

Report of the European Commission Seminar on Youth, Entrepreneurship, Volunteering and CSR

On the 25th of September, the European Commission (EC) organized a seminar on Youth, Entrepreneurship, Volunteering and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Against the backdrop of dramatic youth unemployment levels across Europe and the recent EC Communications on [CSR](#) (2011) and [Volunteering](#) (2011), this seminar brought together a diverse group of 130 participants at the Bedford Hotel in Brussels, to discuss:

- the cross-connection between volunteering, entrepreneurship and CSR with young people,
- how different players in these areas can reinforce/complement each other's efforts to support young people in developing skills or personality traits that could enhance access to employment,
- how skills acquired through informal learning can receive appropriate recognition by employers.

All presentations and the programme for the day can be access through the following [link](#).



This report was written by Liesbeth Reynders, Project Manager for CSR Europe, on behalf of the European Commission. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

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Opening speeches

François Vandamme (Conseiller général, Service public Fédéral Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale, Division des Affaires internationales, Bruxelles), moderator, welcomed the participants on behalf of the European Commission, by referring to the unusual connection between CSR, volunteering and youth unemployment the Commission is making through organizing this event.

Jean-Louis De Brouwer , Director – Europe 2020: Employment Policies, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

Jean-Louis De Brouwer first highlighted that Europe is at risk of losing an entire generation to long-term unemployment. He framed the seminar as a meeting of two agendas - on CSR and on Volunteering - and stated that volunteering can play a role in facilitating the transition from education to work. An important remark made by Mr. De Brouwer was that volunteering positions should never be a replacement for real jobs. Volunteering can be an important part of training by enabling young people to acquire non-certifiable skills outside formal education schemes. More tools will be needed in support of such initiatives.

Hendrik Bourgeois, Vice President European Affairs, GE

Hendrik Bourgeois acknowledged there is a real expectation for business to play a broader role in society beyond making money. To live up to this expectation, companies should understand the competitive advantage a company gains through building lasting relationships with its stakeholders. This is the premise for any successful CSR programme. Mr. Bourgeois also emphasized that the value of employee volunteering goes beyond bringing benefits to local communities. The real value is the additional rich employer-employee relationship that is being created when employees feel encouraged to engage in their communities. Lastly, he pleaded for the promotion of innovation as a pathway to growth.

Madi Sharma, Rapporteur for the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the European Commission's Communication on CSR

Madi Sharma first expressed her support for the Commission's initiative in this seminar to connect four broad fields that are usually not addressed together. Throughout her description of the moving story of her life, she emphasised that everyone has experience and potential, regardless of what their CV says, and that people should not be "put into boxes" for being part of a vulnerable group. Two firm recommendations made by Ms. Sharma are (1) that it is not enough to provide employment or to create policies, you also need to go out and work in the communities yourself, and (2) that the European Commission should pay attention to the potential impact of legislation on the flexibility of the social economy.

Session 1: Developing experience, informal learning, and entrepreneurial skills for young people looking for employment through volunteering

Isabelle Bluche (Directrice des Relations Entreprises, IMS-Entreprendre pour la Cité), moderator, pointed out that a lot of good experience exists among young people that are facing (long-term) unemployment, which could help them gain access to work. A broad understanding of the importance of informal learning is essential in this regard.

Lena Bondue, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)

NFTE organizes a course on entrepreneurship for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to help them stay at/return to school, or join the workforce as an entrepreneur. The organization works together with 40 companies, which support NFTE through sponsoring or employee volunteering. **Lena Bondue** highlighted the fact that companies have shifted their focus from pure philanthropy to a return-on-investment approach. Employee volunteering fits into this framework. USA-based research has shown that employee satisfaction and commitment surge when employees feel stimulated to volunteer.

Andrea Carafa, Marie Curie Fellow, Founder and Director of Green Young Economy, Global Shaper – World Economic Forum

Andrea Carafa started by pointing to the deep crisis young people can experience in going through a period of long-term unemployment. Through the Green Young Economy, a community aiming to stimulate young people in shaping and gaining access to the green economy, Mr. Carafa advocates a 'hybrid volunteering model', where young people don't only learn or receive training, but are also challenged to bring innovative ideas to the organization they volunteer for. Additionally, Mr. Carafa emphasized the need to counter cynicism regarding young people's aspirations for the future by inspiring young people through providing examples of peers that are already running a start-up and firmly believe in the change they want to bring.

