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Chapter

Youth Volunteering: New Norms for Policy and Practice

Aileen Shaw and Pat Dolan

Abstract

Young people engaging in volunteering are encountering some of the greatest, unanticipated challenges facing society in decades including the impact of Covid-19, the rise in extreme poverty and an increase in the number of migrants and displaced persons globally. Youth volunteering is understood as embracing a wide range of civic and societal objectives. It acts to encourage young people to become active citizens and agents of positive change for communities. It has a role in providing developmental opportunities to young people including pathways to education, training and work. While some characterisations of volunteering highlight benefits it accords at the individual level, increasingly, policy responses are focusing on the ‘other-oriented’ elements that contribute to an inclusive, committed and tolerant society. This paper examines the potential role of volunteering in fostering a culture of citizenship, democracy and social cohesion among youth, in particular, an emerging focus on empathy and global consciousness as key elements of policy and practice.

Keywords: young people, volunteering, policy, citizenship, empathy, tolerance

1. Introduction

The term ‘volunteering’ is broad, incorporating an extensive range of formal and informal activities across diverse contexts and cultures. The 2022 *State of the World’s Volunteering Report* (SWVR) uses the definition, adopted in the 2002 UN General Assembly resolution, of volunteering as ‘a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor’ ([1], p. 16). The SWVR also differentiates between ‘formal volunteering’, namely unpaid voluntary work through an organisation, and ‘informal volunteering’, the provision of unpaid work or support to non-family members outside of the household. Globally, it estimated the monthly volunteer rate, defined as the share of working age people 15 years or older who volunteer in a month, as amounting to 15% in informal activities and 6.5% engaging in formal volunteering ([1], p. 30). The report acknowledged that research on volunteering is challenging as much of the available information is on formal activities taking place through organisations and in high-income countries.

An estimated 1 billion people globally are deemed to be active volunteers with one in three young people, a figure of 600 million youth worldwide, reporting to be volunteering [2]. In Europe, 34% of youth in 2019 reported they had engaged in organised volunteering activities within the previous 12 months, an increase from 24% in 2011 [3]. In the United States, 2019 figures estimated that 30% of Americans volunteered for an organisation or association in the previous year; the 20–24-year-old group had the lowest rates, with teenagers aged 16–19 reported higher rates close to the national average [4]. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [5] found that in 2019, 29% of people aged 15–24 had volunteered in the previous 12 months. There is some evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted volunteering levels. In the United Kingdom, for example, it resulted in a downturn among the elderly from 25 to 13%, due to practical issues such as need to self-isolate. At the same time, among the 16–24 age group, rates spiked from 30 to 40% between 2018 and 2020. This was followed, however, by a return to pre-pandemic levels [6]. In response to Covid-19, the overall proportion of Australians volunteering declined from one in three people in 2019 to one in four during 2020 [5]. The SWVR Report highlights the difficulties in measuring volunteering during the pandemic due to the large amount moving to online activity.

At the same time, the pandemic has focused attention on new trends in volunteering, that growing in popularity among young people, escalated during Covid-19. These include ‘episodic’ volunteering, namely flexible, short-time or once off activities that commonly manifest in times of crisis often through providing care for vulnerable people and in the form of community events [7]. Young people are seen to prefer occasional, short-term and spontaneous types of volunteering activities to regularly organised ones [8]. Also during Covid-19, cyber-volunteering or digital volunteering ‘has revealed its potential to complement ‘standard’ volunteering associated with physical mobility or even to become an alternative form of volunteering altogether, especially for young people who are not in a position to travel physically’ ([9], p.1).

In examining youth volunteering, there is a need to be mindful of the definition of ‘youth’. The UNDP acknowledges the United Nations General Assembly definition of youth as between the ages of 15–24 and, whilst acknowledging considerable disparity globally, adopts a definition in programming to ‘focus principally on young women and men aged 15–24, but also to extend that youth group to include young men and women ranging from ages 25 to 30’ ([10], p. 9). Among studies on youth volunteering, differentiations are typically made between adolescents or ‘school’ age youth (aged 12–17) and young adults (aged 18–30).

