



# Worlds of Experience

No. 48 (February 2019)



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## What drives YOUTH to volunteer?

Dear friends,

Youth volunteering has long been recognised for its contribution to society, its potential to create social capital, social awareness and civic responsibility among young people for more global and empowered citizens. So what inspires these young people to travel beyond their comfort zones and serve in communities unknown to them, and what keeps them going often for a year? Approximately 900 young people volunteer annually with ICYE in a diverse range of host project across the world. The 48<sup>th</sup> issue of the ICYE Federation newsletter asks them, *What drives YOUTH to volunteer?*

In **Volunteers Voices**, six young people from Vietnam, France, Taiwan, USA, New Zealand and Italy give insight into the richness and diversity of experiences of many young people volunteering abroad. A common recurring theme is social capital, the long-lasting relationships and friendships forged with local and other international youth, as well as with host families and host projects. In your search for "What drives YOUTH to volunteer?", we start you off with a former Vietnamese volunteer in Japan who questions the altruistic motive, urging you to be honest with yourself, to do it for yourself and help yourself, for only then you will be able to help others.

**ICYE News:** ICYE celebrates its 70 anniversary this year and presents the global events planned in 2019 to celebrate our work and mark this momentous jubilee.

**News from Int'l Organizations** feature: new UNESCO e-Platform on intercultural dialogue and UNESCO's Right to education handbook and digital campaign #RightToEducation.

**News from NGOs** feature the World Report 2019 of Human Rights Watch and the Peer learning activity on "validation of transversal skills through volunteering".

Wishing you an interesting reading, please note that to mark ICYE's 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2019, the next issue of "Worlds of Experience" will be a special edition consisting of the best articles by volunteers published in the ICYE Newsletter, from its first issue in February 2003 to this very last issue. The "Best Of" will be published in July, 2019 and the print version will be available in November 2019.

Warmest regards!

**ICYE International Office**

This and previous issues of "Worlds of Experience" can be viewed and downloaded from: [www.icye.org](http://www.icye.org).

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# Volunteers Voices

## Be Yourself – Do it for Yourself

**Dang Huy Tam (Vietnam)**

Volunteer in Japan

“Volunteer” - what is the first impression that pops into your mind when reading or hearing this word? You may think, well, we have to do something to help others or we do something good for our hometown, for the society around us. Yes, it's true. It's good for youth to give a hand and build up a better place.

“Volunteer globally” - Wait, but why? Isn't it enough to work voluntarily in the hometown, in the city or in the country where we live? Yes, it's enough but last year, in late October, I chose to set foot in Japan, not for travelling, not for studying abroad, and not as you think, not for volunteering either. Let's be honest. There are many kinds of volunteer projects in our hometown, city or at least in our country. The people there need our help the most. I dare say it is not necessary to go volunteering for the purpose of helping people on the other side of the world.



Please, help your people first. I have the courage to utter these words as I have taken part in many volunteer activities so far: from being a high school student to working as a salaried man; from running local projects to joining a global programme. Please don't tell me that your country is boring and there is nothing to do. There are always interesting projects waiting for us to explore and experience. There are always interesting people waiting for us to meet and make friends. And they are all living near you, speaking the same language as you. Yet I chose to quit my job, got my plane ticket, flew to Japan and volunteered there for two months.

From the beginning, my sole purpose was not to help people there. I chose to take part in that programme because it suited me best: I both love tea and Japan, so I wanted to explore them further. Every weekday, I came to tea farms, worked with the local host then came

home, prepared dinner for myself. Sometimes even on my days off, I asked if I could go on working with them. Please don't think that I am a good guy. I chose to work not for helping them, but for helping myself. I really love to learn more about the culture, the lifestyle, and the ways of working there. I set out to volunteer not to help others, but to help myself.

I went there for myself, worked for myself, learnt for myself, enjoyed moments for myself. Everything I did, I did for myself. And by helping myself, I helped others. Again let's be honest. You don't have to lie yourself about the reason you choose to volunteer abroad. You don't have to say you want to help people. Just be you. Show your true colours. And by helping yourself to become better, you will help others to live better, in a way that will surprise you. Just be yourself. Do it well for yourself before doing it well for others.

