



for the **EUROPEAN  
VOLUNTEERS  
ENVIRONMENT**

## **ORIENTATION AND OPPORTUNITY REPORT**

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE  
EDUCATION IN YOUTH WORK AND  
EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING**



Co-funded by  
the European Union



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# **European Volunteers for the Environment project**

2021-1-FR02-KA220-YOU-000028610



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pistes solidaires



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# INTRODUCTION


## THE EVE PROJECT: CONCEPT, ACTIVITIES AND PURPOSE

The “European Volunteers for the Environment” project, funded by the Erasmus Plus Programme of the European Union, aims to encourage young people involved in European volunteering programmes to develop their ecological consciousness and act towards caring for the environment.

Inspired by the launch of the Green Deal by the president of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, the project envisions to contribute in its own way towards the transformation of EU countries into resource-efficient states, ensuring no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 (European Commission, 2022). Sustainability is also at the core of the 11 European Youth Goals that reflect the concerns and priorities of young Europeans. More specifically, Youth Goal 10 vows for a Sustainable Green Europe and for educating all young people about the environment, equipping them with the tools that will make them environmentally active and able to endorse sustainability in their everyday lives (Youth Goals, 2022).

European Volunteers for the Environment (EVE) respects the wish of the youth to participate in the transformation of a sustainable Europe. For this reason, the project aims to develop and provide youngsters with the relevant educational material that will guide them to minimise their carbon footprint during their volunteering mobility. By so doing, the project aims to complement the overall efforts of the European Union to move towards carbon neutrality and to introduce sustainability in all contexts.

EVE comprises a consortium of European actors who have come together to develop and implement different activities related to the



project's aims and objectives. The consortium consists of: PISTES SOLIDAIRES (France) – the leading organisation; HUB NICOSIA (Cyprus); SOLIDARITY TRACKS (Greece); and REPLAY NETWORK (Italy).

EVE aims to:

- Contribute towards the achievement of the Green Deal
- Focus on European Youth, and more specifically young people involved in European volunteering projects
- Create educational material, regarding the environment, that volunteers and youth workers alike can use either for personal development or for educational purposes
- Train youth workers and mentors involved in European volunteering programmes on the topic of sustainability
- Use the 5th of June – International Day for the Environment – as an opportunity to raise awareness on sustainability and on the project's goals and objectives

More information is available at the project's official website:  
<https://www.volunteers4environment.eu/>

## THE OPPORTUNITY AND POLICY REPORT: THE NEED FOR AND PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND HOW TO USE IT

The Opportunity and Policy Report aims to identify and outline the ways in which European volunteering mobilities can act as a good opportunity for educating the youth on the topic of the environment and for providing them with the knowledge and skills to embrace sustainability and contribute to the success of the Green Deal. The document is therefore directed to all decision-making bodies involved in matters of youth: youth organisations and workers; training organisations; mentors; and any other policy makers involved in the field of youthwork, European mobilities and volunteering.

The report will present to the decision-making bodies the current role of environmental education in the field of youth work and European volunteering. It will also provide them with suggestions and avenues of increasing the presence of sustainability in the field, all the while adhering to the overall objective of the EVE project, that of developing and reinforcing the environmental awareness and green skills of young Europeans.

In order to achieve what has just been mentioned, the four partner organisations involved in the project undertook extensive research, surveying youth workers and mentors as well as past and current volunteers involved in volunteering programmes like the European Solidarity Corps (or previously the European Voluntary Service). The results of the questionnaires that were produced and disseminated for this purpose, along with the focus groups that provided each partner country with a general idea of the needs and thoughts of volunteers and youth workers around the subject of environmental education in European volunteering projects will be analysed below.



The Opportunity and Policy Report comprises two main parts:

- **Part One: Analysis of the state of the art** will outline the current role that environmental education plays in the field of youth work and European volunteering.
- **Part Two: Recommendations for improving the role of environmental education in European volunteering projects** will offer a series of suggestions for promoting sustainability in the field of volunteering mobilities, based on the answers collected during the research undertaken by all four partner organisations.

The report builds mainly upon the national information of the project countries, namely: France, Cyprus, Italy and Greece. Additional data was collected by surveying people coming from European countries that are not included in the consortium. This will be further explored in the next sections.