A further clarification relates to the understanding of the terms ‘youth volunteering’ and ‘youth engagement’. Youth volunteering is primarily presented as a sub-set of youth engagement; a facet of civic education. More broadly, while there is agreement generally that what comes under the banner of civic engagement, active citizenry and civic action includes voluntary activities, the terms can differ across country contexts [11]. Such differences can manifest as ‘apolitical’ volunteering and ‘political’ civic engagement. Evers and von Essen [12] note that ‘Volunteering is often crudely described as the private, morally motivated and individual form of voluntaristic action that seeks to help other individuals but not change society. By contrast, civic action is perceived as the public, political and collective form that deliberately aims for societal change’. They argue that conceptual divides are not helpful preferring the adoption of a contextual approach in which both are treated as forms of popular engagement for ‘public actions voluntarily performed by individuals for the benefit of

another individual, a group or some cause' (p. 4). Similarly, Stanley [13] uses 'youth action' and 'voluntary activity' as umbrella terms to describe 'all kinds of voluntary engagement characterised by being open to all, unpaid, undertaken of a person's own free will, educational (in the sense of providing non-formal learning) and of social value'.

2. Policy frameworks

Across international policy frameworks and instruments, youth volunteering is associated with a range of civic and societal objectives. Volunteering offers a rich array of informal and non-formal learning opportunities that serve to enhance young people's 'personal, socio-educational and professional development, active citizenship, civic participation and employability' ([8], p. 2). Framed largely within the discourse of youth engagement and participation, it is seen as important for the self-development of young people; for their engagement as active citizens and for enhancing social cohesion. In the context of young people's education and career pathways, volunteering also offers opportunities to develop practical, marketable skills and improve employment prospects, including entrepreneurship [10, 14].

A fundamental part of the rationale for promoting youth engagement and a core principle across key policy frameworks and youth strategies is fostering the participation of young people in democratic life [14, 15], a position based on the framework for the rights of young people as articulated in the UNCRC Article 12. UNESCO's *Operational Strategy on Youth 2014–2021* seeks to promote youth leadership across all levels of society in order to enable young people to 'to express themselves, understand their rights and responsibilities and play an active role in democratic processes' ([15], p. 14). Such frameworks operate from the perspective that youth be seen as active citizens or 'architects of their own lives' [14] with an emphasis on empowering young people to play a role in their own development and in their communities. As stated in the UNDP *Youth Strategy 2014–2017, Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future*, 'Engaging young people in policy dialogues and decision-making processes on the social, economic, environmental and cultural affairs that matter most to them therefore has to be an important component of the engagement process with youth' ([10], p.5).

For many young people, volunteerism acts as their first experience of civic engagement [2, 10]. Under the UNDP Youth Strategy, volunteerism is viewed as a channel for young people's participation in civic and public life. Policymakers are recognising that compared with older citizens, participation by young people in formal political processes or traditional forms of participation is declining; instead, young people are embracing informal modes of engagement [10, 14]. Such developments are viewed positively 'This has translated into new forms of youth mobilization, through social media channels or innovative informal groupings, and a heightened engagement in volunteering' ([10], p. 19).

A number of policy instruments incorporate the growing awareness of young people's natural disposition towards civic engagement and activism, expressed, in large part, through their commitment to addressing global challenges, including the sustainable development goals [10, 14]. As a global force and evidenced by their engagement with climate change, peace and gender equality for instance, youth are acknowledged to be moving to the centre stage of development debates; reflecting their determination to participate in the decisions that shape their societies and their futures. As stated in the UNDP Youth Strategy, opportunities for youth volunteering

should be optimised in order to ‘to engage young people in tackling development challenges, gaining both skills and strengthening trust and solidarity in society, and creating opportunities for participation’. ([10], p. 25). Moreover, ‘youth volunteers are often involved in bringing together different components of social action, combining direct action and service provision with online and in-person advocacy and representation to solve challenges’. ([16], p.2).

As a forum for social action and generating awareness, voluntary participation is seen to harness young people’s capacity to effect change at the personal and structural level: ‘Through volunteering, young people gain a strong sense of civic engagement to bring about transformational change in their communities’. ([10], p. 44). The role of young people as agents of change, ‘active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change for communities’ is invoked as part of the European Youth Strategy [14]. This element of engaging in social transformation is deemed especially important in countries with younger populations and those experiencing challenges such as migration, unemployment and political instability [2].

