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Activity Youth Workers Mobility
(Training Course)

"Empower for the promotion of social
and civic participation of young people
through activism and volunteering"



Agência Nacional
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Orgão de Apoio



Associação
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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

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Introduction

This e-book is the result of a shared journey by youth workers from Portugal, Spain, Greece, Romania, and Croatia, who came together as part of an Erasmus+ Training Course under Key Action 1 (KA1): Mobility of Youth Workers.

Over several days of learning, dialogue, and collaboration, participants explored essential topics such as youth participation, activism, mental health, civic engagement, and volunteering, using non-formal education methods. Rooted in the principles of the Erasmus+ Programme and inspired by the EU Youth Goals, the project created a space to exchange good practices and co-develop meaningful tools for youth work.

This e-book reflects the collective knowledge, creativity, and experience of everyone involved. Inside, you'll find practical resources, inspiring event ideas, and insights into how youth workers across Europe are empowering young people to take action in their communities and beyond.

More than a publication, this is a toolkit of solidarity and participation, created by youth workers, for youth workers, with young people always at the center.



What is volunteering?

Volunteering is the act of offering your time, skills, or services freely and without payment to help others — often through organizations, charities, or community initiatives. It typically supports social causes, humanitarian needs, or community development. For example: helping in a food bank, tutoring children, planting trees, or assisting in animal shelters. As Nelson Mandela once said, *“We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference.”*

Volunteering is also a form of activism — a way of taking action to promote positive change without expecting material rewards. Whether it's through local projects or international efforts, volunteering reflects a commitment to social responsibility and collective well-being.

Importantly, volunteering doesn't just benefit the communities or causes involved — it also helps volunteers themselves. It can strengthen social connections, improve mental and physical health, and enhance employability by developing valuable skills and experiences.

At its core, volunteering is an expression of active citizenship: participating in building a more inclusive, fair, and sustainable society. In the European context, volunteering also plays a key role in promoting cross-border cooperation, protecting the environment, fostering cultural exchange, and contributing to a more united and resilient Europe.

Types of Volunteering

Volunteering can take many forms, depending on the needs of a community and the interests or skills of the volunteers. While the activities may vary, they can generally be grouped into a few key categories:

1. Environmental & Animal Volunteering

In a world facing urgent environmental challenges, *green volunteering* offers individuals a powerful way to take meaningful action. This type of volunteering involves active participation in initiatives aimed at protecting and preserving nature and animals.

By engaging in environmental projects, volunteers not only contribute to the health of the planet but also gain valuable knowledge, develop new skills, and cultivate a deeper understanding of sustainability. It fosters personal growth, community connection, and environmental awareness.

Examples include:



- Trash pickup and recycling campaigns
- Wildlife conservation projects
- Volunteering in animal shelters
- Helping on sustainable farms
- Habitat restoration and reforestation

2. Social Volunteering

Social volunteering focuses on addressing social issues and supporting people in need — whether through education, community support, or cultural exchange. Volunteers dedicate their time and energy without expecting financial reward, making a tangible difference in the lives of others.

In many cases, this type of volunteering offers the opportunity to learn about new cultures, languages, and lifestyles, while also building empathy and communication skills.

Examples include:

- Organizing or supporting activities for children or youth
- Teaching a foreign language or offering tutoring
- Working on community projects or cultural integration
- Supporting migrants, refugees, or vulnerable families

Social volunteering is especially common in regions such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but valuable opportunities also exist in local communities across Europe and beyond.

3. Healthcare Volunteering

Healthcare volunteering involves offering time and expertise to support medical services, often in underserved or crisis-affected areas. Volunteers may work with healthcare organizations or in communities lacking adequate access to care.

These volunteers often have specialized backgrounds — such as doctors, nurses, therapists, or medical students — but some roles may also be open to general volunteers with appropriate training or guidance.



Healthcare volunteers play a crucial role in improving global health standards, especially in situations involving natural disasters, conflict zones, or public health emergencies.

Examples include:

- Assisting with elder care and companionship
- Supporting public health campaigns
- Volunteer firefighting and emergency support
- Working with NGOs in medical outreach missions

4. Event Volunteering

Event volunteering focuses on helping organize and run public events, ranging from cultural festivals to sporting competitions or academic conferences. It offers a unique chance to be part of something exciting while gaining organizational skills and meeting new people.

Volunteers are often involved in a variety of tasks, from setup and logistics to guest support and promotion. In some cases, they receive exclusive benefits like access to restricted areas, meals, merchandise, or even participation in the event itself — though these perks should never be the primary motivation for volunteering.

Examples include:

- Assisting at music or cultural festivals
- Volunteering at conferences, lectures, or public exhibitions
- Supporting local sports events or competitions

No matter the type, volunteering is a rewarding way to contribute to society, gain practical experience, and grow both personally and professionally. Each form of volunteering brings its own challenges and rewards — the key is to find a cause that resonates with you.



How do I start?

In this chapter, you will find practical guidance on beginning your volunteering journey, compiled collaboratively by youth workers from Portugal, Spain, Greece, Romania, and Croatia. Each country shares unique experiences, tips, and resources designed to help you connect with local communities, discover meaningful opportunities, and make a positive impact. Whether you're new to volunteering or seeking fresh ideas, this section is your stepping stone to getting involved and contributing effectively.

In Croatia

If you're interested in volunteering in Croatia, particularly in the Zagreb region, a great place to start is the [Volunteer Center Zagreb \(VCZ\)](#). VCZ connects individuals with local and regional volunteer opportunities, offering a space to engage in meaningful, socially beneficial activities. Their mission is to create a community of informed and motivated volunteers, and their vision is simple yet powerful: that every person in Croatia has at least one volunteer experience in their lifetime.

What sets VCZ apart is its strong foundation in values. At the heart of its work is authenticity—the commitment to living and promoting the values it teaches. Volunteers are encouraged to act with openness, integrity, and personal alignment. Nonviolent communication is also a core principle, inspired by Marshall Rosenberg's model. It promotes respectful, empathetic dialogue and helps build deeper understanding between individuals.

Solidarity plays a key role in VCZ's philosophy. Volunteers are encouraged to act with a sense of togetherness, offering support to others and fostering a culture of mutual care. This is closely tied to their commitment to building a culture of peace, grounded in values such as freedom, justice, democracy, and human rights.

VCZ also focuses on empowering individuals through volunteering. By engaging in community work, young people not only contribute to society—they also develop important life skills and grow personally. Finally, empathy underpins all of VCZ's interactions, encouraging openness to difference and compassion in action.

Volunteer centers like VCZ are not just organizers of service—they are educators, facilitators of growth, and builders of more connected, inclusive communities. Through them, volunteering becomes more than giving time; it becomes a path to transformation—for both individuals and society.



In Greece

Volunteering is a meaningful way to give back to your community, meet like-minded people, and gain experience while making a real impact. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you get started in Greece:

1. Discover Your Passion

Start by asking yourself:

- What causes matter most to me?
(Children? Environment? Health? Education? Refugee support?)
- How much time can I commit?
(A few hours a week, once a month, or during holidays?)
- Do I want to help **in person**, **online**, or even **abroad**?

Understanding your motivation and availability is key to finding the right fit.

2. Use Digital Tools to Find Opportunities

Explore these platforms and communities:

- [Volunteer4Greece.gr](https://volunteer4greece.gr) – A national platform for local volunteering roles.
- **Facebook & Instagram groups**, such as:
“Εθελοντισμός στην Ελλάδα”
“Volunteering in Athens”
- Search hashtags like **#volunteeringgreece**, **#εθελοντισμός**.

Many NGOs also accept **digital volunteers** to help with:

- Content creation
- Translations
- Fundraising
- Social media and outreach

3. Start Small, Build Momentum



Your first action doesn't need to be big:

- Join a **beach clean-up**
- Volunteer at a **local food bank**
- Spend one day at a **children's center**

Each step builds confidence and helps you grow into deeper roles.