## Volunteering in the Mystic Place of Koli

**Simon Le Cléach (France)**

Volunteer in Finland

I have been volunteering here in Finland for one month now and I will narrate to you the beginning of my extraordinary adventure in Koli, one of the national parks of Finland. My volunteering period began on the 6th of January when I arrived in Helsinki before moving to Koli, my home for ten months. A new experience in a new country, a new culture in which people do not speak my language.

This is a kind of a challenge for me because in France we just speak French, not English. But I am here to improve my English and also to discover the splendid nature of Finland while offering my help and skills. I can once again test my adaptation capacity, a hard but educational and rich exercise.



This project is totally different from the previous volunteering I have done in Madagascar. For instance, the climate differs, and the cultural environment in Africa

is a unique one. Volunteering in Madagascar was the best experience in my life: I discovered a wonderful country with generous people and an amazing way of life despite all the problems the country has with poverty. After returning from Madagascar, my only wish was to go abroad again and share my experience with new people while discovering a new culture. I had this opportunity to go to Finland, and since I have skills in landscape layout and I love nature and hiking, after deep reflection, I decided to take on this project.



I have different tasks here in the magical winter universe of Koli as well as at the cafeteria of the nature centre Ukko. I help to organize events and to develop small projects. I also propose new ideas, help in outside work, etc. Through volunteering here, I can try many things, test new activities and of course meet new people. I think that it is important to go abroad and see with your own eyes the cultural differences and similarities and the context, and it is better when you can work with local people. With all these elements, everything makes sense for me because you can analyse and compare different ways of doing, and learn – a real opportunity for creating souvenirs – learning by doing and discovering yourself much more.

The beginning of my experience was not simple; I was a little bit lost because I did not know this type of environment: the very cold weather, the Finnish language, being alone in the middle a nowhere. At first I felt frustration and loneliness but I was prepared for that, I knew that I should carry on volunteering even with these feelings. After a few days, a few weeks, it already felt so relaxing to just enjoy the silence and admire the colour of the trees, feel the freshness of the pure air, hear the tapping of woodpeckers and gaze at the magnificent landscape of lake Piellinen. It is so appreciable to feel the purity and to see the light of the sun come brush the tree branches, a calming feeling for me. Koli, a particular place that has many stories and legends and special wildlife, where you can see a fabulous landscape change over the seasons, a perfect place for enjoying nature.

That was the beginning of my story here, a beginning full of discoveries and personal feelings. After a few weeks, I

had an occasion to meet new people in Koli and students in Joensuu. With them, I talked about the Finnish and French culture and language, tried the sauna and also drove snowmobile in the forest to collect firewood! I am now feeling happy to be here; I can experience new activities like snowshoes hiking or ice fishing and make the most of a fire while talking with friends in a snow-covered meadow. Now I know that I will meet a lot of extraordinary people and I have got many things to do and much to learn about the local culture. I am sure that I will hear incredible stories. This adventure is unique to me and will be full of surprises for sure. Nine months to enjoy the country and Finnish people!

## The project I have in mind

**Chia Hao Chuang (Taiwan)**

Volunteer in Poland

As a curious soul, I am open to trying anything different and being at the crossroad of life. I long for inspirations to push myself forward, thus I thought joining ICYE voluntary service would be a great chance to meet these two desires, which at the same time are my motivations for volunteering.



About half a year ago I picked up my long-lost interest, origami. And I like how a friend named it “conceptual origami”, as I try to integrate origami with global issues, culture and humanity to raise the awareness. So for the very first day that I visited my school, I asked teachers to help me build this project I had in mind. The project is to create an origami butterfly tree which I would like every person in the school to take part one way or another, so that I interact with every of them more and they also get to know me better. The project started in the second week, I asked the art teacher to spare me a couple of lessons to teach children how to make an origami butterfly with their own drawing / design. I happened to see some students struggling at a few steps and some



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students stunned to see what it becomes at the end from a piece of uncut paper.