## PART ONE: ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF THE ART

The first part of this report has as an overall aim to outline the current needs in the field of youth work and European volunteering projects in terms of environmental awareness and education. This will be achieved by firstly having a look at the questionnaire disseminated in the local context of each partner organization, addressing current or ex volunteers involved in ESC/EVS projects. This will allow us to draw some conclusions regarding whether young people are familiar with the Green Deal; the extent to which European volunteering projects take this pact into account; the willingness of young people to take part in environmental activities while volunteering, among other topics. This will be preceded by a section dedicated to analysing the key findings of the focus groups executed by each partner organization in a local and European level, allowing us to have an even clearer idea on the current situation regarding environmental awareness and initiatives within the context of youth work and European volunteering.

### OVERVIEW OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES DISSEMINATED TO VOLUNTEERS

The first step in the process of researching the current trends around environmental education within the volunteering sector was to disseminate a questionnaire addressed to young people who are currently taking part in an ESC project or who have participated in a European volunteering project (ESC or EVS) in the past. All four partner organisations shared this questionnaire in their local context by reaching out to their mailing lists, to their internal and external network, and by promoting the survey on their social media pages. Overall, France received 44 responses, Italy received 31, Cyprus 22 and Greece 36.



The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions, 9 of which were closed-ended questions and 3 were open-ended. The questions included in the survey can be seen below, along with a summary of the responses of the volunteers from all four countries.

## ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS


### Demographics

The respondents of the questionnaires were all young people between the ages of 18 and 34 years old. In the cases of Cyprus, Greece, and Italy the majority of the respondents were female: 73% (CY); 69% (GR); 61% (IT), while France received more responses from male participants (73%) than female (23%).

### Background and familiarization of the respondents with the Green Deal

The respondents of the questionnaires were people who were either currently undertaking a volunteering mobility or who had participated in a volunteering programme in the past. From all the people surveyed, the following claimed to have participated in a volunteering project with a thematic related to the environment and climate change: 44% of the respondents from Greece, 36% of the respondents from Cyprus, 18% of the respondents from France, and 4% of the respondents from Italy.

Moreover, in terms of the familiarization of the respondents with the European Green Deal, the following was observed: 77% of the respondents from Italy, 69% from Greece and 55% from France claimed to not be familiar with the pact. In the case of Cyprus, the people familiar with the Deal seemed to exceed the ones who were unaware of its existence (59% against 41%). Most of the people who claimed to be familiar with the Green Deal had a generally good and accurate idea of what the pact entails. Respondents mentioned correctly that the Green Deal is a European initiative aimed at fighting




climate change and making Europe carbon neutral by 2050. The respondents also mentioned that the Green Deal involves a set of laws specifically designed to fight climate change by regulating the member states' behaviour towards the environment. More specific and well-informed answers mentioned the vision of the Green Deal to promote economic growth decoupled from resources with the inclusion of all people from all regions. In the case of Italy, where the grand majority of respondents were unfamiliar with the pact (77%), it was observed that the answers were vaguer with some of the people replying that they are not very well familiar with what the Deal entails. Only 7 out of 31 of the Italian respondents mentioned that the Green Deal involves carbon neutrality and that it is a pact aiming to reduce carbon emissions and making the European continent carbon free by 2050.

Furthermore, the people surveyed were asked whether they had partaken in any activity involving the Green Deal or any other kind of environmental education activity during their volunteering mobility. On the one hand, 68% of the respondents from Italy answered that they had never been involved in any activity around the Green Deal or any other similar environmental education initiative during their volunteering time. On the other hand, 59% of the respondents from Cyprus, 36% of the respondents from France and 36% of the respondents from Greece claimed to have occasionally experienced such initiatives while volunteering.


When asked to specifically mention in which activities they had taken part, the following was observed:

- Italy recorded 8 answers whereby volunteers mentioned to have participated in environmental activities. 4 out of 8 respondents mentioned to have participated mostly in sensitization and cleaning activities. 1 person mentioned that they had participated in a youth exchange about sustainability and another one had participated in a pre-Cop26 conference. The remaining 2



respondents mentioned to have participated in specific projects that raised awareness on the environment through an exhibition of illustrations. Overall, 65% of the respondents mentioned that these activities were not included in their volunteering agreement, but they were initiated by themselves.