Glenn Manoff, Director of Social Business and Sustainability, Telefónica Europe

Glenn Manoff shared information from internal research, showing many young people today go through a crisis in their search for employment. Mr. Manoff emphasized that business can play a part in providing an answer, if it puts the creation of social value at the core of its business strategy. Doing so will give businesses a competitive advantage in the long run. For Telefónica, this means actively stimulating entrepreneurship bottom-up and capitalizing on young people's familiarity with modern technology - a potential that is being underutilized. Telefónica's initiative Think Big tries to change people's attitudes by stimulating self-belief and eradicating fear of failure. Mr. Manoff did not deny that volunteering can play an important part in all this, but did say that terms such as "volunteering" and "CSR" may need rebranding, as they no longer appeal to the young.

Pavel Trantina, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, EU relations and projects manager with the Czech Council of Children and Youth

Pavel Trantina pleaded for an adequate recognition of the skills acquired by young people through volunteering, and mentioned the upcoming EC's European Skills Passport / Europass Experience as a possible response to this. He sees a significant overlap between the competencies/values required by employers when recruiting new employees and what young people actually develop through volunteering activities. Unfortunately, both sides often speak a different language and therefore don't recognize this compatibility. Mr. Trantina highlighted projects initiated by scout organizations in Belgium and France that developed self-assessment tools for scout leaders in order to raise awareness of the commonalities in interpersonal skills/attitudes between scout leaders and business managers. From his own experience, he also mentioned that businesses do take an interest in non-formal learning, once it has been pointed out that what is usually required from new recruits has a lot in common with the competencies acquired through informal learning.

Discussion

A short round of discussion followed the presentations of the panel members, focusing on two topics:

1. Regarding a debate on whether educational institutes should focus on equipping young people with skills and competencies needed for their professional life, and/or on developing attitudes and character, the following points were raised:
 - Companies prefer to do the vocational/technical training themselves, as education cannot provide the right type of skills tailored to their needs.
 - Education systems still don't succeed in developing the personality traits and skills young people need in their professional life (e.g. resilience, empowerment, presentation and communication skills, how to truly tap into the resources provided by the internet).
 - What you do in life is becoming more important again than what you earn in the eyes of society.
 - Embedding values in young people's lives is moving away from the family sphere and is being transferred to the sphere of informal learning.

2. It was also mentioned by one of the participants that there is too much emphasis on standardization. Young people and the way they can develop and learn should form the basis of the discussion. The entire discourse around 'skills', for example, is too standardised.

Session 2: Encouraging young people to volunteer on socially-responsible projects – role of the Commission’s Youth in Action programme

Gabriella Civico (Director, European Volunteer Centre – CEV), moderator, introduced a session on finding ways to stimulate young people to take on a volunteering role and how the EC’s Youth in Action programme can play a role here.

Brian Rockliffe, Director, International Citizen Service (ICS)

The ICS is a fulltime, international volunteering programme, supported by the UK government. It seeks to engage 14 000 young people - half from the UK and half from 29 of the poorest countries around the world - in direct action programmes to fight poverty. The real impact these programmes can have is illustrated by interviews conducted with people from the UK that have participated in a similar programme ten years ago. 64% confirmed that the soft skills gained through the programme directly helped them to find a job, while 62% are still volunteering in their home communities today. In order to achieve such an outcome, however, **Brian Rockliffe** emphasized that programmes need to be carefully designed, as young people sense very quickly whether the work they are doing is actually useful. Ultimately, it is about giving people the confidence and belief that they can make a difference.

Svein Leknes Gryte, representing the company Figuma (winner of Junior Achievement Young Enterprise [JA-YE] Europe Enterprise Challenge 2012 Competition)

Svein Leknes Gryte studied product & system design at the college of Ålesund, which enabled him together with two fellow students, to design a gutting machine for small fishing vessels. In Norway, the fishing profession, and especially the fish-gutting part, is often seen as a dangerous job. In bringing a machine to the market that enables fishermen to gut fish easier and more safely, Figuma’s founders have been able to add practical, social value to their educational background. Mr. Leknes Gryte focused on the fact that, to be successful, you need to be passionate about what you are working on and believe in what you are doing. He also said taking part in the JA-YE competition increased his self-confidence, assuring him he can take initiatives and be successful at it.