The second phase followed, now I had collected about 275 butterflies (one from each student), I started to build the tree stem for which I would require a larger space. The school library turned out to be the perfect place. During break time, many students came to read or study, this time more young children would attempt to talk to me even though I only understood minimal Polish and older students tried to translate and help. Some who spoke fluent English were able to ask and hold a longer conversation, such as discussing my culture and my stories.



Six weeks passed, the last phase of this project was to glue butterflies onto the tree branches. Some students came to the library and helped me from time to time and I started to have regular talks in English with older students and gesturing with the young ones. Finally, it was done and it symbolizes that every butterfly is unique as they are, that's what makes society diverse, and it is up to us to choose to embrace or detest. Now it's being displayed in the local cinema hall along with my other origami models to introduce foreign culture and also to attract more people and hold events in the future.

Now I've shared my culture, I need to know more about the country where I'll be staying for the coming year. I was lucky to have stayed with a host family, in which the mum was very patient in teaching me Polish as well as sharing Polish cuisine and culture. Thanks to her my Polish improved significantly and I started liking vegetarian Polish dishes. I started calling her my Polish mum while she still wasn't sure if I am from China, Thailand or Taiwan, which to me isn't the most important matter anyway :).

As much as I would like to make every day count, I reached out both in the local community and in Warsaw to find people to play music with and like-minded people to collaborate on other projects. The events I've done so

far include: origami sessions in several institutes, donating an origami model to help raise funds for charity, a presentation in Polish sign language to the deaf community in Warsaw, performing in a senior choir during Christmas, culinary session about Asian food in a vocational school and many more. Every event was a great opportunity for me to immerse myself in the culture, there were a few anecdotes, both bad and good happened, which made me realize how different our perception and the way things work are, and thanks to that they all turn into my inspirations later on.

While writing this article, it's been four months that I've been in Poland. Things that have not changed since the start are my expectation of this service, stay in the country and obstacles (language barrier and the way things work). Things that have changed are I have started to speak Polish with people, eat potatoes every day and every meal, and interact more often with all the people around me.

## Hej Hej Denmark

**Isabella Hedly (USA)**  
Volunteer in Denmark

When I originally left the United States, my motivation for volunteering was mostly focused on me: I wanted to learn another language, I wanted to experience another culture, and I wanted a break before I started university. My only motivation for volunteering instead of traveling was the fact that I had enjoyed the volunteering I did in high school and I wanted to feel like I was making a difference abroad. While it feels selfish now that my original motivation to volunteer abroad was mainly focused on me, being abroad caused me to learn that now I want to volunteer more because I made relationships in Denmark, I had wonderful experiences, and I felt like I created a difference.



One of my favorite parts of my time in Denmark was the relationships that I formed over here. The closest relationship I formed was with my host family as they truly took me in and made me a part of their family. In only six months, I gained a second set of parents, three sisters, and a brother that I can't wait to visit again. I also made friends with the other volunteers over there, both the other international volunteers, and the Danish volunteers on the ground. We all bonded over the horror of our first week in Denmark and it blossomed into friendships that culminated in us celebrating our last weekend there together, and the promise to visit each other when we are all home. Finally, I bonded with both the students and my coworkers at my school. I enjoyed every moment with my coworkers as we gossiped before class started, and I loved the thousand hugs that I got from the students and the way the first graders ran down the hall screaming my name. At the end of my time, I had formed so many relationships to keep up when I get home, and this inspires me to want to continue volunteering abroad so I can form new relationships that are just as wonderful as these are.