- In the case of **Cyprus**, 8 people talked about their participation in environmental awareness activities and clean ups. More unique answers included the participation in redistribution of “ugly food”, participation in an insulation-building seminar while 4 people claimed to have received training on recycling and waste sorting with 1 of them mentioning to have received this training during the pre-departure meeting. Overall, 59% of the respondents mentioned that these activities were included in their volunteering agreement.
- In the case of **Greece**, 17 out of 30 respondents mentioned to have participated in clean ups, specifically at the beach and forest and in other common sustainability activities like sensitization about recycling and waste. In general, the respondents mentioned to have taken part in sensitization workshops either facilitated by themselves or by the organisation hosting them. 2 out of the 30 responses collected on this topic included the participation of the volunteers in campaigns where it was encouraged to collect waste and make something out of the rubbish (in this case artistic products). Overall, 75% of the respondents mentioned that these activities were included in their volunteering agreement.
- For **France**, the answers were more varied, and the activities mentioned seemed to have a more specific scope. While 6 people mentioned the participation in cleaning and waste collection activities, the rest of the answers were more unique. These answers included among other things: the participation of the volunteers in environmental camps; the study of endangered species (both animals and plants); the study of the toxins found in a canal; volunteering in a charity second-hand store that fought against consumption; the development and implementation of



environmental education activities in schools. Overall, 60% of the respondents mentioned that these activities were included in their volunteering agreement.

## The attitude of volunteers towards the environment and their willingness to contribute to the success of the Green Deal

When asked about the importance of introducing environmental education activities in the schedule of volunteers, 68% of the French respondents, 61% of the Italian respondents, 59% of the Cypriot respondents and 58% of the Greek respondents answered that it is absolutely essential to do so. More specifically, the respondents gave a variety of reasons elaborating on this answer. People consider education as the key to awareness and therefore believe that only through environmental education will we be able to achieve the Green Deal: having clean water, fresh air, healthy soil and a biodiversity of flora and fauna. Respondents seemed to put particular emphasis on the roles of volunteers, suggesting that it is an avenue full of opportunities for change; volunteers are capable of considerable social impact. Therefore, volunteering projects should be supported in such a way that they would enable people taking part in them to develop their green skills and take part or organize initiatives that would empower others to do the same.

When asked about what is required in order to offer the volunteers the appropriate support in implementing environmental activities while volunteering, there was a general agreement among the respondents that hosting organisations should offer more support to the volunteers. As a matter of fact, this was specified by 86% of the respondents from France, 50% from Cyprus, 36% from Greece and 42% from Italy. Moreover, the respondents agreed that volunteers should have a better knowledge of the topic of sustainability and the challenges related to it in order for them to implement environmental activities during their volunteering projects, while they also believe that a greater access to ideas for activities would also facilitate significantly this process.

As the survey progressed, the volunteers were asked to specify which competences they would be interested in gaining or learning throughout the volunteering period. One of the most popular answers that came up included "Promoting nature: To acknowledge that humans are part of nature and to respect the needs and rights of other species and of nature itself in order to restore and regenerate healthy and resilient ecosystems"; this was selected by 46% of the respondents from Cyprus, 45% from Italy, 42% from Greece and 32% from France. Another most selected response (FR-50%; IT-36%; GR-31%; CY-23%) was "Collective action: To act for change in collaboration with others". If we combine the two results, we can clearly derive that volunteers are looking to develop their green skills and competences and are ready to work collectively to foster change in society, and more specifically when it comes to caring for nature and the species that inhabit it.

Moreover, the results of the survey indicated that volunteers are not only willing to improve their own environmental skills but also to help other young people develop their green skills, attitudes, and behaviours. More precisely, 67% of the respondents from Greece, 59% of the respondents from Cyprus, 55% of the respondents from Italy and 46% from France answered that they would definitely want to play a part in guiding other youngsters to improve their environmental competences and adopt green behaviours when it comes to caring for the environment and climate change. Nevertheless, they recognize that while themselves or other young people are aware of the issue at hand, there exist certain reasons that prevent them from acting for the environment. In their opinion, one of the most common causes for this situation is that people believe that the problem is too large to be fixed, thus it would not matter what they did. The respondents also believe that people often do not act for climate change because they believe it should be dealt by governments or large corporations that have the power and resources to create major change.

