

TOP 10 of Voluntary service

What voluntary activity is – and what it could be

1. Voluntary service is not only for the young. In Germany a model pilot project has been started called “International voluntary service for different phases of life”, and it offers international voluntary service opportunities for citizens up to the age of 80. Voluntary service gives your life a purpose, keeps you young and healthy and can end the isolation of old people. In addition to the intercultural learning opportunity, intergenerational learning also takes place in the projects as well.
2. For an enlarged European voluntary service programme we could capitalise on the experiences of the National Civil Service programmes, which involve tens of thousands of volunteers every year. Moreover, connecting these national civil services between each other could give a great synergy and added value to Europe and the participating volunteers.
3. Voluntary service means building solidarity. During the Irish Special Olympics thousands of Irish citizens and international volunteers lend a hand, and give their time, energy and commitment to have the hearts and minds of the Irish people beating for the same cause. Imagine this solidarity at European scale...
4. International voluntary service combats racism, xenophobia and discrimination. It can break down the barriers of countries, cultures, ethnic groups...What if the young second generation immigrant young people in the suburbs of Paris would get an opportunity to spend their voluntary service abroad and see something different, get self confidence, gain new skills and learn a new language, help others.
5. Voluntary service gives volunteers on the job experience, contributes to the development of professional and soft skills, and thus helps reduce unemployment. In Poland the youth unemployment rate is 40%, looking for a cure?
6. Voluntary service makes you an active citizen, enables you to participate actively in the society, in the community. Volunteers become aware of their role in the society, moreover the power they have to make it a better place. Young people serving abroad really see that Europe is the future, and are able to engage in the European debate and help shape the Europe of tomorrow.
7. Voluntary service can open your eyes to reality. Not all is shiny in Europe, we still have problems with poverty, discrimination, anti social behaviour, and volunteers can make a big difference, no matter the scale of their contribution. We need immediate action to combat poverty, to halt climate change. Voluntary service projects can group those willing to make a change and by giving them structure and purpose can achieve results, little by little. In Germany each year around 2000 young people participate in the Voluntary Year of Ecological Services programme.
8. Voluntary service is a means for immigrants and refugees to feel useful in the society that they become a member of, and help the integration process and share their experiences and knowledge in their new country.
9. Voluntary service is also open to all people with different abilities. Through virtual and real volunteering persons with disabilities can help others, contribute with their skills and knowledge. Community Service Volunteers in Britain offers 1000 placements a year, and with their non-rejection policy about one fifth of its recruits are socially excluded, including people with mental health problems or a criminal record.

10. Voluntary service is an added value to the society. It is not there to replace jobs, volunteers can enhance the effects of hospital care, can provide entertainment and distraction to patients and is a great help to family members. International volunteers from another country bring their culture and knowledge with them and can share it with the hosting communities, thus enhancing their knowledge about other cultures.

Last but not least, voluntary service creates an opportunity to socialize and make friends with others, who feel equally motivated to make a change and contribute to society. Voluntary service gives the volunteer more self esteem, makes them more open minded, thus they can become more aware members of the European society.