4. Explore Organizations That Need Volunteers

For Children and Youth:

- **SOS Children's Villages (Παιδικά Χωριά SOS)** – Support for vulnerable children.
- **Kivotos tou Kosmou (Κιβωτός του Κόσμου)** – Shelter, education, and care.
- **Together We Can (Μαζί Μπορούμε)** – Organizes food, blood, and clothing drives.

For Health and Humanitarian Aid:

- **Doctors Without Borders (Γιατροί Χωρίς Σύνορα)** – Medical support in crisis zones.
- **UNICEF Greece** – Promotes children's health and education.
- **ELPIDA (ΕΛΠΙΔΑ)** – Supports children with cancer.
- **KETHEA (ΚΕΘΕΑ)** – Recovery programs for people with addiction.

For Refugees and the Homeless:

- **SolidarityNow, Praksis, and Ithaca Laundry** – Provide shelter, legal aid, and hygiene services.

For Environment and Animals:

- **Callisto (Καλλιστώ)** – Focuses on mountain ecosystems and wildlife.



- **Archelon** – Sea turtle and marine conservation.
- **Anima** – Wildlife protection and rescue, especially birds.

In Portugal

Find an Association to Volunteer Near You

If you want to make a difference, volunteering is one of the most effective ways to start. Whether you have a few hours or more time to contribute, there are many organizations and local groups that welcome new volunteers.

Useful Resources to Find Volunteering Opportunities

To help you get started, here are some reliable platforms and contacts you can explore:

- Youth Portal Portugal — Volunteering in the Country
- Youth Portal — Volunteering Organisations
- Inovação Social Portugal 2020 — Projects
- Portuguese Red Cross — Local Structures
- Your local firefighter corporation
- Your local food bank

Once you find organizations near you, reach out directly to ask about volunteering opportunities. Most groups appreciate any time and skills you can offer, and getting involved is the first step to meaningful contribution.

Examples of Good Initiatives in Portugal

To inspire you, here are some well-established organizations making a real impact in various areas:

- **Just a Change**
A non-profit dedicated to rebuilding homes for those in need across Portugal.



justachange.pt

- Re-food
Rescues surplus food to reduce waste and provide meals for people in need.
re-food.org
- APATRIS 21
Founded by parents and educators, APATRIS 21 supports families of individuals with Trisomy 21 in the Algarve region. apatris21.org
- Amnistia Internacional Portugal (AIP)
The Portuguese branch of Amnesty International, promoting human rights and justice globally since 1981. amnistia.pt
- ILGA Portugal
The first Portuguese association fighting discrimination against LGBTI+ individuals and advocating for equality and human rights. ilga-portugal.pt
- ZERO – Sustainable Earth System Association
An NGO focused on environmental protection and sustainability through advocacy and education. zero.org
- ONGDM – Portuguese Platform for the Defense of Women's Rights
Dedicated to promoting gender equality and defending women's rights through lobbying and awareness campaigns. plataformamulheres.org.pt
- GAT – Group of Activists in Treatment
Supporting people affected by HIV, AIDS, hepatitis, and tuberculosis through health advocacy and non-discrimination efforts. gatportugal.org
- PORTA a PORTA – Movement for the Right to Housing
A social movement raising awareness about housing difficulties and promoting the right to decent housing. portaaporta.pt
- GAIA – Group of Action and Environmental Intervention
Founded by university students, GAIA connects environmental issues with social and political activism. gaia.org.pt
- Médicos Sem Fronteiras (MSF)
An international humanitarian organization providing medical aid in crises worldwide, with opportunities to contribute beyond medical roles. msf.org.pt
- Portel City Council
Supports local volunteering and activism efforts, particularly relevant for



communities near the Alqueva region. cm-portel.pt

- Eugénio de Almeida Foundation
A private institution in Évora focused on cultural, educational, social, and spiritual development of the region. fea.pt
- Transformers Movement
Promotes civic engagement, volunteering, youth training, and active citizenship throughout Portugal and beyond. movimentotransformers.org
- Lourencinho Association
Supports mental health and rare disease communities with social, educational, scientific, therapeutic, and artistic programs in Alentejo. associacao-lourencinho.webnode.pt

Taking the First Step

Volunteering is a powerful way to connect with your community and contribute to causes that matter. Whether you join an existing organization or become a pioneer in your area, your involvement creates ripple effects beyond your immediate actions.

Reach out, learn, and take part. Your time and skills are valuable. Together, we build a more just, compassionate, and sustainable society.

In Romania

Volunteering in contemporary Romania represents a meaningful way to actively participate in society. It goes beyond simply donating your time; it embodies a commitment to take responsibility for your community, to support those in need, and to contribute tangibly toward positive change.

Volunteering is about action, empathy, and above all, hope—the hope that collective effort can transform lives and improve society.

What Volunteering Means in Romania

In Romania, volunteering is legally defined by Law 78/2014 as an unpaid and voluntary activity carried out in the service of the community. While the proportion of active volunteers is still lower than in many other European countries, there has been a notable increase in engagement, particularly among students and young professionals.

Common forms of volunteering in Romania include:



- Social support: Assisting elderly people, vulnerable children, and individuals with disabilities.
- Environmental protection: Participating in clean-up campaigns, tree planting, and eco-education.
- Civic engagement: Advocating for social justice, human rights, and government accountability.
- Education and culture: Organizing events, mentoring youth, and supporting creative initiatives.
- Emergency response: Volunteering during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and humanitarian emergencies.

How You Can Volunteer in Romania

1. Join Local or National NGOs

Many young Romanians contribute their time through established organizations, some of them are:

- *Let's Do It, Romania!* – environmental protection and waste cleanup campaigns.
- *Magicamp* – support for children with cancer and their families.
- *Hospice Casa Speranței* – care for terminally ill patients.
- *Salvați Copiii* (Save the Children Romania) – promoting children's rights, education, and safety.
- *Habitat for Humanity Romania* – building homes for families in need.
- *Asociația Tineretului ONU din România* (UN Youth Romania) – education, international relations, and civic participation.
- *Code for Romania* – developing technology tools to address civic challenges.
- *Crucea Roșie România* (Red Cross Romania) – emergency and humanitarian aid.



2. Engage Locally

Volunteer at community centers, youth clubs, or public libraries.

Assist in organizing events within your town or school.

Offer support to elderly neighbors, children, or people with disabilities in your community.

3. Leverage Digital Platforms

Raise awareness by sharing informative content on social media, including campaigns, infographics, and videos.

Create or endorse petitions through platforms like declic.ro and campaniamea.declic.ro.

Write blog posts or articles about causes you are passionate about.

4. Respond During Crises

Support initiatives providing medical equipment, aid to refugees, or assistance to natural disaster victims.

Collect and distribute donations with humanitarian organizations.

Consider becoming a trained volunteer with the Romanian Red Cross for emergency response.

Despite its rewards, volunteering in Romania faces several challenges:

- Limited time and resources can hinder sustained involvement.
- NGOs often operate with insufficient funding and staff capacity.
- Volunteering is sometimes perceived as unproductive or superficial.
- Volunteers risk burnout when progress seems slow or inadequate.
- In smaller towns, opportunities may be scarce or difficult to coordinate.

Nevertheless, volunteering remains a vital expression of civic responsibility and solidarity, offering individuals the chance to contribute to a stronger, more compassionate society.

In Spain

Volunteering in Spain has become an increasingly significant way for young people to engage with their communities and contribute to meaningful causes. While volunteering has long been present in the country—often through traditional

organizations such as churches or local associations—today's generation embraces new values and approaches. Many young people choose to volunteer out of a desire to support those around them, especially amid rising social and economic challenges.

Some volunteer to gain experience, connect with like-minded individuals, or explore interests beyond school or work. For others, volunteering serves as a means to develop skills, strengthen their resumes, and enhance their prospects for jobs or scholarships.

