

Ensuring the sustainability

CB4VOL: Across borders, strengthening youth volunteering to fight for gender equality and social inclusion



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1. Introduction



1. Introduction

The participation of young people in volunteering activities and action programs is fundamental for sustainable development and the promotion of a more just and inclusive society. In this context, gender mainstreaming in these programs is essential to address inequalities and promote equity. However, young people face numerous challenges that hinder their involvement in volunteerism and activism initiatives focused on gender mainstreaming.

This report aims to explore the specific challenges young people face when trying to participate in gender-responsive programs and actions. These challenges include barriers related to available time, economic precariousness and misinformation, as well as social and cultural, economic, institutional, informational and psychological obstacles. In addition, the report will present detailed strategies to overcome these challenges in order to encourage more active and effective participation of young people in promoting gender equality through volunteerism and activism.

By understanding and addressing these challenges, we can create a more conducive environment for young people to become involved in the struggle for gender equity, thus contributing to the construction of more egalitarian societies that respect the rights of all people. This report aims to gather the contributions of the young people in the volunteer groups that have participated in the project, as well as those of the partner organizations, in order to offer appropriate opportunities to young people and thus promote their commitment and active participation in society.

2. Volunteering conclusions



According to the United Nations, 'volunteerism is an enormous renewable resource for solving social, economic and environmental problems around the world. At a time when we face increasing challenges, volunteers are often the first to help, being on the front line in times of crisis' (UN, 2023).

Volunteerism is a powerful force, and an important part of the fabric of society. Globally, it remains a key means of defining and promoting development. Volunteerism plays a key role in strengthening citizen-state relations. It helps improve governance, contributes to more egalitarian and inclusive societies, and promotes stability. Increasingly, volunteers around the world are forging closer partnerships with public authorities to respond to urgent development challenges.

Despite the steady increase in the number of volunteers globally and the positive aspects it generates for both volunteers and society, volunteers often face challenges and situations that hinder and limit their engagement.

In order for the organizations of the consortium to gain a better understanding of the limitations of young people to participate in society as volunteers, regional and joint meetings were held in order to understand the current situation of young people, so that the organizations can offer opportunities for participation according to the needs of young people.

Regardless of the region, the following barriers that the pilot groups put in common are:

- Socioeconomic situation: most of the young people in the regions involved in the project live in precarious employment situations, due to the hours worked and the remuneration. This situation makes it difficult on a large scale for volunteers to engage in volunteer programs because: a) they do not have the necessary time to devote to volunteer work; b) they do not have the financial resources that would allow them to travel or to do without certain sources of income.
- Lack of opportunities: this is the case in Morocco and Palestine, regions where there are few organizations offering volunteer opportunities. On the other hand, there is a need to strengthen volunteer organizations so that, on the one hand, they begin to work with young people in volunteer programs and, on the other hand, those that already do, have the necessary resources and structure to guarantee a good experience for young people.

- Lack of information: at the group level, there is a great lack of information among citizens, and even more so among young people, about volunteer opportunities. There are many platforms where information can be obtained, but they are not sufficiently well known, easy to find or disseminated by different actors in society. The digital divide is a very important component as the lack of access to technology and connectivity can limit knowledge about volunteer opportunities and the ability to participate in activities even organized online.
- Political and social instability: in areas affected by armed conflict, violence or insecurity, it is not a priority or of interest for young people to participate in volunteer actions, as is almost the case in Palestine today or even in some areas of Morocco. Due to the political and social situation, young people have basic concerns such as getting food or looking for a source of income that do not allow them to be interested in volunteering.
- Perception of volunteering: Some young people do not see volunteering as something that can benefit their personal or professional development in the short term, especially in comparison to other activities such as internships. There may be misperceptions about volunteering, seeing it as boring, undervalued or irrelevant.

In the face of these challenges and barriers, both organizations and youth volunteers have developed the following strategies to mitigate the aforementioned obstacles:

- Flexibility in opportunities. It is important to offer volunteer programs with flexible schedules that fit into young people's schedules. In addition, the online factor can be very beneficial in ensuring youth participation, as it allows for ease of meeting regardless of the distance between participants.
- Financial support: it is important for organizations to ensure that they provide grants or cover expenses related to the development of volunteering for those with economic limitations. It is mentioned that regardless of the purchasing power of each volunteer, the programs should guarantee the reimbursement of all expenses for the activities and also offer additional money to those who need it for economic reasons, if and when applicable.
- Improve communication: increase the promotion and visibility of volunteer opportunities through social media campaigns, collaborations with educational institutions and other channels frequented by young people, volunteer fairs, etc. Another strategy is to share testimonials and success stories of other young people who have participated in volunteering, highlighting the personal and professional benefits.
- The option of collaborating with educational institutions to offer academic credit for

volunteer work is proposed, thus encouraging participation. In addition, the option of integrating volunteering into the school curriculum is mentioned (since not everyone attends university). Another proposal is to establish volunteer programs that also count as internships, offering relevant work experience while helping the community.

