by promising actions concerning the ECI's proposals. Specifically, the Commission will:

- Support Member States' authorities in protecting the national and linguistic minorities while encouraging the Member States to exchange good practices on the protection of and support for the rights of persons who belong to minorities
- Urge the Member States to launch anti-hate speech campaigns and combat racism and xenophobia towards people who belong to national and linguistic minorities
- Maintain and develop cooperation with the European Centre for Modern Languages through the Council of Europe
- Promote language learning throughout the EU, with an emphasis on minority languages
- Identify the needs of national and linguistic minorities for the better development of funding programmes that will protect multilingualism and cultural diversity
- Take relevant measures to promote the development of media services in the languages of people who belong to minorities, supporting the creation of authentic cultural media and entertainment content in the minority language

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.minority-safepack.eu/#about>

- Engage in a dialogue with stakeholders on audiovisual content and ensure that future regulations are designed in a way that minority language concerns are respected

### 3. Ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides



This European Citizens' Initiative calls on the European Commission to propose to EU countries to put a ban on glyphosate, reform the pesticide approval procedure, and set mandatory reduction targets for pesticides that will apply to all Member States. The Initiative was registered on 25th January 2017, and after the completion of signatures collection, the organisers submitted the ECI to the Commission on 6 October 2017. The total amount of statements of support is 1,070,865 collected in 22 EU countries. Following the public hearing of the Initiative's committee in November 2017, the Commission issued a document setting out the actions it intends to take in response to the initiative. The Commission decided to take legislative action by adopting a proposal for a Regulation on the transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment in the food chain and the amendment of the General Food Law Regulation, aiming to achieve a reduction in the use of pesticides across Europe.

#### The main elements of the Regulation:

- Improving transparency: Citizens will have access to all studies and information submitted by the industry in the risk assessment process. The general public and stakeholders will be consulted on these studies.
- Increasing the independence of studies: All commissioned studies will be examined by the European Food Safety Authority to guarantee that companies respect the regulations regarding the use of pesticides. This EU Institution may ask the applicant companies to conduct additional studies for verification purposes in order to ensure compliance with EU standards.
- Strengthening the involvement of the Member States, civil society, and the European Parliament in the governance of the European Food Safety Authority. The Institution will be managed by Member States' representatives who will support its scientific capacity.

- Developing comprehensive risk communication: The Commission will adopt a general plan for risk communication to ensure a coherent risk communication strategy throughout the risk analysis process, combined with open dialogue amongst all interested parties<sup>10</sup>.

#### ECI Objectives

- Ban glyphosate-based herbicides, an element that can cause cancer to humans and has resulted in the degradation of ecosystems
- Ensure that the scientific evaluation of pesticides for EU regulatory approval is based only on published studies that have been conducted by national authorities instead of the pesticide industry
- Set EU-wide mandatory reduction targets for pesticide use, aiming to phase out the use of pesticides<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Stop Vivisection



This Citizens' Initiative calls on the European Commission to adopt a relevant legislation aimed at phasing out animal experiments. The initiative's organisers wish to raise awareness on the cruel treatment of animals and to propose a new paradigm for the conduct of biomedical and toxicological research. The Initiative was registered in June 2012 . After the completion of the signature collection period, it has gathered 1,173,130 statements of support, making it the third successful ECI since the Commission's participatory tool launch. The public hearing at the European Parliament took place in May 2015. Following this procedure, the European Commission issued a Communication on the actions it intended to take regarding the initiative's cause.

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<sup>10</sup>[https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/ban-glyphosate-and-protect-people-and-environment-toxic-pesticides\\_en](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/ban-glyphosate-and-protect-people-and-environment-toxic-pesticides_en)

<sup>11</sup> <https://stopglyphosate.org/>

The Commission intends to:

- Organise a conference engaging the scientific community and relevant stakeholders on how to take advantage of scientific advances for the development of valid approaches that do not require the use of animals
- Indicate a need to accelerate progress in the area of replacing, reducing, and refining (the three Rs) the use of animal testing through knowledge sharing
- Continue to support the development and validation of alternative approaches for the conduct of physiological and toxicological processes
- Maintain dialogue with all stakeholders and the scientific community to advance towards the goal of banning animal testing through dissemination, education, and training activities on non-animal alternatives<sup>12</sup>

In response to the Initiative's claim to repeal the EU Directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, the Commission states that this Directive is the proper legislation to achieve the initiative's objectives. This Directive includes provisions for the complete replacement of animals as soon as it is scientifically possible.

