

VOLUNTEERING CONFERENCE

Shaping volunteering in Europe and beyond

4 - 6 October 2023

Podgorica, Montenegro

The Volunteering Conference 2023, shaping the future of volunteering in Europe and beyond, took place from October 4 to October 6, in Podgorica, Montenegro.

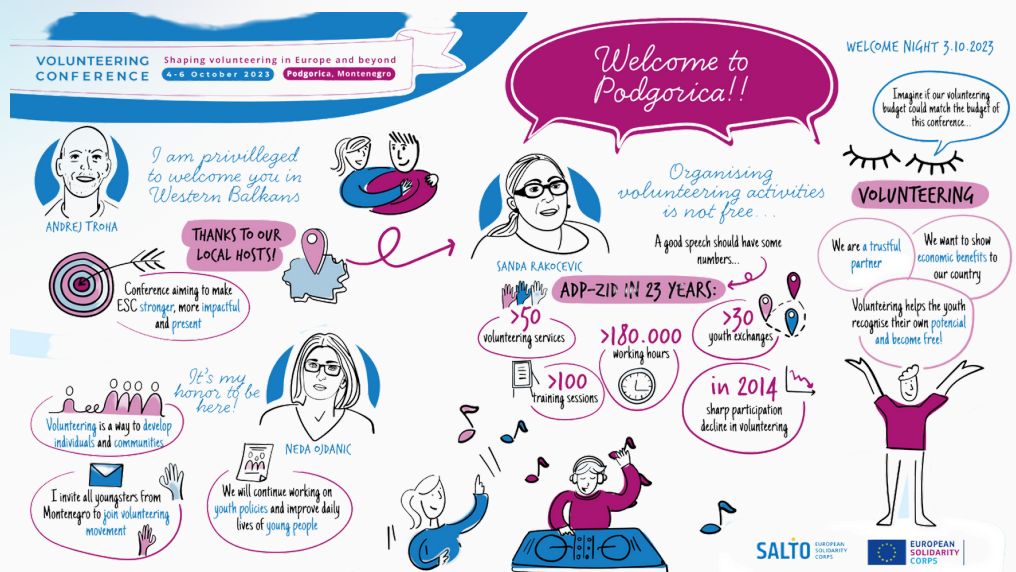
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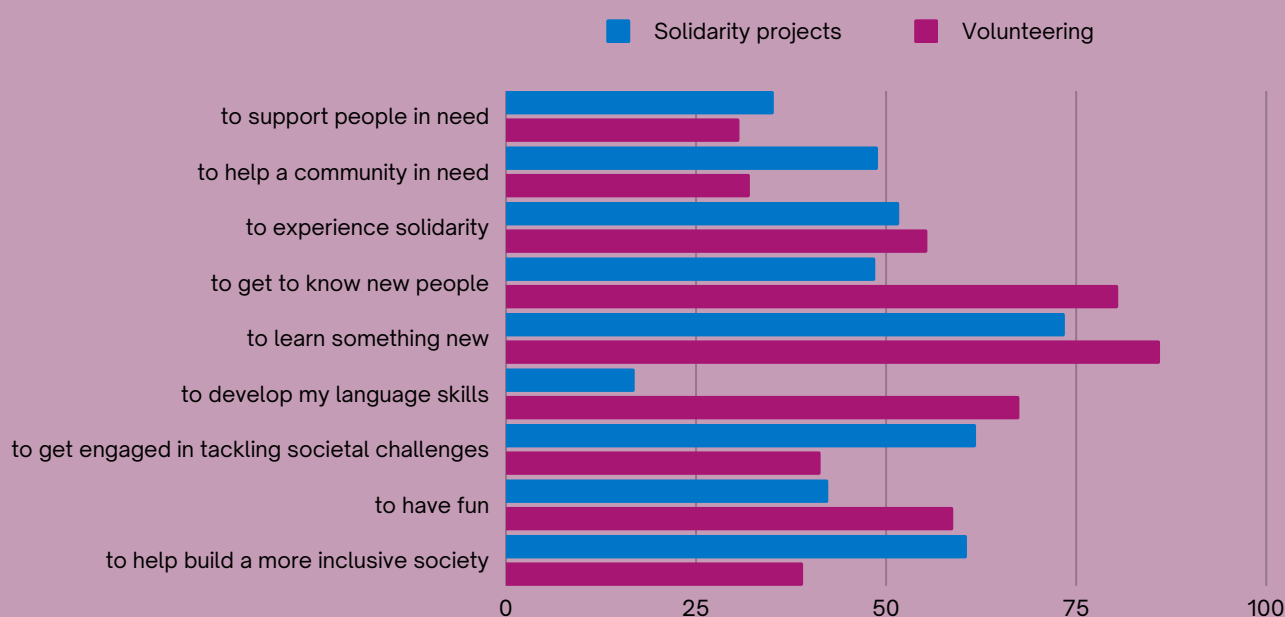
It was organised by the Strategic National Agencies' Cooperation on Volunteering (SNAC Volunteering). Fourteen national agencies and two SALTO centres collaborated to amplify the voice of solidarity. The conference was greeted by Neda Odanić, Secretary of the Montenegro Ministry of Sports and Youth. Over a hundred participants (namely 103 participants) from 34 countries came together to shape the future of volunteering and celebrate the 5th anniversary of the European Solidarity Corps. The conference featured a diverse range of engaging program sessions, providing insights for participants as well as policy makers. Additionally, following sessions encouraged participants to share their experiences and provide feedback.