Something else I enjoyed in Denmark were the wonderful experiences I have had there. From the moment I walked off the plane I had so many lovely experiences with the other volunteers, my host family, and the students at the school. I loved all of the events that I went to with the other volunteers, like the Christmas party that turned into a Latin party, as every experience was filled with laughter and lots of memories. I also enjoyed all the time with my host family; whether we were exploring

Legoland in the pouring rain or playing yet another game of 500, every experience with them was amazing and I will remember every experience with them for a long time. Finally, I loved each and every experience shared with the students at Stouby Skole. One of my favorite experiences with them was going ice skating with the fourth and sixth graders; we spent the whole day laughing as we all fell down over and over again; one student fell down over 40 times in the hour! That day was just one of the many wonderful experiences with the students that I will treasure. I just had so many lovely experiences while volunteering abroad that I never would have had if I wasn't volunteering and if I wasn't living with my host family, and that inspires me to want to volunteer more so I can continue having lovely experiences.

Thirdly, I really enjoyed feeling like I made a difference during my time as a volunteer in Denmark. I mainly felt like I made a difference in the lives of some of the students at my school. At the beginning of my time in Denmark, I felt slightly disconnected from some of the students at the school because of the language difference, but by the end of my stay I felt like I really connected with the students and that they appreciated me. My main connection was with the first graders as they were my first class and they got cake from me every week, and I felt like I made a difference for them when they all made me drawings for my last day and they text me now that I am gone. I also felt like I made a difference in the lives of my host family, and they made a difference in mine. In the beginning, I struggled to connect with the kids because of the language barrier, but by the end I felt like I was part of the family as we all played cards together, watched TV together, and I did the younger girls' hair and makeup. When it came time for me to leave I realized that they had made a difference in my life as I missed them, and I realized I had made a difference in their lives as the girls messaged me two days after I left and told me how much they missed me. At the end of my stay, I realized how much I loved feeling like I made a difference, and that makes me want to continue volunteering so I can continue feeling like I'm making a difference elsewhere. Overall, after living in another country for six months and volunteering abroad, I learned that I want to continue volunteering because I like the relationships it creates, the experiences that come about, and the feeling of making a difference.

Now that my time volunteering abroad Denmark is finished, I can say that I am so glad I had this experience as I am inspired to continue volunteering, I learned to be more self-confident, and I gained a better appreciation for the subtle nuances of different cultures. The best part of my experience in Denmark is the fact that I am bitten by both a travel and volunteering bug as I am already

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planning another experience abroad to volunteer because I loved my time in Denmark so much. I think that this is great because it will allow me to continue enriching my life in the future. I also appreciate my time abroad because it taught me to be more self-confident. At the beginning of my time in Denmark, I was very shy and I didn't like to talk much, but after meeting lots of new people and successfully tackling a new culture and a new language, I feel much more confident in myself. This is an invaluable skill for me and I am so grateful to have learned it.

Finally, I gained a greater appreciation for the subtle nuances of different cultures by getting an in-depth view of the Danish culture. This was shown to me in learning why the Danes act certain ways, and this is useful for having a greater understanding of other cultures and being more open-minded. Overall, I am grateful that I have had the chance to experience volunteering in Denmark for six months as I have come out of it a better person and I know I will continue to volunteer in the future.

## Travel diaries from a Winter Wonderland

**Simona Prisciandaro (Italy)**  
Volunteer in Russia

My name is Simona, I'm from Italy and I'm currently doing my EVS in Samara, Russia. I studied Russian at University for 5 years in my country and after I graduated from grad school, I knew I wanted to spend some time in Russia to practice the language and really get to know the Russian culture. At the same time, I was bored of only going to Russia to attend language courses and I wanted to try something different, test my own skills in a new environment, help people who need it and make a difference in the local community. What better way to achieve all of this than to become a volunteer? During my last year at University, I had already volunteered at an organisation that helps blind people, and I had loved every aspect of that experience, especially how rewarding it was and how useful it made me feel. So I knew that becoming a volunteer in Russia would be the perfect way to combine my need to get some language practice and my desire to be socially involved.

When I started doing my research and found out about the chance to volunteer in a Waldorf Kindergarten in Samara, I sent my application right away. I had worked with kids in the past, but infrequently and never in a kindergarten, so I liked the idea of trying something new,

and from what I could find online Samara looked like such a beautiful city!