## 5. One of us



This Initiative is the second European Citizens' Initiative to have satisfied all the requirements of the EU Regulation. It was submitted to the Commission by the initiative's committee on 28 February 2014, having received 1,896,852 statements of support with thresholds reached in 18 Member States. "One of Us" Initiative calls on the European Commission to act on the juridical protection of the dignity, the right to life and of the integrity of every human being from conception in the areas of EU competence in which such protection is of particular importance<sup>13</sup>. The public hearing of the initiative's committee took place at

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<sup>12</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_15\\_5094](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_15_5094)

<sup>13</sup> [https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000005\\_en](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000005_en)



the European Parliament in April 2014 and a month later, the Commission adopted a Communication presenting its views on the ECI's requests.

The initiative's organisers state that their aims include the recognition of the inherent and inalienable human dignity as a source of human freedoms and citizens' rights. Thus, it should be inviolable and protected by public authorities<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, they claim that the human embryo deserves respect to its dignity and integrity. This claim is justified by the decision of the European Court of Justice in the Brüstle case, which defines the human embryo as the beginning of the development of the human being. They call on the European Commission to take all necessary measures to protect the life of human embryos who are at stake and to put a ban on the financial resources given to the sectors of research, development aid and public health, which are involved in actions that destruct human embryos. More specifically, according to the initiative's objectives, research activities that aim at obtaining stem cells and involve the use of human embryonic stem cells in further experiments should not be financed.

### **ECI Result**

Following a thorough examination of the ECI's requests, the European Commission decided not to submit a legislative proposal, since the issues addressed in the initiative had already been discussed and relevant EU policy had been applied. More specifically, the Commission made a general observation on the issue, mentioning that EU primary legislation explicitly enshrines human dignity, the right to life, and the right to the integrity of the person<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> European Commission. (2014). Communication from the Commission on the European Citizens' Initiative "One of us". EU Publications, Brussels. 1-19.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission. (2014). Communication from the Commission on the European Citizens' Initiative "One of us". EU Publications, Brussels. 1-19.

## 6. Right2Water



This Initiative was the first European Citizens' Initiative that has successfully been through the registration process. It was submitted to the Commission on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2013 following the completion of the signatures collection. The ECI has gathered 1,884,790 statements of support, passing minimum thresholds in 13 Member States. The initiative's organisers call on the European Commission to propose legislation implementing the human right to water and sanitation as recognised by the United Nations, and promoting the provision of water and sanitation as essential public services

for all<sup>16</sup>. The initiative's committee presented their requests before the European Parliament during a public hearing on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014. Following the hearing, the Commission adopted a communication in March 2014 explaining the actions it intended to take in response to the initiative.

### The initiative's main goals:

- No liberalization of water services
- Guaranteed water and sanitation for all citizens in EU countries
- Exclusion of water supply and management of water resources from internal market rules
- EU to increase its efforts to achieve universal access to water and sanitation<sup>17</sup>

In light of the European Citizens' Initiative, the Commission decided to take the following concrete steps and actions:

- Increase efforts to achieve full implementation of EU water legislation by Member States
- Launch a public consultation across all EU countries on the Drinking Water Directive to assess the need for improvements and how they can be achieved
- Increase transparency for data management and dissemination for urban wastewater and drinking water
- Explore the idea of benchmarking water quality

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<sup>16</sup> [https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000003\\_en](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000003_en)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.right2water.eu/>

