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# Intellectual Output #1:

## Activity 2

Comparative analysis of digital  
methodologies for youth  
engagement in volunteering  
activities



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This background paper explores how the youth working organizational sector adapted to the needs that came up during the pandemic and identifies the methodologies and means that they used to provide digital youth work and engage young people to e-volunteering activities. Moreover, through transnational surveys, the level of familiarity of organizations with each country's community media has been explored, as well as the dynamics of climate change-related actions to attract volunteers.

Online volunteering, like onsite volunteering, relies on human compassion, the desire to lend a hand or help make a difference, and on the willingness to share one's time and skills. Some examples of the tasks that e-volunteers can perform are highlighted below:

- Website or social media moderation
- Preparation of press releases and news letters
- Graphic and video designing
- Research for sponsors and beneficiaries
- Data analysis

A key characteristic of community media is the voluntary participation of civil society members in creating and managing programs. The role of volunteers is absolutely critical to the functioning of most community media organizations.

Through the Eco-Media project, the improvement of partnership among youth organizations and community media is going to be achieved, free accessible digital tools and e-learning material will be provided and the importance of e-volunteering against climate change will be highlighted. In this first step, a questionnaire has been delivered among project's partner countries (Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Finland, Italy and Spain) to collect data for digital strategies and means that organizations are using for youth engagement in volunteering activities. Through analysis of responses and comparison of national reports, useful data emerged on how organizations operated in the digital era and youth worker's opinion on which activities could motivate youth to participate in volunteering activities.

## METHODOLOGY

Information was gathered using a mix of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, including the use of an online survey (conducted via Google Forms). The survey was carried out in the form of a questionnaire in the native language of each country. Following from this, each partner developed a national report with the findings in English and the transnational data were gathered together for the identification of differences and similarities, and the conduction of the comparative analysis.

Data gathering was supported, where necessary, by desk-based analysis of relevant research and policy papers.

Collecting the opinions of youth work experts, a range of approaches for youth engagement in volunteering activities were identified in the following six countries: Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Italy and Spain.

### Quantitative data collection

The purpose of the quantitative survey was to collect data on the following:

- Different digital strategies for the engagement of youth to e-volunteerism, each from a different country with a view to create a high-level comparative analysis
- The specific digital means that organizations used
- Promising practices with a view to identifying common success and risk factors

Our experts identified appropriate respondents from each country to complete a set of standardized questions aimed at providing a broad framework for the collection and analysis of data against specific criteria.

Where a national organization or network in the youth work sector exists, the nominated respondent was drawn from there in order to create a wider picture of the digital methodologies and volunteering opportunities in that country. To help ensure fair and balanced responses, the responders were called to answer multiple-choice questions which were derived from qualitative desk research and are indicative of the most common and innovative methods that can be applied in the digital era. Youth workers were expected to consider all the aspects of providing digital youth work when completing the survey such as digital tools, means and opportunities for volunteering, as well as, alternative methods to motivate youth to volunteer.

The survey also gathered data on two specific “promising strategies” from each of the countries:



- The role of community media for the mitigation of social challenges and youth activation
- The importance of climate change related actions for youth motivation and their integration in digital actions and tools such as digital activism and e-learning platforms

The aspects of the overall challenges that organizations faced during the pandemic were identified via the survey in the background of digital transformation, Covid-19 restrictions and financial tools.

## INTRODUCTION

This background paper explores how the youth working organizational sector has adapted to the needs that arose during the pandemic and identifies the methodologies and means used to provide digital youth work and engage young people to e-volunteering activities. The intention is to inform and inspire youth workers of NGOs, youth centers and foundations, social workers and school guides, mentors, tutors and professionals from organizations working with youth about alternative and innovative methodologies to motivate young people to volunteer, by illustrating the important role of community media and green actions for the above purpose.

Chapter 1 provides some background to the topic by describing the key concepts of e-volunteering, digital activism, climate change and the role that community media has in promoting those concepts, while Chapter 2 identifies some of the key challenges across these areas in the digital era.

Chapter 3 provides a high-level comparative analysis of different strategies and digital tools from six different countries. Chapter 4 continues that theme by looking at youth workers opinion in some “promising practices” that could raise awareness among youth for engagement in volunteerism and are proposed within scientifically published articles.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides some conclusions with proposals for action.

## BACKGROUND TO THE TOPIC

### E-volunteering

E-volunteering is internet-mediated volunteering, also referred to as virtual volunteering, online volunteering, cyber volunteering or digital volunteering. The term is coined to signify the type of volunteering in which the Internet (the use of an Internet-connected device) plays a crucial role in recruiting volunteers and delegating and completing voluntary work (E-volunteering handbook, 2014). E-volunteering, as the name suggests, has a lot in common with traditional forms of volunteering. Thus, e-volunteering is a non-paid activity undertaken



freely and purposely to the benefit of other people, with one additional condition: the actions must be performed (wholly or partially) remotely using the internet. Online volunteering, like onsite volunteering, relies on human compassion, the desire to lend a hand or help make a difference, and on the willingness to share one's time and skills. But e-volunteering is also revolutionary, taking the traditional volunteering to the new level of the Web. Using the Internet as an everyday volunteer tool opens up a world of possibilities. Diminishing time and space constraints, it provides the voluntary work with new opportunities and forms and makes it global

E-volunteering is a non-compulsory, unpaid internet mediated activity for the benefit of other person or people coming from outside of one's family or friends' circle [1]. It is also referred to as online volunteering, virtual volunteering or cyber volunteering and encompasses all volunteering activities where volunteer or volunteers perform their tasks online. E-volunteers typically perform activities as described below:

- Website design or support
- Data entry
- Email marketing or management
- Fundraising phone calls and outreach
- Social media promotion and management
- App development
- Volunteer tracking
- Copywriting, blogging, or editing
- Graphic design, photography
- Marketing or branding assistance
- Video creation
- Virtual assistance, staff support

Of course, this is just a small sample of all the possible virtual volunteering tasks a person could provide. Each organization has a different approach, so there will be unique ways for volunteers to support each charity remotely. Moreover, the status-quo has shifted, while physical volunteers will always be in demand, the shift towards the Internet has made virtual volunteer positions plentiful. In fact, in times of great disruption, working and volunteering remotely became essential to keeping the economy, including nonprofits, moving.