Across Spain, young volunteers participate in a diverse array of initiatives. Some provide support to children through after-school tutoring or organize language exchanges for refugees and migrants. Others engage in environmental protection efforts, such as reforestation projects, community clean-ups, or sustainability workshops.

Volunteering has evolved. Young people increasingly seek flexible, hands-on opportunities where they can see the direct impact of their contributions. They prefer less formal, community-centered projects that foster teamwork and meaningful engagement. Social media plays a crucial role in this transformation by helping young volunteers discover opportunities, coordinate campaigns, and raise awareness about important causes.

Despite its benefits, volunteering in Spain also faces challenges. Access to information can be limited, making it difficult for those willing to help to know where to start. Balancing studies, part-time jobs, and personal commitments often constrains long-term involvement. Furthermore, in some sectors, such as cultural or social care, volunteering is sometimes perceived as unpaid labor, which can be unfair for young people already confronting financial pressures.

Nevertheless, volunteering remains an essential avenue for youth involvement in society. For many, it serves as their first experience in driving positive change, fostering empathy, and developing leadership skills. Some volunteers even progress into activism or community leadership roles. Ultimately, volunteering in Spain is not only about aiding others but also about cultivating awareness, engagement, and responsible citizenship.

For example, **Adopta Un Abuelo** is a notable initiative connecting young volunteers with elderly individuals who experience loneliness or isolation, particularly those residing in care homes. Volunteers "adopt" a grandparent by committing to regular visits or calls. These meaningful interactions provide emotional support, combat loneliness, and foster intergenerational friendships. Importantly, volunteers often report gaining wisdom, affection, and fresh perspectives in return.



Another inspiring example is the movement of urban community gardens, where local residents collaboratively cultivate food, share knowledge, and organize social and cultural activities. Volunteers in these gardens contribute not only to planting and harvesting but also to building community, promoting sustainability, and supporting inclusion across diverse age groups and backgrounds. This form of volunteering combines environmental stewardship, social justice, and grassroots activism in a way that is both practical and empowering.

What is Activism?

Activism is the act of taking direct and purposeful action to effect social, political, economic, or environmental change. Activists strive to raise public awareness, shape public opinion, and influence policy decisions through various means such as campaigns, protests, petitions, and advocacy efforts. Examples include participating in climate marches, campaigning for human rights, or organizing initiatives to combat discrimination. Activism represents a vital form of civic engagement characterized by proactive efforts to address pressing societal issues. It extends beyond protest to encompass constructive actions aimed at developing practical solutions, asserting citizens' rights, holding authorities accountable, and promoting the common good.

Types of Activism

- **Marching (Public Demonstration):** Organized protest marches serve as accessible means for individuals, including those new to activism, to publicly express their stance on issues and mobilize support.
- **Voting (Civic Engagement):** Participation in electoral processes is a fundamental civic responsibility that ensures representation and influences policy decisions.
- **Fundraising (Financial Support):** Activists employ various methods, such as crowdfunding, soliciting donations, securing sponsorships, or applying for grants, to obtain financial resources necessary for their initiatives.
- **Volunteering (Community Service):** Volunteering involves the voluntary commitment of time and effort to support causes, contributing directly to community welfare and social development.
- **Civil Disobedience (Peaceful Resistance):** This form of activism entails the intentional and nonviolent refusal to comply with certain laws or government directives as a means of protesting injustice.



- **Craftivism (Creative Expression):** Activism through creative arts and crafts that convey political messages or raise awareness of social issues.
- **Slacktivism (Minimal-Effort Activism):** Engagement in low-intensity activities such as social media sharing or signing online petitions that demonstrate support with limited personal investment.
- **Hacktivism (Digital Protest):** Utilization of digital technologies and hacking techniques to promote political agendas or social change through civil disobedience.
- **Petitioning (Formal Requests):** The collection of signatures and submission of formal appeals to authorities, requesting action or redress on specific issues.

How do I start?

Activism takes many forms, and starting can sometimes feel challenging. This chapter offers a diverse range of strategies and advice, brought together by young activists and youth workers from Portugal, Spain, Greece, Romania, and Croatia. By exploring different approaches tailored to each country's context, you'll find inspiration to raise your voice, organize collective actions, and drive change. Use this guide as a foundation to begin your activism journey with confidence and purpose.

In Croatia

Activism in Croatia is increasingly visible, driven by individuals and collectives committed to social, environmental, and political change. If you are passionate about creating impact, here is a step-by-step guide tailored to the Croatian context.

1. Identify Your Cause

Before engaging in activism, take time to reflect on the issues you care about. These might include:

- Environmental protection and climate action
- Women's rights and gender equality
- LGBTQ+ rights
- Migrant and refugee support



- Anti-corruption and transparency
- Workers' rights and economic justice

Ask yourself: Where do your interests and values intersect with current social challenges?

2. Stay Informed

Knowledge is a critical foundation for effective activism. Start by:

- Following independent and critical media outlets such as *Novosti*, *H-Alter*, *Lupiga*, and *Bilten*
- Listening to podcasts and radio stations like *Radio Student*
- Watching documentaries and attending lectures or public discussions
- Exploring the history of activism in Croatia to understand local struggles and victories

Understanding the context strengthens your credibility and ability to contribute meaningfully.

3. Connect with Organizations and Movements

Many established groups in Croatia welcome new activists and volunteers. Consider joining or supporting:

- **Zelena akcija (Green Action)** – Advocates for environmental justice and climate policies
<https://zelena-akcija.hr>
- **Are You Syrious?** – Supports refugees and asylum seekers through education and advocacy
<https://www.areyousyrious.eu>
- **Solidarna Foundation** – Promotes human rights, anti-discrimination, and crisis solidarity
- **Pride Zagreb** – Organizes the annual Pride March and promotes LGBTQ+ rights



- **Faktiva / FAKTIV** – A feminist collective known for organizing the Women’s Day Night March
- **BRID** (Base for Workers’ Initiative and Democratization) – Advocates for labor rights and anti-privatization policies
<https://www.brid.hr>

These organizations often post calls for volunteers, campaign updates, and event announcements on their websites and social media.

4. Engage Through Action

There are many forms of activism. Your involvement might include:

- Participating in peaceful protests, marches, or public forums
- Designing campaign materials or helping with social media outreach
- Providing translation, legal, or technical support
- Attending community meetings and roundtables
- Writing opinion articles or creating educational content
- Joining digital campaigns or signature drives

Activism does not require a specific background—skills of all kinds are needed.

5. Build Local Connections

Activism is most sustainable when rooted in community. Look for:

- Student associations and university-based collectives
- Cultural centers such as AKC Medika in Zagreb
- Public workshops, solidarity kitchens, or reading groups
- Local Discord or Facebook groups such as “Mladi za klimu” (Youth for Climate Croatia)

Shared purpose and mutual support are essential for long-term engagement.



6. Use Creative and Digital Tools

In Croatia, activism is often supported by artistic and digital expression. You can contribute through:

- Zines, blogs, photography, or video
- Short documentaries or spoken word pieces
- Social media storytelling or campaign management
- Creative protest signage, mural projects, or public installations

Digital activism complements in-person efforts and extends reach across communities.

7. Maintain Balance and Perspective

Activism can be emotionally and mentally demanding. Prioritize:

- Sustainable involvement—start with what you can manage
- Collaborating rather than working alone
- Setting boundaries to prevent burnout
- Celebrating progress, even when it feels small

Becoming an activist is a process. It is not about being perfect, but about being consistent and committed to collective improvement. Activism in Croatia plays a crucial role in challenging injustice and building a more democratic society. Whether you join a protest, write an article, volunteer behind the scenes, or simply amplify marginalized voices, your engagement matters. Social change requires participation from diverse individuals and your contribution has the power to inspire others and shape the future.