- Maintain structured dialogue between stakeholders on transparency in the water sector
- Improve the transparency and accountability of water services providers by giving citizens access to data on key economic and quality indicators
- Advocate universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation as a priority area for post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals<sup>18</sup>
- Stimulate innovative approaches for development assistance (e.g. support to partnerships between water operators and to public-private partnerships) and promoting sharing of best practices between Member States (e.g. on solidarity instruments)
- Invite Member States to register citizens' concerns and to ensure that everyone has access to safe, clean, and affordable water

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<sup>18</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_14\\_277](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_14_277)

## CHAPTER III: MANAGING ADULT AND SENIOR COORDINATORS AND VOLUNTEERS

### Initial assessment of the involvement of volunteers

Volunteer is widely used term intended to vehiculate the meaning of people willing to do something, usually for the greater good, for free or just upon payment of a small sum of money. Unfortunately, there is still not a European definition that could be considered as official; however, the EU has implemented many projects and policies addressing the work of volunteers and, since last few years, also an entire, dedicated programme called European Solidarity Corps. Since the programme (ESC from now on) has been existed for many years now, in its incarnation as European Volunteer Service before 2018, project designers and managers working in the field have been collecting much experience from taking part in the activities. The following chapter is a collection of information put together thanks to the expertise of partners active in the sector.

According to the experience of volunteering managers, the highest obstacle for an organization eager to use volunteers for carrying out tasks is the training. Volunteers must be often trained to execute operations which are usually (far) beyond their knowledge, as it is difficult to find people with specific skills who are not looking for a job rather than a volunteering experience. Furthermore, there is also the topic of staff management: coordination requires dedicated resources and not always organisations are available or capable to use them for side activities. The rate of available volunteering staff varies according to tasks and sectors, but finally the only relevant consideration for an entity is the balance between costs and benefits.

In general, we can divide entities in two large groups: entities which rely on volunteers for essential activities (that is, in an usual and structured way) and entities which rely on volunteers only from time to time and only for specific projects and/or tasks. Inside each group, we can differentiate many cases according to entity size and complexity of volunteer-related tasks. See the following tables.

### Essential activities

	Larger entities <sup>19</sup>	Average entities	Smaller entities
Basic training	10	9	8
Average training	9	8	7
Longer training	8	7	6

### Side activities

	Larger entities	Average entities	Smaller entities
Basic training	10	8	6
Average training	8	6	4
Longer training	6	4	2

Values in the boxes are an estimation of how worth the investment in terms of time and resources could be. Values under 6 represents situations where such an investment should be considered with much care and on a case-by-case ground to assess if really needed. Values at 6 or above can usually be considered acceptable.

## Role Development and Design

According to the guidelines provided by the EU, much attention should be taken not to turn volunteering into jobs. The risk is to rely on volunteers for covering activities that should be performed by the staff of organizations, creating situations of exploitation. That is why it is necessary to define roles in a very clear and attentive manner, so to make them very tellable from official roles inside the involved entity. In order to do so, organisations need to implement some rules to avoid missteps which could badly reverberate against reputation or even determinate legal issues.

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<sup>19</sup> Please refer to the usual EU definition of enterprise size for an assessment of how to classify an entity: <https://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/page.php?cid=6&pid=019&faqcat=14&faqid=101>

Partners should always be very aware of the difference between volunteering and work, and especially of the potential harmful intersections to which the two areas may be subject. Against any temptation of improper mixing, there is a small set of indications that could be usefully followed:

1. External advice should seek whenever possible; this involves not only similar entities and organisations working in similar fields, but also more institutional actors with an eye to legal context and an overview of the whole labour panorama
2. Trust in other, more experienced partners is also a good way to deal with the issue, for instance leaving the role of project managers to partners who have a better understanding of the matter
3. Assessing ex ante all areas where overlapping between job and volunteering is more likely. For instance, whenever volunteers are supposed to (partially and temporarily) take over organisations' official roles, caution must be put in place to avoid any significant threat to the work of the staff or any form of exploitation towards volunteers.