## **Community media**

Community media are civil society organizations, usually registered as legal entities, that offer and encourage participation at different levels of their structures. Also referred to as the third media sector, community media have a clearly distinct identity alongside national public



service media and private commercial media. The third-media sector includes community and social media owned and managed by organizations or non-profit groups such as NGOs, cultural association, youth and neighborhood associations, social movements, etc., that attempt to guarantee the right to communication to the general population, as well to preserve local and cultural communities, in particular.

As locally originated media that use horizontal structures of production, community media projects also promote important functions including “the quality and the management of volunteers, the sector’s training capacity and the nature of various networks of which community broadcasting is a part” (Van Vuuren, 2006).

Community media is understood as taking the form of broadcasting and/or multimedia projects which share some of the following characteristics: independence from governments, commercial and religious institutions and political parties; not-for-profit orientation; voluntary participation of civil society members in the devising and management of programs; activities aiming at social gain and community benefit; ownership by and accountability to local communities and/or communities of interest which they serve; and commitment to inclusive and intercultural practices.

In a recent leaflet on community media (2019), the Council of Europe acknowledges the important role of community media in protecting the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information and recognizes the contribution of bottom-up organized community media in adding to the pluralistic nature of the local media landscape as well as fostering diversity and dialogue. (Council of Europe 2019). The recommendations emerging from the *2015 International Seminar on Community media Sustainability: Strengthening Policies and Funding* calls on Community Broadcasters and their Associations to “collaborate with other actors to promote media and information literacy, to combat hatred and xenophobia, to contribute to a culture of tolerance, and to raise awareness about the importance and role of community media in their target communities” (UNESCO 2015, p.3).

Therefore, organizations can motivate youth to actively engage in volunteering activities through community media, obtain a voice in their community and act against social challenges such as climate change. Concerning what is mentioned above, community media can provide opportunities for e-volunteering activities, promote active citizenship of youth in their communities while helping its structure to evolve.

## **Digital activism and climate change**

What does climate change mean for youth today? According to the IPCC (2013), by the year 2050, a child born in 2000 is likely to experience atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> of between 463 and 623 parts per million by volume (ppmv), compared with about 400 ppmv in 2016. They are likely to be living with 8.4-11.3 billion others on a planet that is 0.8°C to 2.6°C

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warmer, with sea levels higher by 5-32 cm compared with 1990 (IPCC 2013). The impacts of these changes will be distributed unevenly, with the greatest risks experienced by the poor and marginalized, many of whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change. However, wealthier communities will also be affected, both directly and indirectly, through changes in ecosystem functions, extreme weather events, and the social and economic consequences of climate change (IPCC 2014). The policies and decisions made today will influence outcomes over the remainder of this century and beyond, and youth today have a large stake in this future. Young people across the world are increasingly connected, using the internet and digital tools to build their communities, interact with other similar-minded people as well as advocate, express resistance, organize events and raise funds for the causes they care about, claiming space and agency in their societies and adopting new forms of participation. At the same time, young women and men often feel disenfranchised and disillusioned with governing structures incapable of providing them with the opportunities that support their needs.

For many youth-led social movements, one of the most important shifts of the 21st century has been moving from what used to be predominantly in-person activism to increasing action online, including various forms of digital activism. From the Arab Spring, and the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, to hashtag campaigns, such as, #MeToo, the online sphere has been used by activists of all ages to organize, mobilize and promote their causes.

This trend has been even more pronounced with the onset of COVID-19, as curfews and enforced physical distancing have made people more dependent on digital tools to connect and communicate, on both personal and societal levels. While COVID-19 has restricted young people from taking to the streets to voice their concerns, staying at home has not meant staying silent. Global movements have seen exponential growth in online environments with young people rallying against racial injustice, surfacing inequalities and climate change, showing that social causes go beyond any physical restriction. Similarly, online communities have stepped up to support the most vulnerable groups, often complementing governmental processes which have been at times overwhelmed.

Public participation and civic space are at the heart of the work and of the European institutions, making it a priority area to not only partner and engage with youth-led civil society, but to also ensure the protection of young civil society actors and overall promotion of civic space for youth.

For this to happen, we should better comprehend how can organizations and youth workers, motivate youth to digital activism overpassing traditional civic engagement and what opportunities and obstacles actors encounter in the digital sphere. This paper offers perspectives from the region of Europe as a starting point to gain a preliminary understanding how young civic actors use digital tools for political and social participation, what kind of digital



tools are provided to them and the specific digital means and strategies that could be used for that purpose.

## IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES

The importance of e-volunteering has been highlighted more than ever during the pandemic. Organizations were unable to facilitate face-to-face communication with possible volunteers and provide them opportunities for volunteering work in the field due to social distancing and travelling restrictions. Thus, in order for the organizations to attract young volunteers, digital methodologies were developed both for approaching (e.g. dissemination of volunteering activities through digital media) and for the engagement of youth to volunteerism (volunteering in digital marketing, data entry etc.). Most of the organizations, were unable to adapt so fast in this situation and the obstacles and challenges which they encountered are being identified in Figure 1 for each country.

