



**Speech given by the President of the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service, Matina Deligianni during the annual conference of the International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCO),
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Plenary session: Youth Volunteering: building a movement for the future

Madam the President of the Forum, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to thank you for this invitation and the occasion to share with you about International Voluntary Service, on its contributions for young people and its contributions for local communities. I will try not to bore you with a long speech, considering that as for the type of voluntary service carried by the network I represent, the objective is the co-construction, the doing together and the exchange. Nevertheless, I will give you some elements which will give food for thought and contribute to our discussion and which will allow us to improve the recognition of the importance of international voluntary service on all levels.

The Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service includes more than 200 members and branches in more than 100 countries. They all organise thousands of actions which are important for local development, as they are organised by the people who live and work on the spot and who are the most aware of their own needs. These same organisations exchange tens of thousands of volunteers, especially young people, who contribute concretely to the implementation of their mutual initiatives in the framework of projects which are followed through on a long term basis, even if the action of the volunteers can often be on a short term.

The founding idea of International Voluntary Service is a contemporary one despite the shift of times and paradigms. It lies in the will to accomplish a way to live together pacifically through the realization of concrete projects which are over and beyond our individual interests and which serve for the general interest. These can take different forms from one country to another. We must draw inspiration from these origins of international voluntary service, especially in the creation of future programs; is the fundamental values of these origins that should shape the future.

I believe that it is essential to not forget that the projects where these actions take place are important for local communities, addressing concrete needs identified by the communities themselves and bringing visible change in the long term. Is this that makes the projects meaningful and prevents the implementation of actions that are not linked to grassroots initiatives, with no connection to the hosting territories and its inhabitants. In my opinion it is this which acts as a catalyst for the motivation and the commitment of young volunteers on the long term. It is for this reason that politics focusing on voluntary service should be associated principally with organisations that implement the actions in order to enable and guarantee the development of useful and meaningful actions which produce in turn participation of young people and offer them learning opportunities.



International voluntary service creates learning opportunities for young people who participate in the projects and this can have an impact on their future paths on a personal and professional level. Numerous evaluations and research show us that the participation of young people in international voluntary service projects contributes to reinforcing essential qualities in the lives of the people participating such as autonomy, openness, self-confidence, initiative taking, adaptation, active listening and the understanding of otherness; important social competences for young people which are contributing to the construction of a culture of peace and which enables the comprehension of the differences and the reduction of conflicts: purposes of the CCIVS, born in 1948 under the aegis of UNESCO.

Commitment plays an important role in active citizenship and sustains individuals desire to keep invest themselves.

It is because of the fact that voluntary service contributes to self-fulfillment and to personal development; because it brings interpersonal skills and know-how that it can then also have effects on the professional career of young people. However, I think that it is a mistake to reduce voluntary service to a springboard towards employment, even if it does have an undeniable impact on the scope of possibilities and therefore on the volunteer's professional career path as well. Without wishing to play on the semantics of the terms, employment and professional career path differ greatly. I consider that we should bring to the forefront that in the framework of international voluntary service young people acquire social competences above all and are enabled to choose and build their future, including professional future, and consequently find their place and become involved in social life. These can take diverse forms from one person to another but represent a major issue and it seems essential to me that we continue to develop and support voluntary service projects and actions as spaces of freedom, creativity, individual and collective development and of concrete realisation.

By supporting actions and projects which enables their realisation, I mean the support through public policies but also the support of the whole of society in the acknowledgement of the value of international voluntary service and of self-commitment. Moral value above all, a sign of young people who want to share, to go forward, to discover and to learn. As well, a concrete value, which materialises through the recognition of social competences of the volunteers, achieved through their choice of involvement but also thanks to projects and organisations which enable young people to participate in projects all over the world.

The significant effects of voluntary service concerns all young people from all backgrounds, all over the world. Thus, it is important to facilitate the participation of all and to work for the development of policies which enables the participation of young people who do not have the culture of voluntary service. This can be done by increasing the visibility of voluntary service but also by supporting organisations so that they can support and accompany in turn, these young people throughout their journey.



Moreover, it is necessary to facilitate the mobility of volunteers – short and long term- with the creation of a specific visa, a volunteer visa, on behalf of all countries, which would enable exchanges and actions not only from the north to the south but also from the south to the north and between south countries and will contribute to a better recognition of voluntary service.

In 2011, CCIVS developed a white paper on international voluntary service which through a participative process bringing together during one year more than 100 organisations and 7 networks of international voluntary service, defines the thematic and the priorities of international voluntary service for the next 10 years. Active participation and social inclusion was designated as one of the priorities for the network for the period 2011-2021. Accessibility of international voluntary service for all was considered as a strategic objective and at the same time a fundamental preoccupation for the organisations and networks participating in this consultative process.

These were the key elements that I wanted to share with you before starting the debate.

Thank you

Matina Deligianni
President of the Coordinating Committee for
International Voluntary Service