Equally important is mobilising and empowering youth as agents of change during times of disaster and conflict. In the area of social action, the role played by young people during the Covid-19 pandemic is widely acknowledged and their efforts credited with mitigating Covid-19’s impact through increased volunteering and intergenerational support [8]. During Covid-19, governments created dedicated programmes to harness youth volunteering efforts often in the form of practical tasks such as shopping for neighbours or assisting the elderly. Many schemes included digital initiatives to engage young people in recovery efforts and foster community resilience. A report from the OECD [17] highlighted the need to sustain this solidarity through action ‘It is critical for governments to capture, retain and build on current youth mobilisation to strengthen society’s resilience and readiness for future shocks. National youth volunteering programmes and strategies that allocate clear responsibilities, provide capacity building opportunities, as well as adequate financial resources can help in keeping youth mobilised for their communities’.

Volunteering is widely associated with broad societal objectives for an inclusive, tolerant and integrated society. In particular, European policy places a strong emphasis on the role of volunteering in fostering social solidarity in youth [18]. This spirit of solidarity and intercultural learning that accompanies volunteerism is widely invoked through increasing opportunities under schemes such as the European Solidarity Corps, encouraging youth exchanges and cross-border mobility of volunteers. Sipos [19] in an examination of the concept of solidarity as applied in European youth policy, identified four cornerstones of solidarity that together embody the principles of human rights, active citizenship, empathy and inclusion.

Informed by the need for young people to acquire skills to function as citizens of the world, tackle global challenges and build intercultural understanding, discourses on youth citizenship are increasingly focusing on global citizenship. UNESCO [20] advocates a model of Global Citizenship Education based on three domains of humanistic learning: cognitive (skills to better understand the world); socio-emotional (values, attitudes and social skills to live peacefully and respectfully) and behavioural (conduct, practical application and engagement). Using the model with Italian voluntary organisations Albanesi et al., [21] found that Italian youth reported higher scores in all the dimensions. The authors concluded ‘our results add evidence to the importance of civic engagement from early stages of life as a booster for the development of citizenship skills and confirm that belonging to organizations and engaging civically can contribute to positive outcomes regarding openness to diversity and Global Citizenship’ (p. 508).

While policy frameworks seek to foster youth engagement in public life, it is widely recognised that opportunities for participation can be unequal. The 2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR) concluded that while volunteering offers diverse pathways to civic participation, access remains unequal. The report identified the need for policymakers to address barriers to volunteering faced by marginalised groups, including participation in decision-making processes and for greater access and inclusion while volunteering. Estimating that one-third of young people are active volunteers, the EU Youth Strategy cautions that 'Decision-makers need to make participation a reality for all young people: to be transparent about actions in their favour, to reach out and communicate in an accessible way through their preferred channels (like social media) and to promote their involvement in decisions' ([14]; p. 2). In Europe, while volunteerism has a role in supporting processes of integration and community building among EU nationals and third-country national youths, Lehner et al. [22] found that issues that prevent youth with migrant backgrounds from volunteering include language, socio-economic and legal/bureaucratic barriers.

The European Commission, in the 2022 European Year of Youth, undertook to step up measures for high-quality and inclusive youth volunteering that included: ensuring access to transnational volunteering activities is a realistic opportunity for all young people, prioritising those with fewer opportunities; support for volunteering activities that make a meaningful contribution to tackling environment-related challenges; as well as exploring new trends and alternative dimensions and formats of volunteering, such as digital and inter-generational volunteering. [8]. Alongside recognition in the social domain, accreditation in the labour market is highlighted as the EU Youth Strategy also calls for greater validation of volunteering experiences [14].

3. Why young people volunteer

Key factors influencing youth volunteering include motivations to volunteer, ability to participate and opportunities for volunteering. These are discussed below.

3.1 Motivations

While volunteerism takes many forms, the majority of research is based on organised volunteering activities that constitute 'planned, non-obligatory, and contributory behaviour that takes place over time and within an organisational context' ([23], p. 971). Such definitions embrace a broad array of activities that incorporate elements of personal growth or self-development as well as varying degrees of social and civic awareness. Much has been written about the motivations for volunteering and, relatedly, the factors that influence individuals to participate, including age-related considerations. Clary and Snyder [24], in an often referenced scheme, classified the functions served by volunteering to be based on:

- Values – expression of humanitarianism.
- Understanding – learning more about the world and exercising of skills.
- Enhancement – individual growth and development.
- Career – gaining career and work-related experience.
- Social – strengthening social relationships.

Protective – reducing negative feelings such as guilt.

Schema such as the above are oriented to a primarily individual approach based on the self-development of the volunteer, whereas others emphasise motivations of a more socio-political nature. Laitinin [25], in her study of volunteering in Finnish youth organisations, views the different opportunities as encompassing a *menu* of volunteering. Options include *benevolent* volunteering (providing care/unpaid work); volunteering *as leisure* (way to spend free time) from project or time-bound activities and serious leisure (e.g. tutoring) to volunteering *as associational or political activism*.