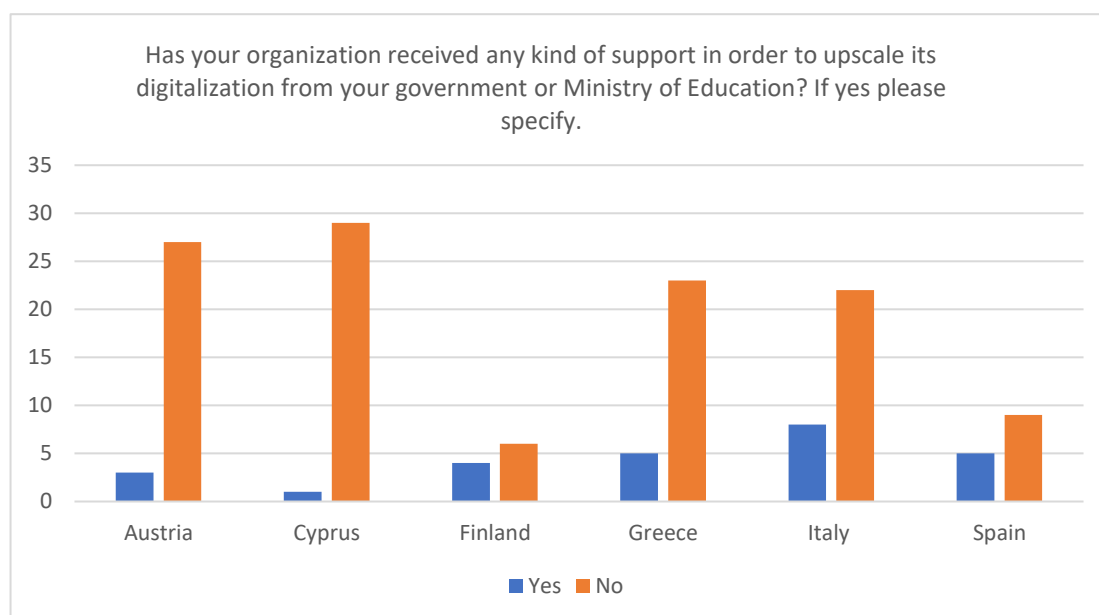


**Figure 1**

As we can observe on the above figure, the main challenge for the majority of organizations during the pandemic, was the lack of participants. While the pandemic restrictions were applied for almost two years (and there is a possibility to be applied in the future) organizations in the youth sector couldn't approach as many young people as the did in the past. Furthermore, this fact brought a decrease in the number of volunteers mainly due to the fact that young people couldn't engage at on-site activities. Concerning that, organizations

needed to adopt new strategies (mostly digital) to approach and motivate youth to participate in (e-)volunteering activities. The second most common obstacle for all partner countries was financial-related which came up from price increases and cancelation of events or fund-raising activities. Moreover, almost 1 to 3 organizations at each country, voted as an obstacle the absence of digital tools and the low expertise of youth workers to digitalization.

All these problems that appeared in the pandemic, were intensified by the lack of governmental support in most of the cases, that is reflected by organizations responses to a related question as seen in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2**

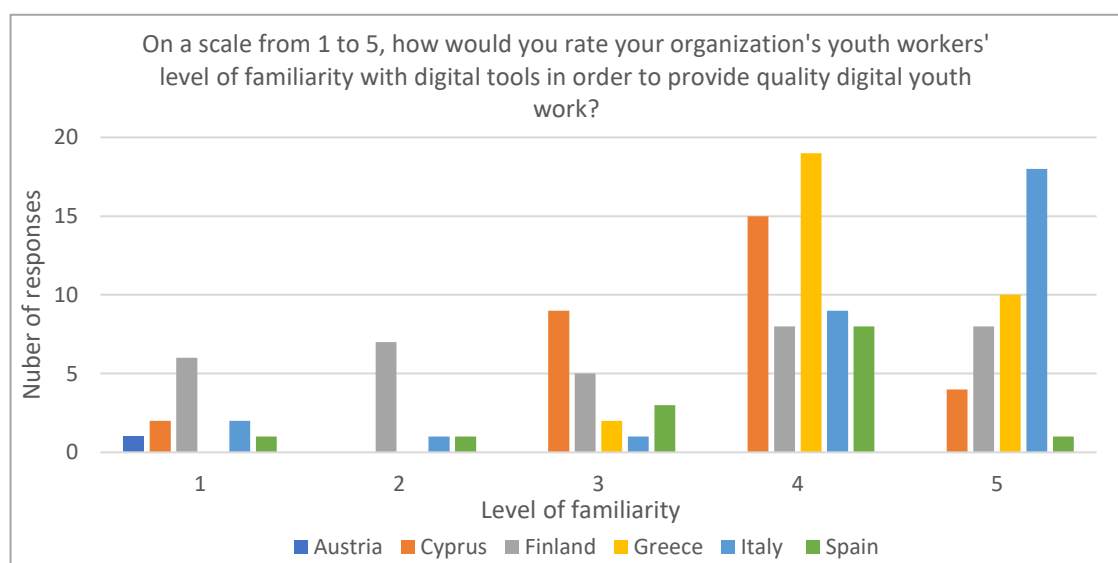
## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 6 TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES**

In this section we will compare and contrast six different digital approaches for youth engagement in volunteering activities from Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Italy and Spain.