Matej Selepsky, representing the company AIM (winner of JA-YE Europe Company of the Year 2012)

Matej Selepsky entered the JA-YE competition through a class in applied economics, which challenged him and his peers to develop a product they were passionate about. AIM produces energy-boosting chocolate, adding in exotic fruits (Acai and Goji). The company works together with first class chocolate manufacturers in Belgium, Italy and Switzerland and sees to it that fruits and packaging are sourced sustainably. Additionally, company representatives are not only trained to provide product information, but also teach customers about the importance of balanced diets. Mr. Selepsky recommended the experience he went through as a life-changing one, which has also greatly impacted his self-image.

Maria Podlasek-Ziegler, Programme manager – EU policies, DG Education and Culture, European Commission

Youth in Action is an EU funding programme providing non-formal, socially oriented learning opportunities to people aged between 15 and 28, with special attention to young people who have fewer life/work opportunities. Besides highlighting the approach and main achievements of the programme, **Maria Podlasek-Ziegler** stated programmes like this can engage people if they respond to their needs, expectations and interests. She also highlighted how initiatives like Youth in Action can empower youth, in the sense that it can give them a first work experience. It helps them discover their potential and develop both 'hard' and 'soft' skills. And it can help them to make decisions concerning their personal and professional life. Impact assessments show that young people especially value the fact that they can do something practical and meaningful, and that it also increases their social commitment.

Discussion

The discussion centred on two questions:

1. How can it be assured that businesses and other players (e.g. federations of entrepreneurs) recognize volunteering experiences appropriately?

Mrs. Podlasek-Ziegler referred to the Youthpass as one possible solution to this problem. It would need to be more widely-known and recognized to solve the problem, though. In addition, national validation systems should also be developed, but this is a process that will need time before it can bring results. In this context Mrs. Podlasek-Ziegler referred to a Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

2. The European Voluntary Service, part of the Youth in Action programme, includes sub-Mediterranean countries. Because of Visa implications, the exchange is in reality a single-direction one (EU to sub-Mediterranean). Can this situation be corrected?

Mrs. Podlasek-Ziegler confirmed that these problems are known and added that national agencies are often trying to help on an individual basis, but these issues also need a certain degree of political support.

Discussion groups: Is youth volunteering good preparation for entrepreneurialism in the world of work?

Bea Berruga (Analysta RSE, Forética), moderator, invited the participants to join one of the three discussion groups, which all focused on the relationship between volunteering and an entrepreneurial mindset. The main outcomes were shared in the plenary session, as follows.

1. Group 1 - moderated by Floor van Houdt, Deputy Head of Unit, DG Education and Culture, European Commission; Rapporteur: David Barnes, Solidarité proposal

- Regarding the difference between **volunteering and paid work**, the group highlighted that volunteering gives space for both mistakes and taking initiatives. While volunteering can be very efficient in the short run and young people can gain a lot out of volunteering experience (personal learning, an enhanced CV, sense of ownership, for example), people also need to be able to sustain themselves financially. Therefore, long-term volunteering was disapproved of.
- In response to the question as to how the value of volunteering can be conveyed to employers, the group pointed out that **European culture values volunteering less** than, for example, in the USA. Suggested ways to improve this included the Youthpass, individuals promoting more what they have done/achieved through volunteering activities, or advocating for volunteering at a higher level within companies. Another relevant remark was that, so far, rigorous **research** pointing out the linkages between volunteering and entrepreneurship is missing. This could be something for the EC to invest in.
- The general outcome was that if volunteering is **promoted within society**, it will receive more recognition, including in schools and other learning environments.

2. Group 2 – moderated by Iris Kroening, Policy Officer – CSR, DG Enterprise and Industry, European Commission; Rapporteur: Michele Orzan, President of the Founding Council, European Chamber of Commerce

- The group disapproved of any approach that would make volunteering a **compulsory** activity (e.g. within an educational curriculum).
- The question was raised (again) whether the word volunteering needs **rebranding**, as it may sound old-fashioned to young people.
- Not much attention has been paid to **the role teachers can play**. They could be prepared more to encourage, accept and value volunteerism.
- The **financial needs** of young people should not be disregarded. For some, the priority will certainly be to have a stable income.
- Finally, the group emphasized **that volunteering is a strong indicator of a person's future**. It shows that a person is passionate about making a contribution to society.

