

Companies and volunteering



What contribution can companies make?

In most Member States, no legal provision or specific support schemes exist to facilitate private sector companies' engaging in corporate volunteering. Nonetheless, more companies are introducing such initiatives. CSR Europe, the European business network for corporate social responsibility, and its national-level partner organisations such as Business in the Community (in Ireland and the UK) are actively involved in promoting volunteering by staff in companies.

A company's contribution to a volunteering initiative can be financial or non-financial; non-financial contributions may include providing jobs, offering education and training measures, providing consultancy and technical assistance, and making available products and services. Private companies – and public-sector organisations and local authorities – may also encourage their employees to take part in volunteering as part of a drive towards corporate social responsibility (CSR). Volunteering efforts by employees tend to be focused on the local community, often being targeted at local schools in disadvantaged areas and socially excluded groups. By supporting their employees' volunteering, employers can make CSR a reality. Employees' engaging in their communities to mentor disadvantaged youth, taking part in environmental action or offering their skills to local organisations can give a face to CSR.

Through its learning dimension and through the skills it provides, volunteering improves people's employability.

Volunteering and employability

For volunteers who are not employees but rather who are unemployed, volunteering can be a path to active engagement. Volunteers can avoid or minimise marginalisation, expand their skills and reintegrate into the labour market – all particularly valuable as societies face the consequences of the current economic crisis. Assisting volunteers in the community to integrate into the labour market is the aim of many corporate initiatives in which companies sponsor education and learning programmes. In addition, Initiatives such as the European Employee Volunteering Awards, aligned to the European Year of Volunteering 2011, highlight how companies are helping people who face barriers to the labour market boost their employability. This programme is organised by Business in the Community and co-funded by the European Commission.



Good practice examples

Not only large, multinational companies support such CSR initiatives as employee community engagement. Small companies with a strong sense of social responsibility to their local communities and of their potential contribution to local employment and development also play their part. In Malta, some companies support employees who wish to take part in voluntary activities by granting them paid or unpaid special leave – for instance, during national campaigns dealing with youth-related issues. In other cases, employees are allowed to perform voluntary service overseas, sometimes for up to a year. In France, employees can avail of up to nine unpaid ‘representation days’ to engage in voluntary work. In the UK, the Employer Volunteer Scheme – in which a number of large firms participate – encourages corporate volunteering. In Germany, a cosmetics company invites retired employees to participate in volunteer networks that help current employees deal with care challenges. Vodafone Ireland Foundation’s World of Difference Programme offers 30 people, from outside the company, the opportunity to take a three-month paid placement with an Irish charity of their choice. The company also offers their own employees ‘matched’ company paid hours – up to a total of three days per year – in which to perform voluntary work.

The benefits of volunteering

Surveys of employee volunteers show that they find community engagement gives them a sense of achievement, is personally rewarding and boosts morale. Volunteering can be a good opportunity to improve team functioning and internal cohesion and to develop or enhance skills. Increasingly, businesses are incorporating employees’ engagement in the community into their training and development programmes. Volunteers benefit from broadening their horizons and gaining new and fresh perspectives on social issues and can bring their newfound skills, confidence and enthusiasm back into the workplace.

Though support for corporate volunteering is increasing, incentives could be provided to companies to encourage it further. One way forward would be for Member States to build a regulatory environment that encourages this type of initiative (through tax relief measures, for instance) and ensure that the infrastructure is in place to encourage corporate partnerships with the voluntary sector.

Further information

This fact sheet forms part of the Eurofound resource pack *Volunteering – a force for change*.

The pack looks at the extent of volunteering across Europe, examines the contribution that it can make to the goals of social policy, and looks at ways in which volunteering may be encouraged among European citizens.

For a copy of the pack or for further information on this topic, please email:
volunteering@eurofound.europa.eu

To view the resource pack online and all other Eurofound materials on this topic, please visit:
www.eurofound.europa.eu/resourcepacks/volunteering.htm

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