In Greece

Activism means raising your voice for change—whether through peaceful protest, awareness campaigns, or digital advocacy. If you're passionate about justice, equality, or climate action, here's how you can get started:

1. Define Your Cause



Ask yourself:

- What injustice or social issue do I care about?
- Do I want to engage through art, writing, protests, or education?
- What skills or experiences can I offer to a movement?

Some common themes in Greece include:

- Human rights and anti-racism
- Refugee and migrant support
- Gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights
- Climate justice and environmental action

2. Engage Digitally

- Follow activist movements on Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok.
- Join online campaigns or virtual protests.
- Create and share content that raises awareness or inspires action.
- Use platforms like Discord, Twitter, and YouTube to join discussions.

Popular hashtags and groups include:

- #activismGR
- #δικαιώματα
- #κλιματικήδικαιοσύνη

3. Educate Yourself

- Listen to podcasts on activism, politics, or mental health.
- Watch documentaries on platforms like YouTube or Netflix.



- Attend free webinars and training sessions from NGOs or community centers.

Learning more empowers you to speak out effectively and respectfully.

4. Participate in Local Movements

Many grassroots and international organizations in Greece welcome young activists:

- ActionAid Hellas – Works on poverty and justice through campaigns and youth training.
- Greenpeace Greece – Hosts direct action events and awareness campaigns.
- Generation 2.0 RED – Advocates for migrant rights and promotes diversity.
- European Solidarity Corps – Offers youth the chance to volunteer abroad and locally in activist roles.

5. Join Peaceful Protests or Creative Actions

- Attend events like Thessaloniki Pride, anti-racism rallies, or climate marches.
- Volunteer at info-booths, distribute leaflets, or help organize logistics.
- Collaborate with musicians, artists, or influencers to spread powerful messages.

Remember: Activism and volunteering are both powerful tools for change. Whether you're donating time, skills, or your voice—what matters is that you show up. Start where you are, and take that first step toward creating the future you believe in.

In Portugal

“Fight for something.” — Ivan Funtek

Stepping into activism doesn't require grand gestures. Often, it begins with a single decision—to care, to question, and to act. Whether you are a student, a young professional, or simply someone wanting to make a difference, activism is a journey. It starts with a cause, grows through learning and collaboration, and is sustained by community, resilience, and a shared vision for change.



Discover What Drives You

Activism begins with passion. The first step is to ask yourself: what issues matter most to you? What motivates you to take action? Being educated on the subject you are campaigning for is essential, as it gives your efforts clarity and strength.

There are many types of activism, each with its own focus and approach: social justice, environmental protection, digital rights, youth activism, economic equality, political engagement, among others. You don't have to limit yourself to just one. Choose what resonates most with you and remember: do what you wish to see changed in the world.

Collaborate with Others

While activism can start with individual motivation, real change requires collective action. After identifying what drives you, explore what is already happening in your community. Find groups, attend meetings or events, and connect with others who share your concerns.

“Taking the first step and going along to an event or joining a meeting is the best place to start.” — Maddie Bromfield, People & Planet

Building your soft skills, communication, teamwork, empathy, and relationship-building, is crucial. Activism is not just about speaking out; it is also about listening and working collaboratively across diverse groups and perspectives. Together, groups can build the strength and strategy necessary to create lasting change.

Learn as You Go

No one begins as a fully formed activist. Knowledge and confidence come through experience. The best way to learn is to start participating, ask questions, listen carefully, and reflect on your experiences.

Working with others provides valuable opportunities to grow and learn more effectively. You don't need to have all the answers or specialized skills to contribute. Simple tasks—such as creating signs, sending emails, taking notes, or distributing flyers—are essential parts of any movement.

Find Your Role

If you are unsure how to help but want to contribute, consider the skills you already have or those you would like to develop. As Ric Lander, a researcher and movement historian, suggests, “Think of a skill you have from somewhere else and offer it to the group, or think of a new skill you want to gain, and look for ways to do so.”



Activism requires many roles—some highly specialized, others more general. Every contribution matters.

You Are Not Alone

Activism can be physically and emotionally demanding. It is normal to feel overwhelmed or discouraged, especially when facing complex issues. Kate Whitaker, movement-building lead at Friends of the Earth Scotland, notes, “If you’ve recently deep dived into an issue it can be really overwhelming, especially if you feel like you personally are responsible for solving every problem right now. This can lead to burnout, self-sacrifice, or a hero culture—none of which helps anyone. Learning about past movements is a good way to understand the context of the struggle and feel part of something bigger.”

Celebrate Joy and Connection

Recognizing that you are part of a larger community can bring comfort and strength. Confronting significant challenges requires focus and dedication, but it also requires moments of rest, joy, and connection. Building friendships and celebrating small victories helps sustain long-term commitment and morale.

Activism in Portugal: How to Get Started

Intrinsic motivation, the genuine desire to make a difference, is the key to becoming an activist anywhere in the world. In Portugal, as elsewhere, the best way to begin is by connecting with local groups or initiatives.

- In your neighborhood: Are there associations or groups working on causes that interest you?
- At school: Talk with teachers about ongoing projects or propose your own initiatives.
- At university: Many activist organizations are based in universities. Find out what’s happening or consider starting a group.
- At work: Look for ways to connect your professional skills to activist causes.
- Based on your interests: If no existing groups meet your needs, consider becoming a pioneer by raising awareness and mobilizing people in your community.



Every movement begins with one person willing to take that first step. By educating yourself, collaborating with others, and committing to consistent action, you become part of a much larger story—a story of change, hope, and progress.

In Romania

Activism in Romania began to take significant form following the fall of communism in 1989. Since that pivotal moment, it has evolved into a powerful means for citizens to confront injustice, demand governmental transparency, protect the environment, and advocate for human rights. Beyond these aims, activism in Romania also seeks to challenge corruption, discrimination, and the pervasive indifference that allows unfair systems to persist.

In Romania, activism can take many forms, including:

- Utilizing legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act (Law 544/2001) to request transparency and accountability;
- Launching community initiatives focused on issues like environmental protection, education, and public safety;
- Monitoring public institutions through petitions, protests, and open letters to ensure responsible governance;
- Leveraging digital platforms—from social media to blogs—to inform and mobilize the public;
- Participating in on-the-ground activities such as marches, local events, and support for marginalized communities.

Practical Steps to Get Involved

1. Engage Locally

Attend city council meetings and inquire about budget allocations and public spending;
Submit formal requests for public information to understand institutional actions;
Participate in public consultations initiated by local authorities or government ministries.

2. Utilize Digital Tools

Create and disseminate educational content—videos, infographics, and posts—on critical social issues;
Promote and endorse petitions through platforms like declic.ro;



Use social media strategically to raise awareness rather than passive consumption.

3. Volunteer Your Time and Skills

Collaborate with NGOs such as Let's Do It, Romania! or Code for Romania;
Assist in organizing community clean-ups, tree planting, or educational workshops in schools.

4. Participate in Public Actions

Join peaceful protests or awareness campaigns aligned with your beliefs;
Help coordinate events that highlight local challenges in a respectful and lawful manner;
Write to elected officials or rally community support around important causes.

5. Promote Civic Education

Facilitate discussions, workshops, or debates in educational institutions about civic rights and duties;
Use online channels—podcasts, vlogs, social media—to engage audiences on often overlooked topics.

6. Share Stories and Facts

Publish articles or posts about local developments;
Partner with independent media outlets such as Recorder, PressOne, or Casa Jurnalistului, which excel in investigative journalism.

Challenges of Activism in Romania

Engaging in activism in Romania presents several obstacles, including:

- Navigating slow, opaque bureaucratic processes;
- Encountering authorities who may prefer to ignore rather than engage;
- Confronting entrenched attitudes resistant to reform;
- Facing criticism or skepticism from peers (“You’re wasting your time,” “Nothing will ever change”);
- Operating with limited resources, including funding, spaces, and institutional support.