While organizations in the youth sector have evolved differently from country to country, depending on educational and financial level of each one, a common starting point has been the need to provide youth with the opportunity to engage in activities which could make them active members of their communities. A particular focus has been meeting the needs of contributing on social challenges and empowering young people to actively participate in this kind of projects by providing them various volunteering activities. These activities generally

operate using a horizontal management structure of teams of volunteers. As a result, participants benefit not only through active participation, but also by developing their skills and acquiring management and collaboration experiences.

Now, in education, there are more digital tools that are being adopted and have become the most important tools to help teachers and students improve their communication, collaboration, and creativity skills in order to complete a task. Digital tools are programs, websites, or online resources that can make tasks easier to complete. A lot of these can be accessed in web browsers without needing to be downloaded. Thus, the first question was integrated to investigate the relation of youth workers with digital tools with a greater scope to understand in what extent they could provide quality digital youth work in each partner country. The results which are presented in figure 3 below, demonstrated that in all partner countries, youth workers have on average a very good level of familiarity with digital tools, so they are able to provide quality digital youth work. Thus, if they are provided with the appropriate digital tools, they could teach them to young people as an extra motivation for their engagement in e-volunteering.

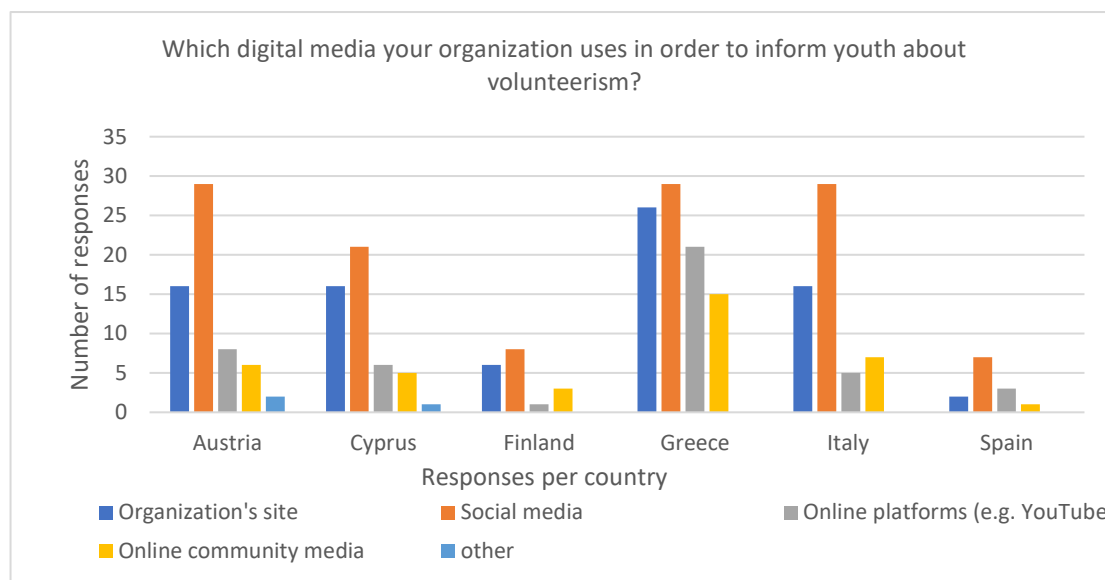


**Figure 3**

Moreover, while Millennials are considered as “digital natives” and Generation Z “true digital natives”, organizations needed to adopt new strategies both for disseminating volunteering benefits or vacancies and providing innovative opportunities, such as, e-volunteering. E-volunteering, as the name suggests, has a lot in common with traditional forms of volunteering. Thus, e-volunteering is a non-paid activity undertaken freely and purposely to the benefit of other people, with one additional condition: the actions must be performed (wholly or partially) remotely using the internet.

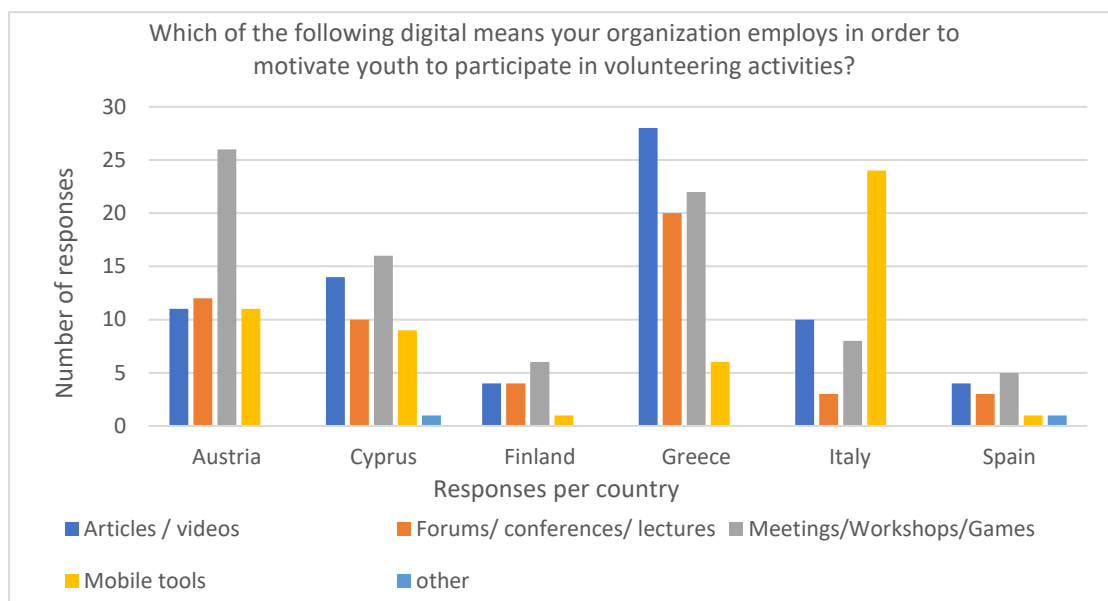
Accordingly, organizations and youth workers adopted their strategies in “digital eras” needs by utilizing, for example, social media instead of newspapers for advertising volunteering vacancies and providing digital instead of on-hand volunteering activities. For this reason, in the first section of the questionnaire, we aimed to collect data for the specific tools and means that organizations utilized (especially in the pandemic) to approach young volunteers.