## SUMMARY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The data collected and analyzed above allowed us to draw some initial conclusions regarding the engagement of the youth with the Green Deal and with environmental education, and more specifically, the role and position of the two in European volunteering projects. The conclusions are as follows:

- Overall, the young respondents of the survey from Cyprus were familiar with the Green Deal, while in the cases of France, Italy and Greece there were more respondents who were not aware of the topic than the ones familiar with it.
- From all the people responding to this survey, a good amount of the respondents from France, Cyprus and Greece claimed to have occasionally experienced environmental activities during their volunteering experience, while from the Italian respondents, only a small amount indicated to have partaken in such activities. These activities mostly evolved around some of the most common environmental-awareness actions and practices, such as beach clean ups, workshops about recycling and upcycling among other things. Nonetheless, the responses collected from France indicated that the volunteers had been involved in more unique environmental initiatives during their volunteering projects.
- The respondents agreed that environmental education is important, and it should be incorporated into volunteering programmes, something that demonstrates their willingness to engage with this topic and any other relevant activities during their volunteering mobility.
- According to the respondents, hosting organisations should support them more in implementing environmental activities and there should be more trainings on the subject. Volunteers should have greater access to ideas and tools that would enable them to organise workshops on the topic for other young people.
- Volunteers value the environment and the power of collective action; they would hence be willing to work with other young people to improve their green competences and fight climate change.

## OVERVIEW OF THE FOCUS GROUPS WITH VOLUNTEERS

After disseminating the questionnaires to current or ex volunteers of European volunteering projects, the partner organisations kindly invited the respondents to participate in a focus group where the topic of environmental education was discussed more profoundly. All four partners organised and held their individual focus groups, the results of which will be discussed below.

Pistes-Solidaires organised two different focus groups: one with local volunteers where they had 11 participants from their national context and another one with volunteers originating from other European countries (Spain, Poland, Portugal, Austria and Greece) where they had 8 participants in total. Replay Network had 5 participants, Solidarity Tracks 7 and Hub Nicosia 4. The participants were all people who had been involved in a European volunteering project (ESC and EVS) or a similar initiative like the Civil Service (Italy).

## ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS

### European volunteers and the Green Deal

The data collected from the focus groups suggested that young volunteers are very keen on the subject of sustainability and have a critical opinion on the topic. They believe that they can make a significant contribution to the Green Deal's success and show optimism in terms of their potential to foster change. While there exists a general concern on how significant a contribution to the Green Deal's success could be, especially considering that climate change is a serious issue with large-scale consequences, the volunteers recognise that a lot more can be achieved with collective action. In fact, they believe that by putting together their different skills at the service of sustainable development, they can contribute greatly to the success of the Green Deal. This can be done by doing the smallest eco-gestures like recycling or carpooling to the more impactful actions of implementing awareness-raising workshops.






## Environmental education and its presence in European volunteering mobilities: obstacles and initial thoughts on avenues for action

The volunteers are very willing to integrate environmental education and activities into their volunteering schedule. Nevertheless, they are concerned about the obstacles that come up when they attempt to do so. One of these obstacles is the thematic of the volunteering project that might be completely unrelated with sustainability, e.g., volunteering with people with disabilities. Another common obstacle are the hosting organisations that often have a fixed agenda and might not be inclined to accept proposals from volunteers or might not be willing to change the way they work in order to create a more sustainable working environment.

Volunteers also believe that another major obstacle preventing them from following a sustainable lifestyle is the fact that they are not aware of certain processes in the local area of their volunteering mobility, e.g., how public transport works or when the farmer's market takes place. According to them, they are in need of more information and guidance, something that is in this case the job of the mentor who is responsible for their integration in the hosting country. As a general remark, the volunteers would like to receive more support from the mentors and hosting organisations as well as engagement with more profound environmental activities and not only with the basic workshops and trainings that are usually offered about waste sorting and recycling.