In whatever way volunteering is framed, it is broadly understood as serving a twofold purpose offering individual and societal benefits. Incentives for young people to volunteer are sometimes presented as ‘self-oriented’ and ‘other-oriented’ [26]. Similarly, they are characterised as ‘egotistic’ (e.g. my volunteering will boost my curriculum vitae or will allow me to meet people and make friends) versus ‘altruistic’ (i.e. my volunteering will make a difference in other people’s lives) motivations [27]. In programmes where the focus is on participation in community activities and building civic awareness, differentiating volunteering from other forms of youth engagement can be problematic. Taylor Collins et al. [28] in a UK study of 16–20 year olds, adopts the term ‘youth social action’ as it incorporates a range of activities, including fundraising, volunteering and campaigning. Central to this understanding of social action is the dual benefit to both the young person participating and the community or cause involved. Young people volunteer for a variety of reasons across individual and societal objectives. Typically, rather than being overly influenced by one feature, young people are found to have multiple motivations that straddle instrumental and altruistic goals [26, 29, 30].

Among the key factors influencing young people to participate in volunteering are their engagement through schools and religion. Schools play a fundamental role in providing young people with exposure to direct volunteering opportunities, instilling an early civic orientation as well as teaching of altruistic values [31] while playing a critical role in sustaining a habit of volunteering into early adulthood [32]. The influence of religion in initiating and sustaining youth volunteering is also notable. Gil-Lacruz et al. [23] found trust in religion to have a positive association with youth volunteering across countries in the European Union; in the United Kingdom, young people engaging habitually in volunteering tended to have a religious affiliation and, importantly, to practice their religion [28].

The roles of parents and close friends are identified as key factors. Studies have found young people are more inclined to participate in volunteering where the family has a civic orientation and when parents lead by example [33, 34]. Even among younger children, a study of volunteering among preadolescents found that those with parents that ‘endorsed humanitarian-egalitarian values and those with greater civic participation were more likely to have children who volunteered’ [35]. Older-age adolescents in particular are induced to engage in volunteering when close friends and peers volunteer, Van Goethem et al., [34]. Interventions that target parents’ or friend’s civic behaviour or extend opportunities to adults are often instrumental in stimulating and maintaining a culture of volunteering among adolescents.

Research points to a number of key differentiators in the motivations for volunteering between young and older volunteers. Among younger people, motivations relating to acquiring new skills, career-related experience and making friends appear more important than for older volunteers for whom civic service or societal considerations are dominant [36, 37]. Using the scheme developed by Clary and

Snyder [24] above, Okun and Schultz [38] found that career and understanding motivations decreased with age, whereas social functions increased. Notably, their findings indicated that enhancement, protective and values motivations to be unrelated to age. Research on age and episodic volunteering undertaken by Almong-Bar et al. [39] examined the characteristics in different age groups among 2270 episodic volunteers from six countries. Defining episodic volunteering as engagement in one-time or short-term volunteering, the authors suggest that policymakers would benefit from greater attention to the differences in behaviour patterns and motivations among the various age groups of volunteers. Greater understanding of the motivations behind youth volunteering is important for recruitment and retention strategies as targeting messaging to young people and matching individuals to suitable activities can be effective in preventing high turnover [36]. The need to be mindful that motivations of young people change over time and at critical transition points such as entry into secondary school or college is highlighted [40–42]. Davies cautions that ‘although early experiences can provide an important foundation for volunteering, opportunities for participation must also be viewed alongside the lifecourse and in conjunction with events in individuals’ lives’ (2018, p.269).

3.2 Ability to volunteer

Mirroring the experience of youth civic engagement, volunteering among young people is also associated with socio-economic status and demographic factors. Research suggests that higher levels of income and greater levels of educational attainment are positively associated with rates of volunteering while participation of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic and minority groups is lower due to issues of access and opportunity [30, 40, 43, 44]. Such studies point to the importance of contextual factors in encouraging youth volunteering. Gil-Lacruz et al. [23] differentiated between individual and contextual features in influencing youth volunteering behaviour. Individual factors include socio-economic variables such as education and income; contextual influences include government expenditure on volunteering, time constraints and resourcing. Among their findings, ‘individual variables, show that being male significantly and positively affects being a volunteer in leisure and professional organizations, while its significance is negative in social justice organizations’ ([23], p., 986).