Despite these challenges, activism remains a source of courage, resilience, empathy, and solidarity—qualities that empower individuals and communities to strive for meaningful change.

In Spain

In Spain, activism has become a powerful way for young people to raise their voices and demand change. Although activism has been part of the country's history for decades, today's youth bring new energy, creativity, and urgency to the pursuit of justice.

Many young activists are motivated by pressing issues such as climate change, inequality, racism, mental health challenges, and housing insecurity. Instead of remaining silent, they organize protests, lead awareness campaigns, and advocate for improved policies at both local and national levels.

Youth-led activism is visible throughout Spain, from large street demonstrations to vibrant social media campaigns. It extends beyond protests to include the creation of community spaces, knowledge sharing, and the building of support networks. Social media plays a vital role by connecting people and amplifying messages quickly.

This new wave of activism is often informal and grassroots in nature. Young people initiate small-scale projects such as art interventions, community dialogues, and mutual aid groups. Rather than waiting for permission, they take direct action. While activism can be perceived as radical by some, it offers young people a sense of purpose, empowerment, and opportunity for growth. Ultimately, it is about building a fairer and more inclusive future.

For example:

The Top Manta Movement is a grassroots activist group led by street vendors, primarily African migrants, who sell goods on blankets in public spaces. Organized as the Popular Union of Street Vendors, they combat racism, social exclusion, and unjust immigration policies. Their activism includes launching an ethical fashion brand, protesting police violence, and defending human rights. This movement exemplifies activism born from resilience and the fight for survival.

The 15M Movement (also known as the Indignados) was a massive protest movement that began on May 15, 2011. Citizens, especially young people, gathered in public squares to demand social justice, combat corruption, and call for genuine democracy. Operating without political parties or traditional leadership, it represented a grassroots and horizontal form of activism. The 15M became a powerful symbol of



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public resistance, with its legacy continuing through various social and political initiatives across Spain.



Good Practices

In this chapter, we will explore inspiring examples of effective volunteerism and activism from the countries involved in this project. These real-life stories and initiatives demonstrate how individuals and communities are making meaningful contributions to social change and civic engagement. By sharing these good practices, we aim to highlight diverse approaches that foster active participation, build solidarity, and address pressing social issues.

Whether through grassroots campaigns, community cleanups, or coordinated crisis responses, these cases offer valuable insights and practical ideas. They serve not only as motivation but also as models that can be adapted and replicated in different contexts. We invite you to learn from these experiences and consider how you can apply similar strategies in your own community to promote positive change.

In Croatia

Croatia Volunteers Campaign

Since 2010, the annual Croatia Volunteers campaign has been a flagship initiative promoting volunteerism across the country. Organized by the Croatian Center for the Development of Volunteering in collaboration with four regional volunteer centers—Volunteer Center Zagreb, DKolektiva (Volunteer Center Osijek), Association “MI” (Volunteer Center Split), and Association SMART (Volunteer Center Rijeka)—along with numerous local volunteer centers, the campaign underscores the vital role of volunteering in fostering a modern, engaged society.

The campaign’s primary objective is to emphasize the importance of volunteering as both a right and responsibility for every individual, encouraging active participation in community life. Each year, hundreds of volunteer activities take place nationwide over several days, engaging thousands of volunteers who collectively contribute tens of thousands of hours toward building stronger, more resilient communities.

Individuals interested in participating or registering volunteer activities for the campaign can find detailed information on the official website or follow updates via social media platforms.

The Green Cleanup 2024 — Koprivnica

In April 2024, Koprivnica witnessed a record turnout for The Green Cleanup, an environmental volunteer initiative organized in conjunction with Earth Day celebrations. Over 150 residents united to beautify their city by collecting waste and improving public spaces—marking the highest participation to date.



The Green Cleanup is part of the global Let's Do It! movement, the largest volunteer environmental project in history, which mobilizes citizens and organizations to remove illegally dumped waste in a single day. This year's edition also contributed to the "From Source to Sea" project, incentivizing participation with the potential to win funds for purchasing tree seedlings for urban afforestation.

The city expressed gratitude to all participants, including families, local associations, cultural groups, and sports clubs, highlighting the spirit of community solidarity and shared responsibility for environmental stewardship.

Volunteering After the 2020 Earthquake in Sisak-Moslavina County

In recent years, Croatia has faced multiple crises, including floods, wildfires, the refugee influx, the COVID-19 pandemic, and notably, the devastating earthquakes in Zagreb (March 2020) and the Petrinja region (December 2020). These emergencies underscored the critical role of volunteers in crisis response.

Volunteers were on the front lines, assisting vulnerable populations, aiding in damage repair, and providing essential social and psychological support. Their efforts fostered a powerful network of solidarity, demonstrating the strength of civil society in times of adversity.

The Radius V project, which focuses on research and development in volunteerism, conducted a study on crisis volunteering in Sisak-Moslavina County following the 2020 earthquake. The study explored volunteers' experiences, motivations, and perspectives during and after their service.

One of the key findings highlighted the profound sense of solidarity among Croatian citizens, with volunteers citing empathy and support for affected communities as their primary motivation. However, the study also revealed widespread skepticism toward institutional responses, with many volunteers expressing frustration at the lack of effective coordination from state and local authorities.

"It is evident that coordination is needed by the state and local authorities, but there is none. There is no strategy, no clear plan for managing a crisis. I do not believe we have learned much even now."

— Volunteer respondent

The study emphasized the urgent need to improve crisis management systems, particularly in organizing and coordinating volunteers. Better communication and information dissemination to the public were also identified as critical to avoid spontaneous, uncoordinated volunteer efforts that may hinder effective aid delivery.

The Radius V project is co-financed by the European Social Fund and involves a consortium of organizations including DKolektiv, the Croatian Center for the Development of Volunteering, Volunteer Center Zagreb, Association "MI" (Split),



Association SMART, the Center for Civil Initiatives, ACT Group, University of Rijeka, Faculty of Philosophy in Rijeka, the Cities of Split and Rijeka, and the PRONI Center for Social Education.

In Greece

1. Generation 2.0 RED

- Focus: Migrant and refugee rights, anti-racism, inclusion.
- Good Practice: Actively involves second-generation migrants in planning and advocacy. Uses digital storytelling, influencer partnerships, and youth-led campaigns to humanize migration issues.
- Highlight: "Face Forward...into my home" – a photo exhibition and campaign sharing personal stories of refugees and migrants in Greece.

2. Boroume (Μπορούμε)

- Focus: Food waste reduction and food insecurity.
- Good Practice: Built a nationwide network linking food donors with charities, with a strong volunteer component. They use Instagram and infographics effectively to engage youth.
- Highlight: "Saving & Offering Food" campaign mobilizes supermarkets, restaurants, and events to donate surplus food.

3. Antigone – Information and Documentation Centre on Racism, Ecology, Peace and Non Violence

- Focus: Human rights education, peace, anti-discrimination.
- Good Practice: Participates in cultural festivals and local community events with interactive educational games and workshops.
- Highlight: Uses gamification for human rights education (e.g., human rights board games for youth at Thessaloniki Pride).

4. Praxis



- Focus: Health and social integration for vulnerable groups.
- Good Practice: Combines activism with service provision (legal, medical, psychological support). Includes beneficiaries in advocacy efforts.
- Highlight: Mobile health units and street outreach teams promote awareness while providing essential services.

5. Ithaca Laundry

- Focus: Homelessness, hygiene rights.
- Good Practice: Mobile laundry vans provide homeless people with clean clothes, while also raising public awareness about homelessness in Athens.
- Highlight: Engages volunteers and creates partnerships with municipalities for visibility and impact.

In Portugal

1. Diversity and Inclusion - Associação Plano i

- Focus: LGBTQIA+ rights, gender equality, mental health.
- Good Practice: Offers training to schools and institutions on gender-based violence and inclusion. Also provides direct psychosocial support.
- Highlight: Their “Safer Schools” program supports teachers and students in combating bullying and promoting diversity.