Despite these challenges, the volunteers believe that integrating environmental education and activities in the volunteers' schedule is essential and should be made mandatory for the organisations hosting volunteers. This could bring about substantial change in the hosting organisations, forcing them in a way to make the environment a priority and shift attitudes if they are not already considerate of the planet. Moreover, environmental education and caring for the




environment could act as a common goal uniting volunteers towards a common incentive, helping them to bond with one another and to overcome any socio-cultural differences that might often arise in groups of people coming from different countries.

It is also essential for mentors and youth workers to receive the adequate training before attempting to train or motivate the volunteers on the topic of sustainability. All mentors should receive appropriate guidelines that would aid them in supporting volunteers in regards to the environment. This could be achieved by providing them with more learning resources and perhaps with a common guiding manual that they could refer to when thinking about how to help volunteers adjust in the hosting environments and maintain a sustainable lifestyle. Additionally, there should be more workshops and trainings for them around this topic with the help of the National Agencies.

Regarding the youth workers, it has been proposed that a powerful way to strengthen their skills in terms of environmental education is to let the ones who are professionally trained on the topic to develop and run workshops and trainings to their peers who are less educated on the subject. In any case, and as also mentioned above, when thinking about how to help volunteers to adopt environmentally friendly attitudes, tutors and youth workers should abstain from the common practices of recycling and organising clean-ups. Instead, there is a clear demand for more substantial action from the part of volunteers.

Nonetheless, the volunteers feel that there are definitely more opportunities and avenues of action that work around environmental competences and knowledge than before. There are more projects with environmental topics and more organisations that value the environment and are eager to raise awareness by implementing different initiatives. However, in some cases, volunteers are the only ones eager to initiate workshops or other actions related to the



environment and even so, they find that they often lack the resources or the support of the hosting organisations. While they turn to the web to find relevant material, the question remains as to the extent to which that information is accurate and applicable in the context of European volunteering projects. In any case, volunteers would like to see more accurate material and resources on the topic being readily available to them.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The data collected and analysed above allowed us to have a better idea of the current needs of volunteers regarding the topic of environmental education and its presence in European volunteering projects. The conclusions are as follows:

- Overall, the volunteers seemed very keen on the idea of incorporating environmental education into volunteering projects with the ultimate goal of working towards the success of the Green Deal.
- The volunteers recognised that collective action is more impactful than individual initiatives, hence understanding the importance of promoting environmental education during a volunteering programme.
- While volunteers are often willing to address different topics during their volunteering project, hosting organisations often act as obstacles to new initiatives.
- Environmental education should therefore be more formally introduced in volunteering projects, perhaps as part of the Volunteering Agreement.
- Volunteers need more accurate resources on the topic and most importantly, they believe that if tutors or mentors are to discuss this subject with them, they should have the knowledge, if not as well, the professional experience to do so.



## OVERVIEW OF THE FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUTH WORKERS AND MENTORS

Besides the focus groups with volunteers, all four partner organisations appealed to mentors and youth workers involved in Erasmus+ programmes or similar initiatives, also inviting them to participate in a focus group where the topic of environmental education and its place in European volunteering projects was discussed at length. Each partner organised and held their individual focus group with participants from their national context. In addition to that, Hub Nicosia held an additional online workshop with mentors from other European countries. The collective results of the focus groups will be discussed below.

In the case of France, they had 9 participants in the mentors and youth workers' focus groups. Italy had 6, Greece 20 and Cyprus 3 local participants and 1 tutor from Spain. The people who participated in the focus groups had either been involved in ESC/EVS projects as mentors or youth workers or they had a similar experience in programmes of the same nature. Some of them were tutors of volunteers in hosting organisations and other ones in sending organisations.

In general, everyone's participation was vital for understanding the needs of mentors and youth workers when it comes to having the resources and the ability to disseminate knowledge around environmental topics.


## ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS

### The perception of mentors and youth workers regarding the volunteers' contribution to the success of the Green Deal

The mentors and youth workers strongly believe that volunteers have the potential to contribute to the success of the Green Deal. This perception is based on a variety of reasons, one of them being that volunteers are young and motivated and their participation in volunteering projects indicates that they are already in the mindset of fostering change in the world. The cultural diversity of groups of volunteers can also be considered a "success" factor when it comes to implementing new initiatives and ideas. This is because locals are often fascinated or curious about the cultural background and lifestyle of people coming from abroad and volunteers can act as inspiration for local communities, especially when sharing with them how things operate in their countries of origin, motivating them to adopt similar habits. This could of course work both ways; volunteers can also get inspired by the way of life of the hosting country, adopt the habits of the local and maintain them when going back to their respective countries. Applying this to the context of sustainability and environmental awareness can act as a boost for the achievement of what the Green Deal entails.

### Environmental education and its incorporation in volunteering programmes from the perspective of youth workers and mentors: obstacles and initial thoughts on solutions


For youth workers and mentors, the incorporation of environmental education into volunteering programmes is of paramount importance. However, there is a major obstacle to this, and it is the Volunteering Agreement that sets the activities and the budget that are used throughout the project. If the Agreement does not include environmental education, receiving organisations are generally not willing to incorporate it as something extra in the schedule of



activities for the volunteers they are hosting. Therefore, environmental education is not always the priority in volunteering programmes. It often comes second on the agenda of projects, especially the ones that have a completely different topic, e.g., gender and minorities or migration and social inclusion. The topics of these projects have a clear focus on something else and environmental education in this case can only be done through other secondary, supplementary or non-targeted activities, e.g., indirectly promoting recycling during a meeting with migrants where they came to learn how to create a CV. In this kind of workshops, the main goal would be to aid the participants to have better working opportunities and while recycling is encouraged, it is not the top priority.

Furthermore, another reason why volunteering programmes do not introduce as many environmental activities is because they often lack the time and resources for this topic. Besides projects that have a clear environmental aim, other projects with a social theme, just like the one mentioned above, do not see as a priority the inclusion of environmental education in their initiatives. This, however, depends on how sensitized hosting organisations are with the environment. For some, it comes naturally to incorporate sustainable education and practices in their trainings with volunteers. For others, it is hard to deviate from their own agenda and set habits and even harder when it comes to teaching them to volunteers.

It is therefore no surprise that the presence of environmental education in volunteering projects is either insufficient or basic. There seems to be a lot of repetition regarding the environmental activities that are introduced as they keep evolving around the same basic topics of sensitizations, recycling workshops and clean-ups of beaches and parks. This kind of activities are also usually temporary and have little to no impact as they are not part of a long-term strategy. Hence, volunteers are in need of more targeted activities that would bring about real impact.



Regarding the role of the mentors and youth workers, it has been observed that sometimes they know less about the environment than the volunteers themselves. National Agencies should therefore organise more trainings in order to advance the green skills and competences of the youth workers and to train the mentors on how to help volunteers adjust to the host country and make use of all the available sustainable resources in the area. Moreover, the ones who feel more confident or who have a more professional background on sustainability should be appointed to act as "green tutors" and should be a point of reference for their peers, guiding them with matters related to the environment or sustainability.


Training the mentors and youth workers that work with volunteers could also alleviate the pressure from hosting organisations who will not have to be the main responsible entity for the implementation and engagement of volunteers with environmental activities. Nonetheless, the organisations implementing volunteering projects should also be trained on the topic before hosting volunteers; sending organisations could be in charge of making an introduction on this topic during the pre-departure meeting and hosting organisations of organising activities for the volunteers throughout their mobility period.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The above data allowed us to have a better idea of the current needs of mentors and youth workers regarding the topic of environmental education. They also allowed us to understand the extent to which mentors and youth workers are supported and have the appropriate resources on the topic. The conclusions are as follows:

- Overall, mentors and youth workers value the role of the volunteers and consider them capable of introducing change and of contributing to the success of the Green Deal.



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- They also value the potential of environmental education and activities and are in favour of their incorporation into volunteering programmes as long as this does not steal focus from the main topic of the project. The project's main theme should always be respected; environmental education should be a complementary aspect of the volunteers' experience.
  - Youth workers and mentors understand that if environmental education is not included in the Activity Agreement, it is not made a priority by most hosting organisations who have their own agenda and activities that they want to implement.
  - Volunteers are in need of more interesting and creative activities on the topic and youth workers and mentors are in need of resources and training, so that they come up with interesting ideas and aid volunteers to learn more about sustainability.