A study by Davies [41] on young people’s participation in volunteering in deprived urban areas of Scotland identified barriers to include *objective* constraints, namely the conditions in which participants are located and *subjective* constraints, attitudes to volunteering. The former included lack of resources (youth worker/club support); no information about opportunities to volunteer through schools; and spatial or physical access limitations. Objective barriers included elements of stigma associated with the image of volunteering as a middle-class, do-gooder activity and, among males, association of volunteering with femininity.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, Dean’s [30] assessment of youth volunteering programmes in the United Kingdom comes with a caution that structural factors including volunteering programmes that promote volunteering as a pathway to employment as well as specific volunteering programmes that reward short-term, boundaries commitments take away from the altruistic element of volunteering. Moreover, they inhibit holistic long-term volunteering and make for constant recruitment and retention.

3.3 Opportunities

As discussed in the previous sections, there are notable distinctions in the motivations for and styles of volunteerism preferred by young people; moreover, these variations have implications for the management and operation of youth volunteering initiatives.

Typically, young people have a preference for informal modes of engagement. Nursey-Bray et al. [45] found that increased governance and formalisation, for example, requirements to keep timesheets, to draft plans and other related 'red tape' acts to discourage youth from volunteering. Rather, such formalised and professionalised approaches were more likely to appeal to middle-aged and older volunteers. Almog-Bar et al. [39] found that ways to engage young volunteers also differ. While older volunteers demonstrated a preference for communication that is formalised and comes with defined roles, younger volunteers, especially the 18–24 age group, were likely to learn of opportunities through social media platforms or through friends or neighbours and to prefer a less hierarchical style of management.

Research suggests the need for flexibility in managing youth volunteering programmes. Practical considerations feature in the choices made by young people as much if not more than philosophical or aspirational considerations. Veludo-de-Oliveira et al. [27], for example, found that in comparing levels of committed behaviour, 'Volunteers do not differ in terms of altruism, empathy, and attitudinal and normative beliefs'; however, 'they do differ in terms of two control beliefs: lack of time and the hindrances to volunteering work'. Efforts that could assist young volunteers to maintain engagement, the study suggests, include flexible working hours, scheduling and provision of free transport. Similarly, Taylor Collins et al. [28] found key enablers of participation to be time, confidence, skills and opportunity noting that supporting adolescents to believe they have such capacities and providing opportunities that are accessible may reduce barriers to engagement and develop a habit of volunteering.

As has been suggested earlier, greater awareness of differences in behaviour and motivations across and between age groups can assist managers to design more appropriate mechanisms and to facilitate targeted planning and resourcing. Almog-Bar et al. [39] identified two 'outlier' age groups, those aged 18–24 and 65+ to be most often assigned unskilled labour tasks such as clean-up and to receive less training compared with middle-age groups resulting in a sense of meaninglessness with their assignment. Young people were also more likely to 'receive snacks and goodies as gratitude and least likely to receive thank you letters or direct gratitude from supervisors' ([39], p. 494).

Meaningful engagement is viewed as essential in supporting and retaining youth volunteers. Nordstrom et al. [46] in a study of youth volunteering levels in the United States found that young people are driven by a sense of efficacy. Among the programme practices that strengthen volunteers sense of efficacy is authorising, for example, though allowing young people to make decisions or work independently, 'Authorizing reshaped the student's image of themselves and what they were capable of contributing' ([46], p. 361). Others have emphasised the importance of allowing for reflection, for example, journalising and engaging in online discussions, as factors that enable young people to see themselves as making a tangible contribution [25, 30].

4. Future directions

Across policy and practice, youth volunteering is chiefly understood as taking place under the broad spectrum of civic engagement. As such, it forms part of debates, located within a wide body of youth civic engagement, participation and citizenship literature, on the ways in which young people are supported to take active roles in society. Among the predominant discourses are those based on democratic or active citizenship; skills and asset building approaches as well as models for youth engagement incorporating social justice perspectives [47]. This section focuses on two emerging themes, 1) the importance of developing empathy and prosocial skills in young people and 2) education in global consciousness that seek to develop 'other-oriented' competencies in young people.