Aside this issue, it could happen sometimes that the role of volunteers comes too close to some kind of disguised training curriculum. Although it is normal that volunteers develop some competences and skills during their experience, it should not replicate training or any other form of official or unofficial education. Once taken out any element which could resemble work or training, what is left should theoretically be ascribable to volunteering only.

## Recruitment

In ESC programme, the volunteers' selection can be made through the European Solidarity Corps Portal (ESCP)<sup>20</sup>, an instrument designed to make it easy for eligible organizations to search for and recruit European Solidarity Corps participants for their placements. The tool is available to all participants to one of the EU programme related to volunteering, that is, not only ESC but also EU Aid Volunteers and the old European Voluntary Service. Registered candidates on ESCP have already been screened and they indicate their profile **before** any selection takes place; therefore, potential bias is

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<sup>20</sup> <https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity>

reduced, ESCP is a reliable selection instrument and its use is strongly recommended to anyone who aspires to rely on volunteering for carrying out activities.

There are three paths for the selection of candidates:

- a. Research of volunteers on the database;
- b. Individuation of specific volunteers identified through the Participant Reference Number (PRF);
- c. Receiving candidatures from volunteers interested in the project.

The ESCP system allows the selection through different parameters, mainly based on the activities of the project. Through the selection of a specific research criteria, it is possible to identify volunteers motivated by an interest in the project activities.

Even though an organization does not have any interest in relying upon ESCP system or developing its initiative in the framework of one of the EU programmes, the principle incarnated by ESCP methodology can be implemented, nonetheless. Interest and motivation are fundamental elements for the selection of all volunteers and it is important to select candidates with a strong motivation in developing some knowledge on the volunteering world in every aspect; picking just anyone to be a volunteer could potentially turn out as harmful for the initiative or the organization itself.

Local, regional, or national institutional channels are to be preferred when an organization does not know the party offering volunteering staff as a resource. However, networking is quite common in the field, so it is strongly advised to enter one of those networks to establish trusted and reliable contacts with partners which could provide volunteers to the organizing entity whenever necessary. Since volunteering is not a job, open calls for personnel should be avoided as much as possible, as there is a risk to increase the number of applicants only there out of curiosity or some other low-commitment reason, leading to many useless interviews and waste of time for the organisations.

## Interviewing

In time of COVID, and with candidates potentially coming from all over Europe nowadays, it makes less and less sense to hold physical interviews in person. The following tips involve a procedure to hold structured interviews in video or any other online tool.

1. Invite candidates through the chosen mean: a platform, if there is one, or any other contact, such as phone or email
2. Schedule the interview for a day when you are sure that you have time enough for all candidates; interviews have no set duration time and it is quite frustrating to see your own appointment rescheduled
3. Use a tool which you are relatively sure of; some tools do not work properly, some others are almost unknown and there is no certainty that interviewees are able to join the call
4. Start with a few basic short questions, followed by questions about the world around you, to then focus on personal experience and tips of the volunteer
5. Here it is a short list of questions potentially useful for getting to know candidates a bit better:
  - Can you start with stating your name, occupation and country of origin ?
  - What did you study?
  - What were your expectations of your education?
  - Which skill is a must if you want to make it?
  - What are your best characteristics?
  - How do you get ideas?
  - How do you stay curious?
  - How much time do you spend alone on a normal day?
  - What way is more productive in your work (solitude vs confrontation)?
  - How active have you been?
  - Do you actively network? How?
  - Do you usually work with set goals in mind?
  - Are you ever insecure? How do you cope with that?
  - What makes you confident in your work/ what you do?