## PART TWO: PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN VOLUNTEERING PROJECTS

The second part of this report has an overall aim to propose different ways in which environmental education can be further developed and incorporated into European volunteering projects. Having explored the current role of sustainability in European volunteering mobilities above, this section will propose different ways and avenues for action for improving this situation. This will again be based on the answers collected during the focus groups that were organized and executed by all four partner organisations. The section will be divided into two sub-sections offering both the perspective of the volunteers and the perspective of the youth workers and mentors on the issue at hand.

### IMPROVEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE VOLUNTEERS

Regarding the different avenues for improving volunteering programmes in terms of environmental education, the volunteers recommend that first of all, they should be better supported by being encouraged to participate in workshops run by experts on the topic of sustainability. Considering however that the tutors of the hosting organisations are not always the most capable of supporting volunteers, especially on such specific topics that require special trainings and skills, there should also be workshops and educational trainings for the tutors and mentors, equipping them with the necessary knowledge that would then allow them to train the volunteers on the subject.

Another suggestion is to encourage the volunteers to implement themselves workshops on sustainability with different thematic like cooking, biking, the use of electricity, upcycling, etc. This would encourage them to do the research, learn more about the topic and



then be able to teach it to others as well. The workshops could be executed in the form of monthly activities in local schools where the volunteers would introduce interactive games, possibly involving other associations as well and appealing directly to the community in order to raise awareness and contribute to saving the planet.

Volunteering programmes should therefore have the overall aim to sensitize the volunteers on the subject and provide them with the appropriate resources. Moreover, a few days of the week can be dedicated to environmental education, something that can be incorporated from the beginning in the Volunteering Agreement, in order for hosting organisations to respect its importance. Apart from that, according to the volunteers, there should exist a certificate demonstrating that they have developed their green skills during the mobility period. This certificate could be incorporated into the Youth Pass, and it could act as a powerful document to show to future employers.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Overall, the perspective of the volunteers has demonstrated that young people are seeking to be even more engaged with the topic of sustainability and to actively contribute to the success of the Green Deal. For some people, motivation comes from the innate need to help others, in this case the people and animals suffering the consequences of global warming. Others are not as altruists and are simply following the trend of going green and adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle because it is the fashionable thing to do nowadays. Whatever the case, the volunteers are ready to act for the environment, now more than ever.


The above results allowed us to get a more complete idea of what the volunteers think of the role of environmental education, their expectations and their suggestions on how to further advance the presence of sustainability in volunteering projects. The responses of the volunteers allowed the compilation of the following conclusions:

- There is a clear need to train tutors and youth workers as they usually lack the ability to train volunteers on the topic of the environment. National Agencies are accountable for this change, and they are expected to organise workshops and provide them with the appropriate resources.
- Volunteers would also like to have access to relevant resources.
- Future volunteering programmes should incorporate environmental skills and competences in the Activity Agreement as well as in the Youth Pass.
- Volunteers are expecting to take part in more targeted activities that will have a long-term impact.

## IMPROVEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MENTORS AND YOUTH WORKERS

Regarding the different avenues for improving volunteering programmes in terms of environmental education, the mentors and youth workers gave a variety of suggestions. A valuable recommendation arose from Pistes-Solidaires who shared their decision to include a specific Annex on the Activity Agreements aiming to encourage the volunteers to take part in at least one environmental action during their volunteering time. Alternatively, if an organisation is not willing to do that, they could opt instead to encourage the volunteers to base their “personal project” on a sustainable topic.


Replay Network also offered an interesting recommendation on the topic. The idea is to create guides for volunteers or even a mobile application that will provide them with a series of references or good practices related with sustainability and appealing to their local context (the suggestions would be relevant to the city/town hosting them). In this guide they could find out how recycling works in the local area; where to find second-hand stores; when and where the farmers’ market takes place, etc. Of course, for a project like this to work, one would need the contribution of many organisations receiving volunteers.