- The importance of awarding certificates, prizes and official recognition to volunteers to value their contribution and enhance their CV is mentioned. Events can also be organized to thank and celebrate volunteers, highlighting their impact and fostering a sense of community and ownership.
- Reference is made to the creation of supportive policies from governments that encourage youth volunteering. There is also a great need for national legislation on volunteering that legally protects the individual and for regulatory frameworks that facilitate and support volunteer participation.
- Strengthening organizations and creating volunteer networks and platforms. To ensure that the work developed with young volunteers is of quality and that the opportunities that exist for young people reach them, it is very important that organizations have the necessary tools and knowledge to offer quality and successful experiences. On the other hand, networks and platforms empower organizations to create new consortiums, fostering the exchange of experiences, knowledge and best practices that have very beneficial results for the organizations and, consequently, for the volunteers.

Gender conclusions



Gender Mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieving the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that a gender perspectives and focus on the goal of gender equality are central to all activities-policy development, research, advocacy and dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.

Gender mainstreaming in volunteering programs is necessary for several critical reasons. It ensures that the programs are inclusive, equitable, and effective in addressing the diverse needs of all participants. Some of the opportunities and arguments identified by volunteers and staff of the partner organisations for gender mainstreaming in volunteering are the following:

- ✓ It ensures that volunteering programs are inclusive of all genders, recognizing and addressing the unique challenges and barriers faced by women, men, and non-binary individuals. Additionally, it promotes equal access to opportunities within volunteering programs, ensuring that all participants have the same chances to contribute and benefit.
- ✓ Gender-sensitive volunteering programs can empower marginalized groups by providing them with opportunities to develop skills, gain confidence, and take on leadership roles. These programs can help break down traditional gender roles and stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive and progressive community.
- ✓ Including diverse gender perspectives leads to more comprehensive and holistic approaches in tackling social issues, as different genders may experience and address these issues differently. It helps in designing solutions that are tailored to the specific needs of all community members, ensuring that interventions are more relevant and effective.
- ✓ Gender mainstreaming in volunteering programs is a matter of upholding human rights, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate fully and equally in community and development activities. It helps to identify and combat gender-based discrimination and biases that may exist within volunteering organizations and activities. Ensuring that all genders are fairly represented and can participate fully in volunteering programs contributes to broader social justice goals.
- ✓ Gender mainstreaming helps create safer volunteering environments by addressing issues of gender-based violence and harassment, ensuring that all participants feel secure. Establishing protocols and support systems for those who may experience gender-based violence or discrimination within volunteering contexts.
- ✓ Gender mainstreaming in volunteering helps build more inclusive and cohesive communities by fostering understanding and cooperation among different gender groups. Engaging diverse gender groups in volunteering activities strengthens community bonds and promotes solidarity.

Despite the many reasons why a gender perspective should be integrated into volunteer

programs, in many cases young people encounter obstacles to getting involved. The following are the conclusions of the discussion between the pilot groups of volunteers and the partner organizations:

- Social and cultural barriers

In many societies, traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained, and efforts to challenge these norms can be met with resistance or hostility. It can lead to young activists facing backlash from their communities or families who view gender mainstreaming efforts as a threat to cultural traditions and values.

Additionally, activists working on gender issues can become targets of gender-based violence, harassment, and personal attacks, both online and offline.

- Informational barriers

Inadequate education on gender issues and mainstreaming can limit young people's understanding and capacity to engage effectively in gender equality efforts. Limited access to resources, training, and information about gender mainstreaming and advocacy can be a significant barrier. On the other hand, media often misrepresents or undermines gender mainstreaming efforts, and activists can struggle to find platforms that accurately portray their work and messages. Regarding online resources, The vast amount of information available online can be overwhelming, making it challenging for young people to discern credible sources and strategies.

So, what can be done in order to overcome the challenges of young people facing when joining volunteering programmes on gender mainstreaming?

- ✓ Educational programmes: incorporate comprehensive gender education into school curriculums to raise awareness and understanding from an early age. Also, provide training and workshops on gender mainstreaming and advocacy skills
- ✓ Financial support: establish grants and funding opportunities specifically for youth-led gender mainstreaming initiatives.
- ✓ Mentorship and networking: develop mentorship programs that connect young activists with experienced leaders in the field, as well as facilitate the creation of support networks and peer groups for sharing resources and experiences.
- ✓ Policy and institutional change: advocate for the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes within organizations and institutions and Promote policies that support gender equality and protect the rights of activists.

By implementing these strategies, it is possible to create a more supportive environment that enables young people to actively participate in gender mainstreaming and contribute to meaningful social change. gender mainstreaming in volunteering programs is crucial for promoting equality, enhancing program effectiveness, ensuring fairness and justice, benefiting organizations, addressing specific gender issues, and enhancing social

cohesion. It creates an inclusive environment where all participants can contribute meaningfully and benefit from the opportunities provided, leading to more sustainable and impactful outcomes.



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