In Figure 4,5 and 6, three questions are presented and the results analyzed below.



**Figure 4**

Regarding Figure 4 above, the dissemination of volunteering vacancies and motivational efforts, in all cases, organizations preferred social media (such as Facebook and Twitter) as they are very popular among younger population groups and they use it a lot not only for communicating to each other but also to keep in touch with the news. Other means like organization’s site were used in all countries, while in Greece many organizations used online platforms like YouTube for the aforementioned purpose. Community media, didn’t receive a lot of acceptance as a tool to inform youth about volunteering activities, although, researchers recognize that community media through broadcastings and other activities, can raise awareness of youth’s active citizenship and provide volunteering opportunities without leaving anyone behind.



**Figure 5**

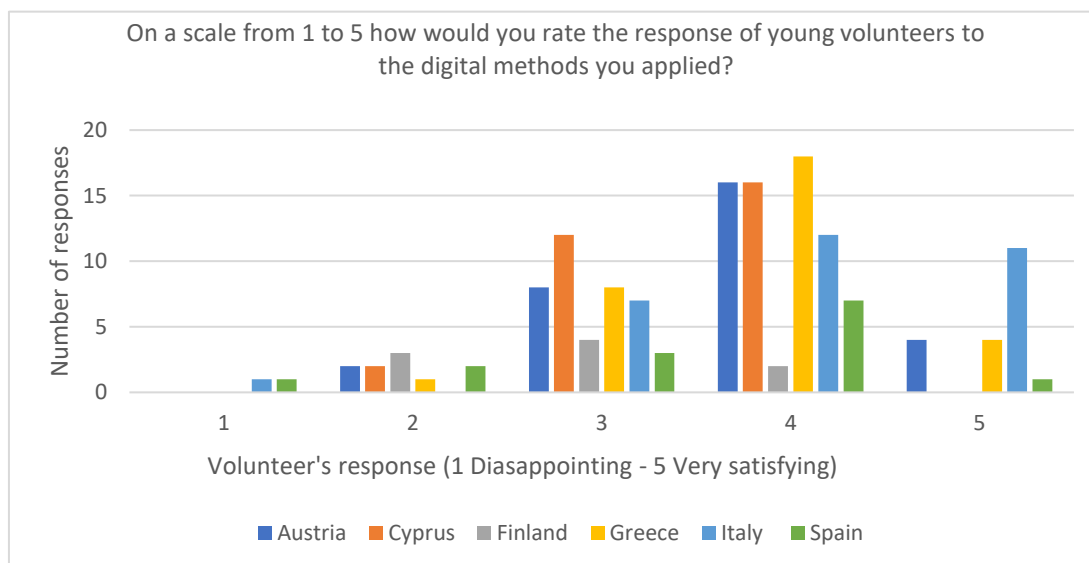
As Figure 5 above illustrates, the specific digital means that professional youth workers utilized for the motivation of youth to participate in volunteerism are diverse amongst partner countries. Certain commonalities, however, have been observed across countries. Firstly, Austrian, Cypriot and Finnish organizations employed online meetings and workshops with the young population group. Secondly, Greece, Austria and Spain observed a large percentage of the organizations created forums to enhance the communication between young people, with common interests and youth workers. On an individual country level, Greek organizations used informative videos and articles, while Italian organisation’s motivated youth by promoting mobile tools like educative applications.



**Figure 6**

In Figure 6 above, over 80% of each country's organizations did not take advantage of any volunteering management software, which could improve the effectiveness of their strategies.

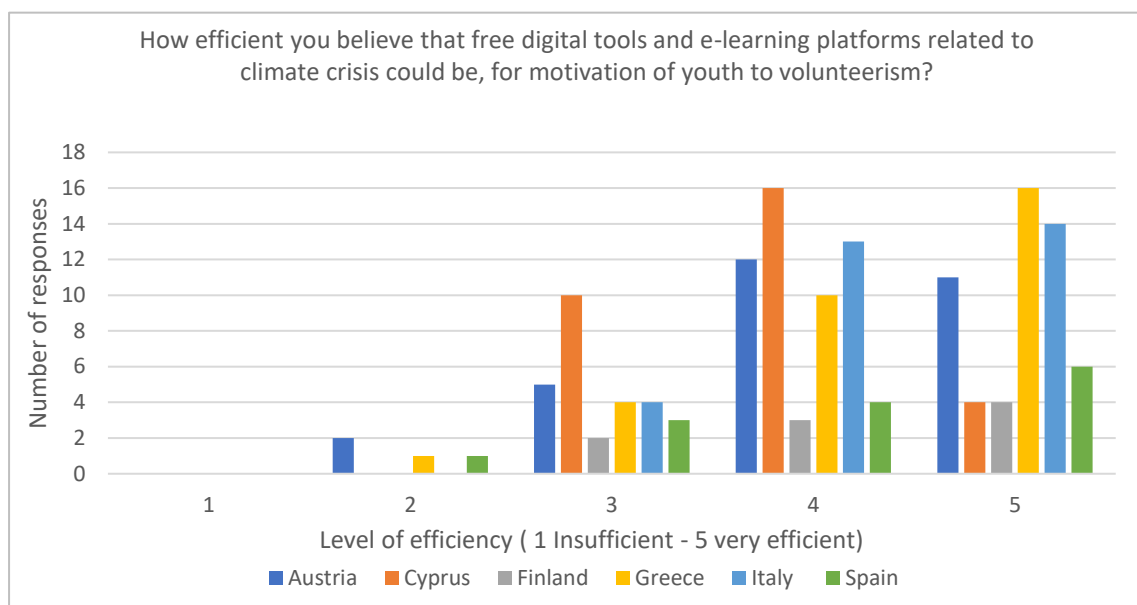
Figure 7 below, indicates the uptake of digital methodologies, applied by organizations, from young volunteers, by rating their response on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "disappointing" and 5 means "very satisfying". Results demonstrated that organizations on average are somewhat satisfied, self-reporting that their digital strategies were successful but there is also room for improvement. Through the Eco-Media project, innovative tools and methodologies (e.g., best practices) will be introduced to organizations that can be used to raise youths' awareness for volunteerism.