Nevertheless, for the youth workers and mentors, sometimes it is enough to introduce small actions, like using the same non-disposable glass or cup during a day of training or a workshop instead of using multiple disposable ones. There can even be a common guideline document presented to volunteers and adopted during the on-arrival, mid-term, and final trainings, also encouraging the volunteers to use it when they host themselves workshops or trainings at their respective hosting organisations. Hosting organisations could also encourage volunteers to use a “carbon footprint calculator” and have them compare among them who pollutes the environment more, giving them small challenges and prizes every week or month.

Youth workers and mentors are generally open-minded people and they can act towards changing the attitudes and behaviours of the youth by making this issue cool and trendy enough for young people to be engaged. Green skills should be made relatable by giving young people challenges to be creative, perhaps even show them examples of other people who did something to help the environment or who are leading eco-friendly lifestyles. Young people tend to follow the lives of influencers on social media, so starting from there, youth workers could encourage them to get inspired by people who are environmental activists and who fight for the planet in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that youth workers and mentors need to acquire a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills before attempting to help the volunteers. First, they should understand themselves what is at stake and then think about how to motivate young people to get involved in environmental activities. National Agencies should offer workshops and trainings to youth workers and mentors, preferably conducted by experts in the field of sustainability to provide them with accurate knowledge and to encourage them to exchange their views on the subject. Second, they need to have access to concrete tools that



can be available online so that they can access them at any time and from anywhere. This could enable all the people involved with young volunteers to have the experience and resources to adapt the topic of sustainability to the interests, needs and realities of the volunteers in their local context. Youth workers and mentors should also be prepared to find the way to link environmental education to the main topic of the volunteering project, especially if the activities of the volunteers differ by far or have no link whatsoever with sustainability (e.g., working in an elder's home or in a refugee shelter).

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The above results allowed us to understand better the expectations of the mentors and youth workers regarding the role of environmental education in volunteering projects and the help they need in order to advance their own environmental competences and acquire the appropriate knowledge to aid volunteers on the topic of sustainability. The key takeaways from the compilation of the above results are as follows:

- Mentors and youth workers need a common document to guide them on the topic of sustainability.
- There is a clear demand for National Agencies to provide them with more relevant resources on the topic.
- Environmental education should definitely be considered in all volunteering projects; this does not necessarily mean making it a priority.
- Environmental skills and competences should be incorporated into the Activity Agreement and Youth Pass.
- Any sort of resources should include creative and innovative ideas that could be adapted to the local context of the volunteers.
- There was a common wish to make these resources readily available on the web, perhaps in the form of e-learning tools.

## CONCLUSION


In conclusion, the Opportunity and Policy Report explored the extent to which volunteers engage with environmental education during their volunteering projects and how youth workers and mentors influence this situation. This was done as part of a bigger aim, to make us understand how young people can contribute to the success of the Green Deal during their participation in European volunteering programmes. The analysis of the questionnaires disseminated to volunteers as well as the focus groups that were organized and executed by each partner organisation, appealing to volunteers, tutors and youth workers from their network led to some important conclusions around this topic.

Even though a big percentage of young Europeans are not familiar with the Green Deal, they do value the environment and the importance of enriching young people's knowledge on the subject. One way to do that is the incorporation of environmental education in European volunteering programmes whose current presence is considered inefficient by the youth who is involved in such projects.

Moreover, while young volunteers are often willing to address the topic of the environment during their volunteering mobilities, hosting organisations act as obstacles to their initiatives as these are not part of their own fixed agendas. For this reason, National Agencies should have a more active role when it comes to regulating the incorporation of the subject of sustainability in the volunteers' schedule.

National Agencies should also equip mentors and youth workers with the necessary resources in order for them to enhance their knowledge and skills on the topic and have access to appropriate material when it comes to training young people on the environment. These resources could be in the form of e-learning tools, so that trainers can access them whenever they want and from wherever they are. They should also include innovative and creative ideas if they are to grasp the volunteers' attention.





To conclude, the above observations are really significant, not only for the development of the project's objectives but also for the future of the planet as they clearly demonstrate the determination of volunteers and youth workers and by extension, young people, to act for the environment. Equipped with the necessary knowledge, resources, and support, young Europeans are ready, now more than ever, to embrace sustainability and to contribute effectively to the success of the Green Deal.

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[volunteers4environment.eu](http://volunteers4environment.eu)

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**Co-funded by  
the European Union**

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.