- How important are deadlines?
  - Do you set deadlines for yourself ? if so, how do you make sure you reach them?
  - How do you master your own time?
  - How hard do you work?
  - Do you feel you are self driven?
  - What or who motivates you to keep at it?
  - What make you move forward/ What is your drive?
  - Do you have a mission / clear goal ?
  - Do you work on long term projects? Are they important?
  - How do you know when a project is finished?
  - What is quality to you?
  - When and how do you collaborate with others?
  - (Why) can a team be helpful?
6. As the questions above are generally useful to describe candidates, attitude towards specific tasks must be measured against expectations. Organisations should be able at setting expectations in advance. For instance, which specific skill will be required for performing a specific task? Which mindset is required to face stress on the field or of circumstances? Are there risks implied which the volunteer could not be willing to undergo? And so on
7. Evaluate availability in terms of time and date with the utmost clarity. Better to find out since the beginning than having to reschedule everything afterwards
8. Especially when volunteers must work in team, it is very important to assess cultural background of volunteers. Things apparently trivial for someone, such as food, could create problems later on when dealing with volunteers who do not fit exactly in the cultural background of choice. Questions about habits and customs should be as sensitive as possible not to violate privacy, but also enough inquiring to bring potential issues to the light

9. At the end of the interview, do not forget to set a follow up. Volunteers should not have the impression that they will receive an answer, maybe, sometimes in the future; set a deadline for a clear answer and respect it.

## Orientation and Training

As orientation activities concerns, it is important that the participant volunteers take part in a general formation which will instructs the participants about:

- the activities,
- the responsibilities of the participants,
- the values and the intercultural awareness,
- the thematic formation,
- health and security.

Moreover, before the activities begin, the organization should fill a form – for each participant volunteer – in which they collect personal information such as: background, careers, possible learning difficulties, cultural or medical needs and formation expectations. That information will be essential for the preparation of an informative kit which should be distributed to every volunteer at least one month before the start of the experience.

At the beginning of the project activities, it is important to train the volunteers with an initial formation specific to the project.

At the end of the activities the organization should verify the acquired knowledge through the delivery, for instance, of assessment questionnaires.

A relevant tool for the recognition for the certification of the volunteering experience, could be the Youth Pass<sup>21</sup>, an instrument developed for the projects realized in the European Youth programs – such as European Solidarity Corps (ESC). Through the Youth pass certificate, participation in such

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youthpass.eu/en/>

projects can be recognized as an educational experience and a period of non-formal and informal learning.

## Monitoring

One of the most efficient ways to monitor and assist the volunteers is the establishment of a key figure: the mentor.

The mentor should be a person to which the volunteers can refer for every need, and an intermediary between the volunteers and the organization.

The organization should schedule weekly meetings between the mentor and each volunteer, to monitor the progress of the activities. During these meetings the mentor would become a referring figure for the volunteers which would communicate to him/her every emergency may occur, they would receive support and advice.

To sum up, the figure of the mentor would become responsible for the monitoring of the volunteers in every aspect, with the added value of simplifying the coordination between the volunteers and the organization responsible for the project.

## Recognition

The recognition of the skill gained through volunteering activities is quite important to highlight the role of volunteering in the EU, where it has a crucial role especially in the non-profit sector.

In this sense, an interesting initiative to point out is the European Skill Passport<sup>22</sup>, created after an European Parliament resolution. The European Skill Passport aims at validating the volunteering experience through the official recognition of skills gained in voluntary work that would give added value to a CV; the ultimate purpose is to make young people more employable thanks to skills, knowledge and competencies acquired through volunteering.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20120612IPR46648/volunteering-validating-skills-for-use-in-job-hunting>

Another interesting initiative is the creation of the MOVE project<sup>23</sup> which focuses on the multicultural recognition of skill and competences learned through volunteering. This project aims at keep in contact volunteer organizations, the business sector, governmental players, stakeholders and experts in order to:

- a. find a way to identify, assess and validate learning outcomes through volunteering;
- b. enhance skills, competences and knowledge acquired through volunteering.

The recognition of the competences acquired through volunteering activities is crucial to increase the convenience of such experience among young adults.

A remarkable initiative, carried out by the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV<sup>24</sup>) is the creation of a European competition aiming to promote volunteering at the local level (EVC), such initiative is important have an impact on the promotion of volunteering activities especially in small municipalities which are usually less inclined in the European activities.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://eaea.org/our-work/projects3/move-mutual-recognition-of-skills-and-competences-learned-through-volunteering-towards-a-european-debate/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/ev-capital>



# ADULATION

Adult Education for Social Change



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