**Figure 7**

The main purpose of the next section of the questionnaire, was to collect the opinions of youth workers from different countries regarding certain techniques that could be used to engage youth to volunteering activities. These techniques have been collected following desk research on the most current topics amongst youth, such as, the climate crisis and innovative tools that could be used to raise awareness and give a voice to young people, such as, community media.

One question asked youth workers whether they believe that free digital tools and e-learning platforms related to climate crisis could be efficient for motivating of youth towards volunteerism. The most common answer to this question was efficient to very efficient in all partner countries. Therefore, youth workers highlighted the need for the creation of climate change related digital tools and e-learning platforms.



**Figure 8**

Regarding the specific actions that could engage youth in volunteering activities, youth workers in Austria, Cyprus and Spain voted ‘training of youth workers on digital skills’ as the most successful method. Greece and Spain selected ‘e-volunteering in community media as very effective and Finland and Italy indicated ‘briefing for digital social-media activism’ as some of the most effective methods for engaging youth in volunteerism. Training of youth worker’s digital skills is considered important in the majority of partner countries as seen in Figure 9 below.

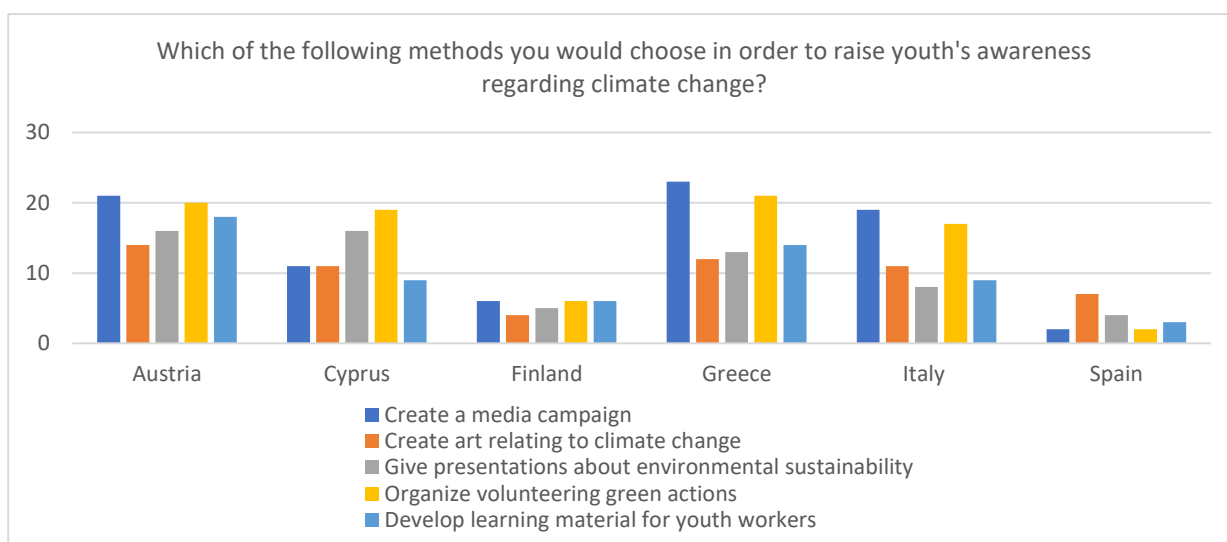




**Figure 9**

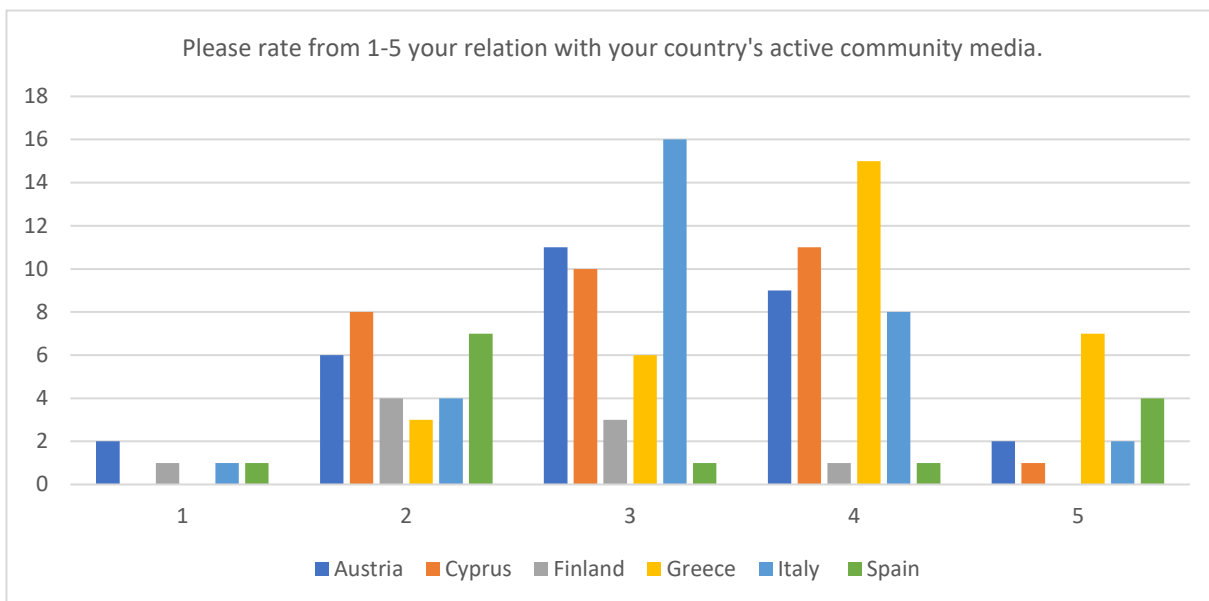
Figure 10 below regards the methods that could be used to raise youths' awareness for climate change and motivate them to actually engage in these kind of projects as volunteers, youth workers were called to choose between a variety of actions. The most effective action selected according to most of the Austrian, Finnish, Greek and Italian organizations was 'media campaigns' that could be effective for raising youth's awareness about climate crisis.