3. Group 3 – moderated by Jérôme Roche, Policy Officer – Entrepreneurship, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission; Rapporteur: Daniela Bosoic, Policy and Projects Officer, European Volunteer Center (CEV)

- From the personal experience of the group, **informal/non-formal learning** through sharing within groups, associations or families can be seen as one of the primary outcomes of volunteering. Additionally, volunteering provides good learning ground to overcome the fear of failure.
- An important element to consider is that people make choices because they feel they can have an **impact**, even if it means less security or not even having a permanent position.
- Regarding the question of what kind of support could **encourage young people to become entrepreneurs**, the importance of role models, having a solid network, and examples of people that have already succeeded was mentioned. No matter what policy or programmes are installed to encourage entrepreneurship, they should always take the differences in culture into account. One important remark was also that it is essential to instil the belief in young people that they can achieve things and be successful in order to create an entrepreneurial mindset.

Discussion

Following the presentations of the key outcomes of the discussion groups, the participants were invited to give their feedback:

- Different participants stated from their own experience that volunteering is a great indicator of a person's **attitude** towards life and people, which is not an easy thing to assess from a CV.
 - Volunteering was also seen as an important way to provide a **context for learning** and development.
 - Some participants emphasized that **inter-generational** aspects also need to be included in the debate. Older employees or mentors within companies can have an important role in guiding young people and sharing experience.
 - While the point was raised that volunteering may need rebranding, not everyone agreed with this. One of the participants was strongly convinced that volunteering is a word that carries a very important **legacy** in terms of the values we, as a society, stand for.
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- No evidence-based policy is possible, as there is no one way to measure volunteering. It will only be truly appreciated once this kind of **evidence** exists.
 - There is a problem in the **values and culture** of some companies, who still don't believe in CSR or a social business model.

Final session: Companies' involvement in supporting youth volunteering and entrepreneurship training through CSR

Jan Noterdaeme (Senior Adviser, CSR Europe), moderator, invited the speakers of the last panel to share their opinion on the "do's and don'ts" for companies in trying to stimulate entrepreneurship, and to shed some light on the impact CSR and volunteering initiatives can have within companies.

1. *Adrian Hermes, Vice-President of European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) Youth*

Adrian Hermes started by pointing out that this crisis is not a purely financial one. He echoed Jean-Louis De Brouwer, in saying that a generation of young people are growing up with a gloomy perspective on the future. As he sees it, the problem is not that young people would be underskilled or lack training, but that growth is stalling because of austerity measures, discouraging companies from hiring young people. CSR, volunteering and entrepreneurship can play a role to support young people, but this is certainly not the only, nor the most important path to solve the problem. Mr. Hermes emphasized that entrepreneurship is not a panacea and that volunteering/internships should never replace actual work, but should offer young people the prospect of finding work. He finished his speech by pleading for more regulatory support from policy makers to truly embed CSR within companies.

2. *Stephen Stacey, Director, Hyundai Motor Group, Brussels Office*

The Hyundai Motor Group has just started its first pan-European CSR programme, called Skills for the Future. The programme aims to engage 10 000 students and around 400 volunteers within the company to close the gap between businesses and education, by equipping students with the skills required for the jobs of the future. **Stephen Stacey** confirmed this project is part of the company's core strategy, as it builds on the need for his company to be seen as a good citizen within the EU community, in order to maintain a long-term license to operate. He also stressed the importance for Hyundai of being able to contribute to developing a skilled workforce as this is key to any company's competitiveness. Additionally, Mr. Stacey mentioned the importance of building strong partnerships in designing and implementing such a programme, as you cannot do it all by yourself. In their case, Junior Achievement-Young Enterprise (JA-YE) is playing a very supportive role.

3. *François Ledoux, Corporate Affairs Manager, Intel*

François Ledoux highlighted that CSR has a prominent position within Intel. CSR falls directly under the CEO and the company has publicized a CSR report for over a decade. Intel has an extensive employee volunteering programme, which engages around 40% of its employees in volunteering activities during 2011. Mr. Ledoux mentioned the importance of building strong partnerships in designing and implementing a CSR programme, including through volunteering. Junior Achievement-Young Enterprise (JA-YE) and IMS Entreprendre pour la Cité are key stakeholders. Regarding the question of what the impact of these activities is, Mr. Ledoux said that quantitative measures (number of projects, people involved, etc) can easily be created. Additionally, the economic impact volunteering activities can have

in addition to the more visible social impact is also hard to gauge. But overall, his conclusion is that volunteering can have wonderful impacts on the community.