2. Associação Renovar a Mouraria

- Focus: Multiculturalism, community development.
- Good Practice: Activates public space in Mouraria (Lisbon) through culture, music, and storytelling. Promotes integration through language classes and cultural exchanges.
- Highlight: “Festa da Diversidade” – A grassroots multicultural street festival blending activism with celebration.

3. Parar o Racismo



- Focus: Anti-racism education and legal support.
- Good Practice: Combines grassroots activism with legal tools to report and combat institutional racism.
- Highlight: Developed a toolkit for recognizing and reporting racist behavior in public institutions.

4. Manifestival – Activism Through Art and Performance

- Focus: Youth-led social change via creative expression.
- Good Practice: Organizes activist festivals combining music, art, and workshops on feminism, climate justice, and democracy.
- Highlight: Encourages civic engagement by turning public spaces into participatory platforms.

5. Reboot the Roots Portugal

- Focus: Social inclusion through theatre and art.
- Good Practice: Uses “Theatre of the Oppressed” methods to engage marginalized groups in storytelling and critical dialogue.
- Highlight: Community theatre productions that challenge social norms and promote dialogue on mental health and exclusion.

In Romania

Save the Children Romania

Save the Children Romania is a prominent non-governmental organization that has been actively defending and promoting children’s rights across the country for over 30 years. The organization was established in response to a challenging social reality: thousands of Romanian children continue to face poverty, limited access to education and healthcare, neglect, abuse, and discrimination.

Founded on the fundamental belief that every child deserves protection, dignity, support, and opportunity, Save the Children Romania has evolved into one of the nation’s most respected and impactful child-focused organizations. Its programs directly improve the lives of vulnerable children, focusing on several core objectives:



- Ensuring equal access to quality education
- Providing psychological and social support
- Enhancing maternal and child health
- Advocating for children's rights at local and national levels

These goals are pursued through a combination of direct interventions, public awareness campaigns, and policy advocacy.

A distinctive feature of Save the Children Romania is its emphasis on visibility and public awareness. The organization conducts ongoing outreach initiatives, leveraging social media, media partnerships, and collaborations with schools, universities, and local communities. These efforts not only mobilize support and resources but also foster a more informed and compassionate society.

Volunteering forms a vital component of the organization's operations. Volunteers of all ages actively contribute by organizing educational workshops, supporting children in hospitals and shelters, assisting with fundraising events, and providing much-needed companionship and assistance in communities.

For young volunteers, involvement with Save the Children offers invaluable opportunities for personal growth, helping them develop skills such as teamwork, communication, and empathy while deepening their sense of social responsibility. For adult volunteers, it represents a meaningful avenue to engage with and positively impact their communities.

Ultimately, Save the Children Romania exemplifies a model of civic engagement that seamlessly integrates professional expertise with heartfelt compassion. It is not only dedicated to protecting children but also committed to fostering a culture that respects and values the well-being of every child.

In Spain

In Spain, many young people are leading by example when it comes to volunteering. Here are three real stories that show how volunteering can be creative, useful, and impactful for the community.

Bryan, 25 years old

Last year, Brian co-founded a local NGO called AISA – Asociación de Innovación Social de Alicante with a fellow master's student. Their goal is to develop social innovation projects with children. In exchange for running workshops and educational activities in schools, they are allowed to enter the school system and gain experience. This also helps them build a



path to future jobs as young professionals in the social sector. It's a great example of turning volunteering into long-term opportunities.

Ahmed, 20 years old

Ahmed volunteers as a scout leader, working mainly with children aged 6–8, although he can lead other age groups too. Through the scouts, he teaches values like respect, teamwork, and responsibility. One of their main goals is to help the kids create a social project each year. The group raises money and involves the local community to bring that project to life. It's a way to teach young people about civic action from an early age.

Natalia, 25 years old

Natalia volunteers at an association that provides free psychological therapy for people who can't afford a private psychologist. She supports individuals with a wide range of mental health needs. This work makes mental health support more accessible and shows how professional skills can be shared through volunteering for the good of others. These three stories are examples of good volunteering practices: being committed, using your own skills, helping locally, and creating impact step by step. Whether it's through education, mental health, or community action, young people in Spain are showing how volunteering can truly make a difference.



How should NGO and Movements share these types of actions?

In an era of rapid technological change and evolving social dynamics, youth engagement has become a central challenge and opportunity for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Young people today are not only more connected than ever through digital platforms, but they also seek authenticity, inclusivity, and purpose in the causes they support.

For NGOs aiming to raise participation, whether through volunteering, activism, or awareness—effective communication is key. This means going beyond traditional outreach methods and embracing a modern, youth-centered approach that speaks their language and meets them where they are.

The following sections explore the strategies NGOs use to boost youth involvement, focusing on three pillars: social media engagement, integration of digital and traditional media, and active community presence, with real-world examples from Greece and across Europe.

Communication Strategies of NGOs to Increase Youth Participation

To effectively engage young people in activism and volunteerism, NGOs must adopt dynamic, inclusive, and multi-channel communication strategies. This includes both modern digital platforms and traditional outreach tools, ensuring they connect with youth across diverse contexts and preferences.

1. Social Media Engagement

Youth are increasingly active on digital platforms, making social media a powerful tool for mobilization. NGOs can expand their reach and impact by developing targeted, creative strategies:

- Establish dedicated social media teams or recruit young digital volunteers.
- Share compelling visual content such as photos, videos, infographics, and personal stories to humanize causes and inspire action.
- Collaborate with influencers—especially youth or community leaders—to amplify messaging.
- Maintain a consistent presence with open calls for volunteers, especially on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X.



Examples from Greece:

- Boroume, an NGO combating food waste, effectively uses Instagram and Facebook to highlight volunteer stories and opportunities, engaging youth through vibrant visual content.
- Generation 2.0 RED promotes migrant rights by employing young media professionals and collaborating with influencers from diverse backgrounds to resonate with younger audiences.

Examples from Europe:

- The European Youth Forum produces TikTok and YouTube Shorts explaining EU processes through humor and animation, making civic engagement more accessible to younger generations.
- Sweden's Fryshuset connects with youth through Discord and Twitch, creating safe digital spaces for discussions on social issues, music, and activism.

2. Integration of Digital and Traditional Media

While digital communication is essential, traditional media still plays a key role—especially for reaching intergenerational or underserved communities. An effective strategy should combine both approaches.

- Maintain a regularly updated website showcasing the NGO's mission, events, and impact.
- Use flyers, posters, public kiosks, and newspaper placements to promote visibility offline.
- Appear on local radio and television, and produce podcasts to reach broader audiences.

Examples from Greece:

- METAdrasi, supporting refugees, runs a professional website with consistent updates and testimonials. They also partner with national media outlets and distribute printed materials in schools, municipal buildings, and public services across major cities.

Examples from Europe:



- In France, SOS Racisme mixes digital efforts—such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts—with printed educational resources distributed in academic institutions.
- Italian NGO Libera, known for its anti-mafia campaigns, regularly features on national television, extending its reach and legitimacy.

3. Community Presence and Face-to-Face Engagement

Physical presence remains essential for building trust, especially in communities where face-to-face interaction holds cultural or emotional value. NGOs should prioritize visibility in spaces where youth naturally gather:

- Participate in festivals, concerts, and sporting events.
- Collaborate with artists, athletes, and influencers to connect cultural expression with activism.
- Organize hands-on workshops and creative events for children and youth using games, art, and non-formal education to convey civic values.

Examples from Greece:

- Antigone NGO engages in events like Thessaloniki Pride, offering interactive workshops on inclusion and human rights.
- They also partnered with Greek artist Monika to deliver an anti-racism campaign that culminated in a live concert, drawing thousands of young participants.