The next most selected action is the method of 'organizing volunteering green actions' including high acceptance in Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece and Italy. The third most selected action, identified by Austria, Greece and Spain was to 'develop learning material for youth workers' and is believed to motivate youth workers to inspire young students to apply a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly way of life.



**Figure 10**

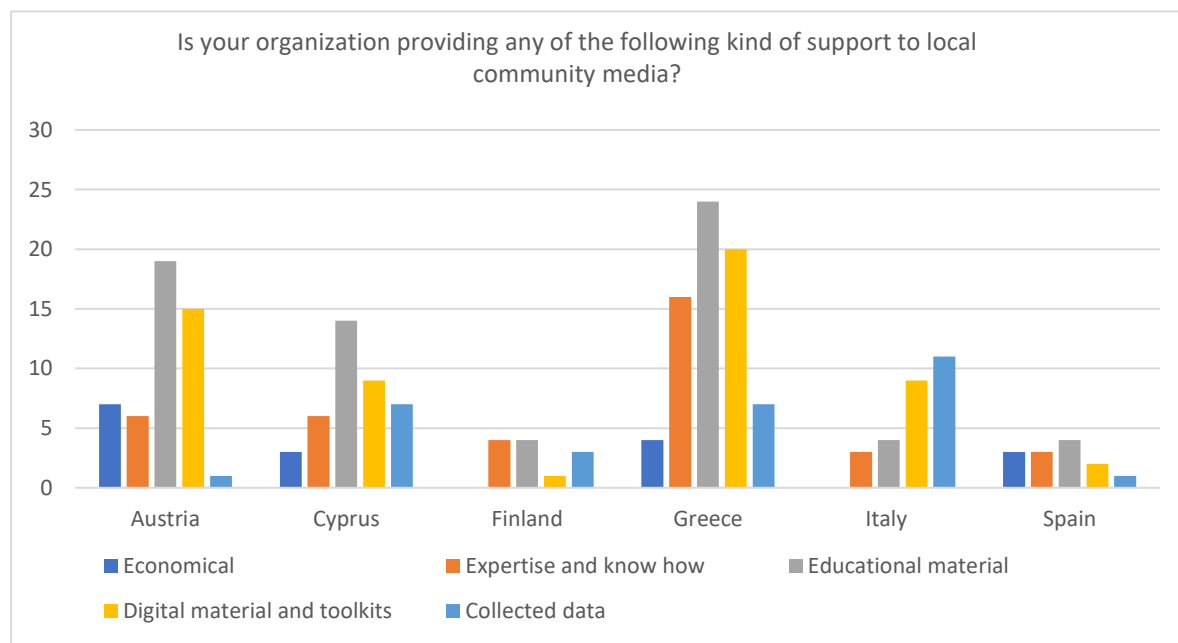
In the next section of the survey, two questions regarding community media were integrated (See Figure's 11 and 12 below). These questions aimed to realize the relations between organizations and community media (that through the Eco-Media project will be used as tools for youth engagement in volunteerism) in each partner country. As presented in Figure 11, most of the organizations in each partner country (except for Finland and Spain) seem to be somewhat of familiar and have a basic relationship with their local community media. Through the Eco-Media project, a list of community media with contact information will be created and shared among organizations in the youth sector so youth workers can come directly in contact with community media administrators and discuss for strategic synergies.



**Figure 11**

The next question of the survey, as depicted in Figure 12, explored if organizations are providing any kind of support to their country's community media. For Austria, Cyprus, Greece and Spain most organizations are providing educational material. The next avenue of support are digital toolkits provided by Austria, Cyprus, Greece and Italy.

52% of organizations in Greece are providing community media with expertise and know-how. In Italy and Cyprus, a significant percentage supply with collected data (of their project surveys).