PROGRAMME

OF THE CONFERENCE

In the presentation of the **RAY SOC research** introduced by A. Karsten at the conference significant differences in outcomes between solidarity projects, team and individual volunteering were mentioned. The research is ongoing, while already the preliminary results are interesting to investigate.



Panel workshops and discussion on four research initiated by SNAC Volunteering were conducted. Research presented were about synergies of the European Solidarity Corps programme with other EU Youth programmes, by W. Koralewska, Needs of Young people and organizations, by S. Apitz; Mapping of Research on Youth Volunteering in Europe, by F. Demicheli and Mapping European Civic Engagement Frameworks, by M. Á. García López.

In the presentation on the Council **Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers across the European Union** by A. Popescu from the European Commission, Significant milestones in volunteering history such as the European Youth Strategy were mentioned alongside with the need for capacity building particularly in terms of promotion and information dissemination. Mentioned was also the unsatisfactory implementation of previous recommendation from 2008.

The position paper on Better Conditions for Youth Volunteering by the SNAC Volunteering highlighted three main areas of focus: (1) introducing an "EU volunteer" status, (2) introducing a renewed quality charter for volunteering, and (3) fostering capacity building to enhance organisational framework.

RESPONSES

Higher level of civic engagement.

Altruistic values in volunteering were losing importance in the past decade, and personal development started to prevail the motivation of young people participating in the European Solidarity Corps programme. However lately, we can recognize a higher level of civic engagement and community building than before. It has been underlined that there is a constant need to put Solidarity in the centre of volunteering.

Reaching beyond youth work field.

Solidarity projects and volunteering should spread beyond the field of youth sector and include younger than 18 years.

The need for financial adjustments.

It is essential to regularly adjust finances in response to inflation, a practice that should occur more frequently than the current seven-year cycle. Often, the workload faced by these organizations is disproportionate to their financial resources, leading to an imbalance. Regular financial adjustments, along with reinstating the role of sending organizations, are paramount.

Communication strategy needs to be adjusted.

The language of the information and application should be simplified. Better communication options for people with vision or hearing impairment needed. National agencies are not the right center to promote voluntary work. Promotion should be done in places with young people.



Mental health needs to be addressed more thoroughly.

Mental health has emerged as a pressing issue for volunteers and mentors, highlighting the urgent need for professional training and financial support. Global concerns like loneliness are magnified in the context of volunteering. Insurance should cover expenses for psychologists or psychotherapy.

The term 'Youth with Fewer Opportunities' (YWFO) holds critical significance since many young individuals may not readily recognize themselves as such or identify with this label. It is essential that the exceptional support offered by the European Solidarity Corps program becomes more widely understood, accessible, and effectively promoted.

The need for flexibility in volunteering schemes.

Expanding volunteering opportunities for younger and for older is aligned with the broader proposal to expand volunteering beyond youth work. Moreover, introducing flexibility in volunteering duration can empower Youth with Fewer Opportunities (YWFO) to participate in long-term volunteering initiatives. A new initiative has emerged, permitting volunteers to use their allocated 12 months of service more flexibly. This approach enables participants to contribute multiple times through shorter projects, all within the 12-month timeframe.



Cooperation with the formal education is crucial.

Formal education has access to young people and a better means to inform them about the possibilities of volunteering. It is crucial to integrate volunteering in formal education, to promote volunteering as a valuable component of education within schools, whether by incorporating it into the curriculum or providing students with tangible benefits. Schools play a vital role in promoting volunteering, given their direct access to young individuals.

The need to reach a proper inclusion.

It seems there is a bigger imbalance between the supply and demand of the European Solidarity Corps projects. This probably leads to a biased selection of the volunteers, favouring privileged youth, thereby widening the gap in access to opportunities. It would be very beneficial to conduct the research getting the number of young individuals who might have missed out on the volunteering experience due to rejections. It is important also to expand the number of opportunities available.

Environmental sustainability of the programme should be adjusted.

There is a negative impact of the transnational volunteering on the environment. Responsibility for sustainable behaviour should be an integral part of the European Solidarity Corps programme by encouraging environmentally friendly behaviour, such as financing eco-friendly practices, reducing carbon footprint, or engaging in activities that contribute positively to the environment.

There are new trends on the horizon.

As new trends in volunteering emerge, they bring forth essential questions and require careful consideration. One of the focal points is the efficiency and meaningful impact of online volunteering. It's evident that online volunteering deserves a different treatment to maximize its potential. Volunteering tourism presents challenges as it can sometimes deviate from the core of meaningful volunteering.

THANK YOU!