Examples from Europe:

- In Spain, Fundación Secretariado Gitano uses creative interventions such as flash mobs and pop-up booths at major festivals to raise awareness about Roma rights and social inclusion.

Creating a culture of youth engagement requires more than just inviting participation—it demands that NGOs meet young people where they are, speak their language, and offer meaningful ways to act. By blending innovative digital strategies with traditional outreach and vibrant community presence, NGOs can inspire the next



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generation to take ownership of their world—turning passive interest into active participation.



Formal and Non-Formal Education learning in Volunteering and Activism

Active youth participation doesn't happen by accident, it's shaped by opportunities to learn, reflect, and act. This chapter explores how formal and non-formal education prepare young people to engage in volunteering and activism, two vital forms of social participation. Together, these learning pathways help youth grow into informed, empowered, and engaged citizens.

1. Non-Formal Education: Learning Beyond the Classroom

Non-formal education refers to structured, purposeful learning that takes place outside the traditional school system. It is voluntary, flexible, and often more responsive to social issues.

Examples of Non-Formal Learning:

- **Workshops & Seminars**
Leadership training, campaign planning, sessions on climate action or human rights.
- **Youth Camps & Retreats**
Experiential learning through simulations, group tasks, and peer exchange.
- **Community Projects**
Hands-on involvement in clean-up efforts, awareness campaigns, voter registration drives.
- **Digital Learning & Media**
Podcasts, social media content, short videos on activism or civic issues.
- **Mentorship Programs**
Youth are paired with experienced volunteers, activists, or NGO leaders.

Benefits of Non-Formal Education:

- Builds soft skills: communication, teamwork, empathy, and critical thinking.
- Allows youth to act on real-world problems.



- Encourages motivation driven by values and personal interest.

2. Blended Learning: Linking Formal and Non-Formal Education

To maximize impact, many educational programs combine academic instruction with civic engagement.

Effective Integration:

- **Service Learning**
Link classroom lessons to volunteer work (e.g., studying social justice + volunteering at a local NGO).
- **Credit for Engagement**
Recognize volunteering or project work as part of academic requirements.
- **School-NGO Collaboration**
Develop co-led programs connecting theory and practice.

Why It Matters:

- Formal education provides structure and knowledge.
- Non-formal education builds skills and civic experience.
- Together, they support active, socially responsible youth.

3. Volunteering vs. Activism: Two Forms of Engagement

Both volunteering and activism play crucial roles in youth participation, but they differ in intent and approach.

Volunteering

- **Focus:** Helping others or supporting a cause.
- **Approach:** Direct service, community-based aid.
- **Examples:** Tutoring, food distribution, environmental cleanups.

Activism



- Focus: Creating social or political change.
- Approach: Raising awareness, challenging injustice.
- Examples: Protests, petitions, digital campaigns.

What They Share

- Both are voluntary and community-focused.
- Both foster civic awareness and social responsibility.
- They often overlap—many volunteers are also activists.

In summary, a volunteer supports the community within the existing system and an activist works to change the system itself.

Young people learn best when knowledge meets action. Combining formal education (knowledge-building) with non-formal experiences (skill-building and engagement) equips youth to take meaningful roles in their communities. Whether through volunteering or activism, they become key agents of positive change.

Education isn't just preparation for life, it's a preparation for action.



Soft Skills

When you volunteer or do activism, it's not just about helping others or engage in something you want to fight for, you're also learning and growing. One of the most valuable things you gain through this experience is **soft skills**: personal and social abilities that help you work better with others, communicate more effectively, and adapt to different situations.

Here are some key soft skills that volunteering helps you develop:

- **Communication**: expressing ideas clearly, listening actively, and speaking with empathy.
- **Teamwork**: collaborating with others, sharing responsibilities, and respecting different viewpoints.
- **Problem-solving**: staying calm and creative when things don't go as planned.
- **Empathy and emotional intelligence**: understanding how others feel and responding with care and respect.
- **Time management**: balancing volunteering with your studies, work, or personal life.
- **Adaptability**: adjusting when plans change or new challenges appear.
- **Leadership**: organizing activities, guiding a group, or making decisions when needed.

Improving your soft skills doesn't require a course or manual, just **real-life experience**. Every time you meet someone new, deal with a challenge, or join a group activity, you're practicing these skills without even realizing it.

Whether you're volunteering or getting involved in activism, both experiences place you in real-life situations where you have to listen, organize, adapt, speak up, and support others. These are powerful opportunities to grow — not just by helping others, but by learning about yourself, your values, and your strengths.

Volunteering helps you develop empathy, teamwork, and problem-solving by working directly with communities, often in supportive roles. Activism, on the other hand, strengthens your voice, critical thinking, and leadership as you take a stand, organize actions, or advocate for change.



If you want to grow faster, take a moment to reflect after each experience — What went well? What was difficult? What would you do differently next time? Ask for feedback when you can, and observe how others lead, communicate, or adapt in tough situations. Every moment, even the small ones, helps build your confidence and skills — and prepares you to make an even bigger impact next time.

Finally, try stepping out of your comfort zone from time to time. That could mean leading an activity, solving a tricky problem, or speaking in public. These small steps add up — and soon, those soft skills become a natural part of how you work, communicate, and lead.

A practical Example

During this training course, participants were divided into working groups to design community-focused events. After a collaborative brainstorming phase, three event proposals were developed. While each idea demonstrated creativity and commitment, one stood out for its clarity, feasibility, and potential for real impact.

In this chapter, we present that event in detail, the most complete and well-structured of the three as a practical example of how young people can turn shared values into meaningful civic action. This case illustrates the process from planning to implementation, offering a model that can inspire similar initiatives elsewhere.

Event Plan¹

Event Name: Active Mind, Full Life: Youth Well-Being

Festival Date: Summer (20-24 july)

Location: Jardim da Estrela (Lisbon)

Event Overview

An interactive four-day festival focused on empowering young people (age 20-35) with tools for mental health, emotional resilience and self-expression.

Activities include workshops, talks by psychologists and influencers, creative sessions, and music performances.

Day 1

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>
<i>10:00</i>	<i>Festival Opening & Welcome: Participant reception and event introduction.</i>
<i>10:30</i>	<i>Main Stage: "Welcome to Active Mind!" Official opening with an inspiring speaker (e.g., public figure connected to wellbeing).</i>
<i>11:15</i>	<i>"Let's Talk About It" Session 1: Panel of local psychologists and young mental health advocates. Topic: "The Challenges of Youth Mental Health Today."</i>
<i>12:00</i>	<i>Workshop: Guided Meditation in the Garden</i>
<i>12:30</i>	<i>Musical Moment: Relaxing acoustic performance during lunchtime</i>

¹ This event was done in the duration of the project, by the participants.



13:00	<i>Lunch Break</i>
14:00	<i>Main Stage: "The Impacts of Substances on Youth Wellbeing" - Open discussion on the effects of drugs and prevention.</i>
15:00	<i>Workshop: Art Therapy - Expression and Connection (Session 1)</i>
16:00	<i>"Let's Talk About It" Session 2: "Breaking the Stigma: The Role of Youth in Demystifying Mental Health in Portugal."</i>
17:00	<i>Workshop: Animal Therapy - Healing Connections</i>
17:45	<i>Closing Session for the Day: Reflection and invitation for the next day.</i>
18:00	<i>End of Day 1</i>

Day 2

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>
10:00	<i>Open Doors: Reception and healthy breakfast.</i>
10:30	<i>Workshop: Stress Management and Daily Resilience - Practical tools for dealing with everyday stress and pressure</i>
11:15	<i>Main Stage: "Navigating Digital Relationships: Online and Offline Well-being" - Discussion on mental health in the age of social media and virtual relationships.</i>
12:00	<i>Workshop: Garden Yoga for Deep Relaxation</i>
12:30	<i>Lunch Break</i>
13:00	<i>Lunch Break</i>
14:00	<i>Workshop: Art & Creativity – Anti-stress Workshops: "Natural Mandala: Creating and Meditating with Garden Elements." (Focus on natural materials).</i>
15:00	<i>"Let's Talk About It" Session 3: "Communicate to Connect: Open Dialogue on Interpersonal Relationships and Mental Health."</i>
16:00	<i>Workshop: Cognitive-Behavioral Group Therapy (Session 1) - Introduction to CBT strategies for thoughts and emotions.</i>
17:00	<i>"Inspiring Voices" Experience Panel: Young people who have</i>