**Figure 12**

In the final section, Figure 13, we aimed to get insights about the current situation in the organizations of each county regarding the opportunities they offer to young people to actively participate in e-volunteering activities. So, the first question, referred to the possible digital activities that an organization could provide for e-volunteerism. In Austria, 80% of organizations provide digital opportunities for e-volunteering on social media through promotion and management and 70% of their activities are related to video creation. In Cyprus, the most common e-volunteering opportunity that 70% of organizations provide is also social media promotion and management and 35% delivers opportunities for e-mail management, marketing and video creation. In Greece, e-volunteering activities vary from website design (93%) to blogging, video creation and social media promotion and management (over 75%). In Italy, social media promotion and management and video creation are the most common activities and one third of organizations provide data entry vacancies for e-volunteering. In Spain, one third of organizations that took part in the survey give opportunities to possible (e-)volunteers for social media promotion, video creation and blogging. Finally, in Finland, the majority of organizations provided support in the form of social media promotion and management, and copywriting, blogging or editing.

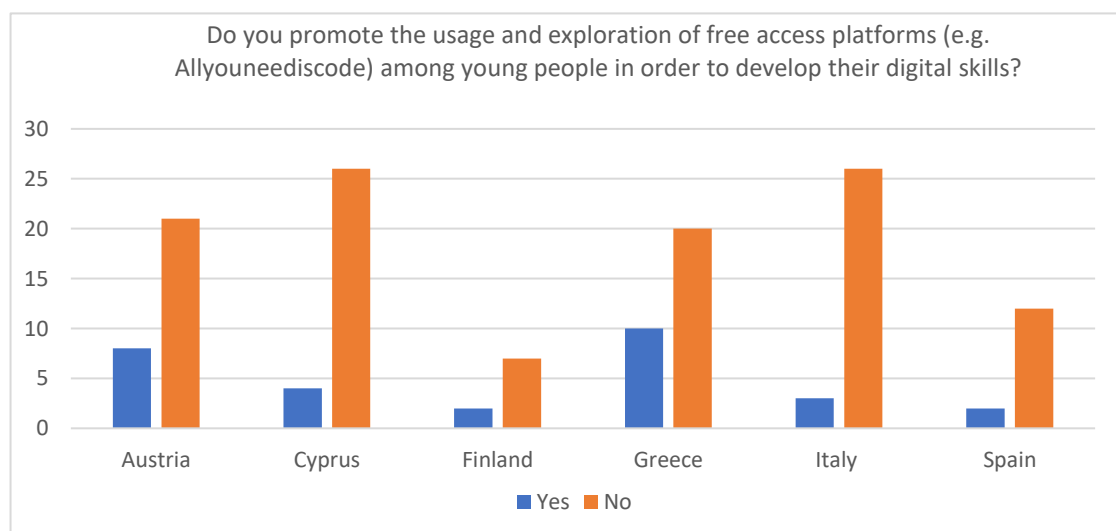


**Figure 13**

Nevertheless, by providing opportunities for e-volunteering does not mean that everyone can take advantage of them. Digital literacy and digital gaps are two of the most common phenomena among young people that prevents them from engagement in digital activities.

The first term refers to the absence of knowing to use a personal computer and all its benefits (e.g. internet, excel, coding), while the second to the absence of specific technical and financial tools, to make full use of the technology (e.g. finance available, technical know-how, or access to tools). Hence, if organizations commit actions for the elimination of these two factors a win-win situation could be created for organizations (increase in potential volunteers, social responsibility) and for young people (develop expertise in digital activities, take advantage of the volunteering benefits).

In concluding the questionnaire results, the final two questions as seen in Figure’s 14 and 15 below, explored if organizations are providing equal opportunities among young people in the six different partner counties and finally to realize if this affected their overall strategies. As presented in Figure 14, a limited number of organizations in all partner countries promote the exploration of free access platforms among their students in order to eliminate digital literacy. This could be one of the reasons for lack of participation that organizations indicated as one of their biggest obstacles in volunteerism. More encouraging is the depiction in Figure 15 below, of the fact that many organizations offer opportunities for reducing the digital divide among youth. Among the most common practices in Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain is the implementation of a dedicated area to free accessible Wi-Fi. Organizations in Greece also offer free computing lessons, and in Austria, Greece and Italy, organizations have efforts in place to provide free access to digital literacy training.



**Figure 14**



**Figure 15**

## CONCLUSIONS WITH PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

In order to gather enough responses and information on the status quo in the European context, partner organizations in the Eco-Media project from Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Italy and Spain did some desk research on the issue and distributed online the questionnaires through different means and channels (stakeholders, networks, and social media). From the responses gathered we managed to get valuable feedback on the digital tools and methodologies organizations in Europe are applying for the engagement of youth in volunteering.

From the findings, it was obvious that most organizations feel familiar with digital tools and the usage of several digital means. Nevertheless, there is always a place for improvement. Community media will be promoted as an innovative tool for providing e-volunteering activities and for raising awareness on climate change related actions as most of youth workers that took part in the survey agree that it would be motivational. Social media and articles have been proven great assistance for the promotion and dissemination of volunteering opportunities for organizations, especially throughout the pandemic period. This is being confirmed by youth workers as they stated satisfied for the response of young volunteers to the digital methods they applied.

Even though organizations in partner countries offer support to young people through several means (online seminars, places with free Wi-Fi, etc.), their engagement has been identified as one of the main obstacles to organizing and implementing volunteering activities.



Additionally, organizations seem to be unfamiliar with software related to the engagement of people in volunteering activities, as most of them stated they do not use or do not even know such software. Despite the attempts of the organizations through several means to promote digital tools and volunteering, a great boost would be free of charge digital software and tools. E-learning platform and digital tools related to climate change will be created and shared among organizations through the Eco-Media project. Finally, from the responses received, there is a lack from a governmental point of view of the support they offer to the organizations in the European context, which noticeably affects efforts of digitalizing their services and provide quality digital youth work.

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