4.1 Citizenship and critical awareness

Over the past decade, the discourse on youth civic engagement has placed a heightened emphasis on global citizenship, as part of which the cultivation of 'soft' skills and prosocial behaviours in young people is key. UNESCO [20] advocates for a Global Citizenship Education (GCED) framework that 'aims to instil in learners the values, attitudes and behaviours that support responsible global citizenship: creativity, innovation, and commitment to peace, human rights and sustainable development.' Internationally, the importance of social and emotional learning is being formally recognised in educational settings [48]. Schools play a critical role in nurturing social and emotional skills as part of education policies designed to foster tolerance, diversity and inclusion [49, 50].

Global consciousness is seen as a critical competency in social justice frameworks for working with young people that seek to address socio-economic challenges in society. Typically, such models set out to actively support and empower young people to take action on social issues that are relevant to their lives, by giving them a voice and enabling them to influence policy and practice on a variety of social and civic issues. Ginwright and Cammarota [51], for example, identified three levels of awareness for such models: self-awareness, through exploring racial, ethnic and cultural diversity; social awareness, thinking critically about issues in their own communities; and global awareness through encouraging young people 'to practice critical reflection in order to empathise with the struggles of young people throughout the world' (p.90). Such a global consciousness approach Dill [52] characterises as one in which the objective is to provide students with a global orientation, empathy and cultural sensitivity stemming from humanistic values and assumptions. It also shares attributes of a categorisation of global citizenship in which advocacy, namely 'A focus on the challenges arising from inequalities and oppression using critiques of social norms to advocate action' ([53], p. 306).

4.2 Empathy and prosocial skills in young people

In working with young people, the cultivation of empathy and positive social values are increasingly viewed as important drivers of youth prosocial behaviour and civic action. For young people, empathy is associated with healthy physical and psychological functioning [54–56] and improved coping and self-esteem [57]. It has also been linked to greater emotional resilience [58, 59], improved cognitive performance

and self-efficacy [60, 61]. The presence of empathy also forms a critical element of the social support structure for young people [62].

Researchers propose that the development of empathy, social responsibility and civic engagement among young people should be a priority concern, since not only are these processes critical for positive youth development, they are also fundamental for promoting social democracy [50, 63, 64]. On a societal level, the development of empathy and social responsibility values are critical to the foundation for broader social attitudes and behaviours and appear to play a key role in fostering social connectedness [63, 65, 66]. Research studies have found a significant connection between empathy, improved social functioning and competence [67, 68]. Moreover, evidence suggests that a person's capacity for empathy can be strengthened over time, based on their social experiences and the presence of ecological assets [64, 69].

The concept of social empathy, central to which is awareness of inequalities in society, Segal [70] understands as 'the ability to understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities'. The three components of the social empathy model – individual empathy, contextual understanding and social responsibility – she argues, go beyond civic engagement, offering a form of volunteerism that advances social action and responsibility. Wagaman also ([71], p. 291) views the combination of individual empathy and contextual understanding to be critical in working with adolescents to ensure they 'are empowered and understand how to apply their new skills to other issues and circumstances'. This amalgamation of social and individual factors is also highlighted in the findings from a systematic review on the development of empathy and prosocial behaviour that concluded: 'the expression of empathy and prosocial behaviour among adolescents is related to their exposure to key environmental processes (e.g. parental modelling, extra-curricular activities, school/neighbourhood climate), as well as their individual skills and values (e.g. self-efficacy beliefs, values, emotion regulation)'. ([62], p. 432).

5. Conclusion

Young people engaging in volunteering are encountering some of the greatest, unanticipated challenges facing society in decades including the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise in extreme poverty and an increase in the number of migrants and displaced persons globally. In this context, the role of youth volunteering in fostering a culture of citizenship, democracy and social cohesion is critical and increasingly recognised in policy. At the same time, the rising popularity of alternative forms of volunteering such as cyber or digital modes greatly expands the scope for young people to engage in volunteering that transcends borders and to participate in social action on their own terms. In seeking to stimulate volunteering among young people, the need for outreach to all sectors of society, particularly to under-represented groups, has emerged as a priority for policymakers.

Youth volunteering is understood as embracing a wide range of civic and societal objectives. While some characterisations of volunteering highlight benefits it accords at the individual level, increasingly, policy responses are focusing on the 'other-oriented' elements that contribute to an inclusive, committed and tolerant society. As a space for critical thinking about structural and personal issues, volunteering affords young people the contextual experience in which to develop perspective-taking skills and social responsibility values. Frameworks for empathy and global consciousness, in particular, offer a valuable lens through which future approaches to youth volunteering may be oriented in both policy and practice.

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