	<i>overcome mental health challenges share their stories of resilience.</i>
17:45	<i>Sound Meditation Session: Singing bowls and other instruments for deep relaxation.</i>
18:00	<i>End of Day 2</i>

Day 3

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>
10:00	<i>Reception and Fun Morning Activities: Group games and icebreaking challenges.</i>
10:30	<i>Main Stage: "Positive Influence: The Role of Influencers and Communities in Youth Mental Health" - Conversation with influencers and experts on social responsibility.</i>
11:30	<i>Workshop: Therapeutic Writing – Finding Your Voice - Tools for expressing emotions through writing.</i>
12:30	<i>Workshop: Mindfulness in the Park - Mindful Movement</i>
13:00	<i>Lunch Break</i>
14:00	<i>"Let's Talk About It" Session 4: "Sexuality, Identity, and Mental Health: An Open and Inclusive Dialogue."</i>
15:00	<i>Workshop: Art & Creativity – Anti-stress Workshops: "Recycle and Create: The Power of Sustainable Art for Wellbeing." (Focus on recycled materials).</i>
16:00	<i>Workshop: Cognitive-Behavioral Group Therapy (Session 2) - Deeper dive into techniques and practical exercises.</i>
17:00	<i>Youth Talent Showcase: Open space for young artists to share music, poetry, or other forms of expression.</i>
17:45	<i>Gentle Dance Party: A moment of celebration and movement to close the day.</i>
18:00	<i>End of Day 3</i>

Program Highlights

Opening Talks: "Let's Talk About It"



A series of engaging discussions featuring local psychologists and youth mental health advocates. These sessions aim to promote open dialogue, break stigma, and empower young voices in the mental health space:

- **Session 1 – The Challenges of Youth Mental Health Today**
A panel discussion exploring the key issues young people face in managing their mental well-being.
- **Session 2 – Breaking the Stigma**
An in-depth conversation on the role of youth in challenging stereotypes and raising awareness about mental health in Portugal.
- **Session 3 – Communicate to Connect**
An open dialogue on how communication and emotional expression affect mental health and relationships.
- **Session 4 – Sexuality, Identity, and Mental Health**
An inclusive and respectful space to explore the intersections between mental health, gender identity, and sexuality.

Main Stage Activities

These large-scale discussions bring together experts, youth, and public figures to address wider issues impacting mental health:

- **The Impacts of Substances on Youth Well-being**
An open forum exploring substance use, prevention strategies, and their impact on mental health.
- **Navigating Digital Relationships: Online and Offline Well-being**
A conversation about managing mental health in a digital age shaped by social media and virtual interactions.
- **Positive Influence: The Role of Influencers and Communities in Youth Mental Health**
A discussion with social media personalities and professionals on the power of online communities and the responsibility of influence.

Workshops

Hands-on, experiential sessions designed to provide participants with tools for emotional resilience, self-expression, and healing.



a. Meditation & Mindfulness

These sessions promote stress reduction, self-awareness, and emotional balance:

- *Guided Meditation in the Garden*
- *Garden Yoga for Deep Relaxation*
- *Sound Meditation Session (featuring singing bowls and other instruments)*
- *Mindfulness in the Park: A Movement-Based Practice*

b. Art Therapy

Creative approaches to mental health using sustainable and inclusive methods:

- *Art Therapy: Expression and Connection (Session 1)*
A space to express emotions through art while fostering community and inclusion.
- *Natural Mandala Workshop*
Participants create meditative mandalas using garden elements, promoting connection with nature and inner calm.
- *Recycle and Create Workshop*
A hands-on experience using recycled materials to reflect on sustainability, creativity, and emotional well-being.

c. Animal Therapy

- *Healing Connections Workshop*
Interactions with therapy animals to foster calm, comfort, and emotional support.

d. Group Therapy Sessions

Professional-led group settings to build coping skills and mental resilience:

- *Cognitive-Behavioral Group Therapy (Session 1)*
Introduction to core CBT techniques for managing thoughts and emotions.



- *Cognitive-Behavioral Group Therapy (Session 2)*
A deeper dive into practical applications and personal reflection.
- *Stress Management and Daily Resilience*
Tools and strategies for handling pressure and everyday stress.
- *Inspiring Voices: Experience Panel*
Youth speakers share personal journeys of overcoming mental health challenges, building connection through storytelling.

e. Therapeutic Writing

- *Finding Your Voice Workshop*
A guided session exploring how writing can be used as a powerful outlet for emotional expression and healing.



Youth Goals

Youth Goals as a Compass for Change

The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 is built around 11 European Youth Goals—developed by young people, for young people—to address the most pressing challenges and priorities of youth across Europe. These goals guide policies and actions to ensure young people have equal access to opportunities, rights, and the means to shape their societies.

Here are the 11 Youth Goals:

1. Connecting the EU with Youth
2. Equality of All Genders
3. Inclusive Societies
4. Information & Constructive Dialogue
5. Mental Health & Wellbeing
6. Moving Rural Youth Forward
7. Quality Employment for All
8. Quality Learning
9. Space and Participation for All
10. Sustainable Green Europe
11. Youth Organizations & European Programs

These goals form the foundation of European youth policy—and many of them are deeply connected to the themes explored in this eBook.

Focus Youth Goals in This E-book

This eBook is about **social participation** through **volunteer work** and **activism**, and it highlights Youth Goals that empower young people to act, lead, and engage. The most relevant goals featured include:

1. Connecting the EU with Youth



Encouraging youth to understand democratic institutions, participate in civic life, and engage with EU-supported opportunities.

2. Space and Participation for All

Promoting accessible platforms—both physical and digital—for youth to express themselves, organize, and influence decisions.

3. Moving Rural Youth Forward

Focusing on youth in rural areas, empowering them to drive change locally while accessing equal opportunities and resources.

4. Youth Organizations & European Programs

Introducing EU initiatives such as **Erasmus+** and the **European Solidarity Corps**, which support youth volunteering, learning, and activism.

Other Youth Goals like **Inclusive Societies**, **Equality of All Genders**, and **Mental Health & Wellbeing** are also present in broader discussions around equity, safe participation, and personal development.

Why These Goals Matter

The Youth Goals provide a shared vision of what young people want their future to look like—and this eBook brings them to life through practical ideas, stories, and strategies for getting involved.

Whether you're organizing a local campaign, volunteering abroad, or starting a youth project in your rural community, the Youth Goals are your guideposts for meaningful participation and lasting impact.



Conclusion

This e-book represents more than just the outcomes of a training course—it stands as a testament to what happens when youth workers from different cultures come together with a shared goal: to inspire active citizenship, inclusion, and meaningful youth participation.

Through open discussions, creative workshops, and real-life event planning, participants from Portugal, Spain, Greece, Romania, and Croatia co-created tools, ideas, and reflections that can now support youth work across Europe and beyond. Along the way, we explored how the EU Youth Goals can guide our actions and how the Erasmus+ Programme can continue to open doors for learning, collaboration, and impact.

We hope this resource serves as an inspiration for others working in the field of youth. Whether you're planning your first local action or supporting young people to take their voices to the next level, remember: participation grows from connection, empowerment, and trust.

The journey doesn't end here. It begins in our communities—through small steps, collective action, and a belief that young people are not only the future but the present of Europe.

Let's keep building together.



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This publication is a result of our shared work and collective vision, and we are proud to carry it forward.

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