Reciprocity in international exchange and solidarity volunteering

Developments. Between 2017 and 2022, France received 860 young international civic service volunteers from 61 different countries outside the EU. The trend was upward until 2019 (+66%), when it came to a halt due to the global health crises.

Profile. Civic service volunteers hosted in France on the basis of reciprocity are more qualified and older than civic service volunteers in general. Also, compared to the latter, the proportion of women is slightly lower.

Geography of origin. 11 countries of origin (out of 61) of the international volunteers hosted in France, listed here in ascending order, stand out as they account for 60% of the international volunteers hosted in France.

Host geography. The types of structures for volunteer assignments also vary from region to region. For example, in Brittany region, private educational establishments played a major role, hosting around 40% of the region’s international civic service volunteers, while in Burgundy-Franche-Comté, there has been a major involvement of local authorities, who received around 45% of the region’s international civic service volunteers.

Balance the flow. For the civic service scheme alone, the number of international volunteers hosted in France between 2017 and 2022 represents 22% of the number of volunteers sent abroad in 2021, i.e. for every 4 volunteers sent, just under one is hosted. Before the COVID-19 crisis, in 2019, this share was lower: around 11%. France is one of the few countries to have adopted a reciprocal approach to volunteering, along with Germany and Norway in particular, with the latter devoting a larger proportion of their volunteers.

Hosting structures. The analysis shows that the majority of volunteers are hosted by “experienced” hosting structures, mainly associations: 7% of organisations (the “subscribers”) host 55% of international civic service volunteers in France.

Hosting framework. Implementing reciprocity through partnership programmes enables a greater number of international volunteers to be mobilised and seems to be the preferred way of guaranteeing development in terms of both volume and quality.

Summary: Panorama of reciprocity in international volunteering in France

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Rotted for several decades in the practices of international and European volunteer exchange networks, reciprocity is an inherent principle of the encounter between people and individuals concerned by volunteering and international solidarity.

In France, reciprocity was included in the founding texts of French Volontarism in 1998. It is thus supported jointly by associations, local and public authorities. In March 2010, the law on civic service was enacted, providing the first structural framework for hosting international volunteers.

In France, reciprocity was included in the law on solidarity-based development and the fight against global inequalities, providing a new framework for action based on the International Solidarity Volunteerism (VSI) scheme.

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RECIPROCITY IN INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING?**

Although there is no collective definition shared by the French actors and their international partners, they all agree that it should be understood in the context of a partnership relationship that implies exchange and mobility giving rise to the hosting and sending of volunteers between countries. Reciprocity in international volunteering can be simultaneous or staggered, with varying degrees of equivalence in the number of volunteers.

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The reciprocity strengthens partnerships in the territories

“Voluntary work helps strengthen the synergy between actors working on the same issues in each region… [Volunteers are ambassadors for cooperation, helping to establish partnerships]”

—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in France

“The reciprocity is there to serve a dynamic of togetherness, and co-construction with the partners, which is opposed to a unilateral logic”

—the Association in France

**Purposes with high added value on the condition of seeking greater equality**

“Through reciprocity, the values we defend are not to fall into the trap of domination… There is a search for equality at all levels. We keep a close eye on the framework, and on the values of equality to be conveyed.”

—the Association in Tunisia

**The reciprocity places individuals at the heart of the modern challenges facing our societies**

“Although there is no collective definition shared by the French actors and their international partners, they all agree that it should be understood in the context of a partnership relationship that implies exchange and mobility giving rise to the hosting and sending of volunteers between countries. Reciprocity in international volunteering can be simultaneous or staggered, with varying degrees of equivalence in the number of volunteers.”

—the Association in Togo