4. Ralf Dürrwang, Vice-President, Corporate Communications and Responsibility, Go Teach, Deutsche Post DHL

Ralf Dürrwang emphasized that corporate responsibility (CR) is a crucial part of Deutsche Post DHL's strategy 2015. GoTeach, a programme aimed at facilitating access to high-quality education and creating an employable workforce for the future, is one of the three pillars of the company's CR strategy. It builds on partnerships with global and local non-profit organizations such as Teach For All and SOS Kinderdorf. Deutsche Post DHL supports these organizations not only financially, but mainly through the voluntary work of its employees who invest both their time and their skills in this. While Mr. Dürrwang agreed that CR activities should be connected to the company's core business, he also insisted that one should not neglect the impact employee volunteering can have on societal developments such as the increased employability of young people.

5. Discussion

Important points covered by the panel discussion following the presentations, were:

- Companies could consider giving employees **more time** to engage in volunteering, as this can also bring in innovation and new skills to the company. The biggest challenge here is the time constraints employees usually experience in their working routine.
- Businesses cannot do it alone. A **cross-sector approach** is important, in which businesses and NGOs work together to find solutions instead of pointing fingers at each other.

Mr. Noterdaeme ended the seminar by expressing his thanks and appreciation to the European Commission for opening the debate on this combination of topics. To conclude, he shared a vision with the audience on what CSR could come to stand for in the near future – a Common Sense Revolution, whereby scaling-up and mindshifts are needed in the subjects under discussion today.

Conclusions and outcomes

Throughout the day, different participants drew attention to the distressing youth unemployment rate Europe is currently facing, and the psychological stress that this brings for young people. It is therefore no understatement to talk about a 'lost generation'. But discussions on youth, entrepreneurship, volunteering and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have been necessary and should continue. A number of key points emerged.

In regard to **youth volunteering**, the following are key points:

- Volunteering programmes of all kinds need to be well-designed to enable young people to have a meaningful impact on society– less "standardisation".
- Volunteering can never be a replacement for actual jobs and should take into account that financial/job security may be a priority for young people.
- Volunteering is not as deeply embedded in European culture for young people as a usual part of their education, as opposed to in the USA, for example. Some participants suggested that it may need re-branding/to be better understood. A coherent and comprehensive view and comparable statistics on volunteering across different EU member states are lacking.
- Initiatives such as the Youthpass are an important step forward, but cannot solve the problem of validating informal learning in isolation.

The following are key points concerning the **role of companies and CSR**:

- CSR can no longer play a minor role, but must be at the heart of a company's strategy.
- Skills, competencies or personality traits acquired through informal/non-formal learning are still not fully recognized by employers. Companies and young people use different vocabulary to talk about skills and attitudes. The "business-as-usual" mindset is still prevailing in companies and business schools.
- The companies present confirmed that employee volunteering can bring significant benefits to a business, since it creates a rich employer-employee relationship and enables employees to build skills they would not have been able to develop within the company setting alone. Older employees can act as role models. There is a clear need for cross-sectoral partnerships, as no-one can do it alone.
- CSR is no longer purely philanthropic; companies want to see a return on investment or a win-win.

Regarding **entrepreneurship**:

- Formal education does not necessarily provide life skills.
- The fear of failure and the stigma attached to this needs to be eradicated from our society.
- The power of telling stories and showing examples should not be underestimated in this regard.

The seminar showed that there is great value in youth volunteering and non-formal/informal learning initiatives, including cross-border projects and learning mobility, as a way for young people to gain a first work experience, build skills or self-esteem, take on a social/civic commitment, develop an entrepreneurial attitude, and increase their chances of finding employment. In this sense, volunteering can be a part of the solution and have a real impact. Companies are making good efforts. But more attention is needed by all actors in cross-sectoral approaches (formal education, non-formal/informal learning and business), working together to make the most of new ways of working and learning within the 21st century.