When I arrived in Samara, my mentor Mia was waiting for me at the airport, ready to take me to my host family. I love that each volunteer is assigned a mentor, a local who can help you especially in those crucial first days, when you don't know your way around the city and you have so many things to take care of and documents to sign. My host family was very welcoming and I quickly bonded with Irina, my host mother, who showed me around the city and cooked for me some of the best Russian meals I've ever tasted.



Two weeks after my arrival in Samara and the on-arrival training in Vladimir, I finally started volunteering in my kindergarten. In a Waldorf kindergarten, kids aren't taught how to read and write, but they learn a lot of useful manual skills. Every day of the week, us teachers organize a different workshop: on Monday the kids will learn the basics of gardening, on Tuesday they'll bake cookies, on Wednesday they'll paint, and so on. We let them express themselves without suppressing their creativity, through games, drawings, musical instruments and sometimes theatre plays. Every day we also dedicate one hour to physical activities and we let the kids go out to play in the yard. Right now, it's winter and the yard is covered in snow, but of course snow doesn't stop Russian children, who would spend the whole day outside if they could.

My usual day in the kindergarten starts at 8 am with games, a healthy breakfast and then some workshops like making wax candles or creating wooden toys. After the kids tidy up with some help from the adults, they get dressed to play in the snow. This is usually when I stay inside to do a few chores and prepare the afternoon activities. Once the kids come back from the yard, hair



matted with sweat and little hands red and frozen, we help them get out of their wet clothes and into warm ones. While an assistant sets the table, I sit with the kids in a circle while another teacher starts reading a fairy tale. Afterwards, it's time for lunch and a nap. I usually leave at around 2pm while the kids are sleeping, but I know that once they wake up there will be a snack waiting for them on the table, along with the last games of the day before their parents come take them home.

Right now, I'm three months into my EVS and loving every moment of it. I love the kids in the kindergarten, my host family, my new friends from all over Europe who volunteer with me, I like Samara and I'm especially in love with the Russian winter. Even though the temperature can drop to -30°C and sometimes waiting for the bus in the middle of a snow blizzard feels like torture, I don't think anyone could ever take a look at the winter scenery in Russia and not have their breath taken away. There's something magical and fairy tale-like in walking through a park where everything's frozen and the only sound that can be heard is your own footsteps as the snow crunches under your boots.

I'm grateful for this opportunity that's allowing me to learn a new language, meet new people, learn about a different culture and most importantly test myself in a completely different environment that forces me to be open-minded and think outside the box. If the beginning is anything to go by, the next 3 months in Samara will be just as exciting, and I'm sure I'll be able to travel around Russia and discover even more of this beautiful, vast country that I love so much.

### In the air to the unknown

**Matthew Cotterill (New Zealand)**  
Volunteer in Denmark

My journey to Denmark started at the Auckland International Airport. Leaving everything behind for a year had been harder than I thought, and the ensuing two days of travel gave me a lot of time to wonder if I would regret leaving. I landed in Copenhagen on a sunny afternoon and the culture shock was instant. From the language, to the money, even the signs were in another language, something I hadn't thought of before this trip began. The first week has been one of the hardest weeks I've experienced, but it also taught me that I was stronger than I thought.

I had trouble fitting in at first, being shy and introverted didn't help either. Most of my doubts disappeared after the first couple of weeks volunteering in the school.

Teachers and students alike asked me plenty of questions and made me feel very welcome. Even when I am having a bad day, I enjoy going to the school. Between all the hugs and friendly conversation, I always end the day with a better outlook than when I started. The teachers always ask for my input and encourage me to help with organising lessons or teaching the kids something about my home country, New Zealand.

Initially coming all this way to Denmark had been for admittedly selfish reasons. I wanted a chance to sort my own life out and get away from the stresses I had been dealing with. But, I also wanted to see the world and immerse myself in a new culture. I've now to come realise I'm here for different reasons. I've fallen in love with the people, the culture and even the food. Every day here makes Denmark feel more and more like home. Although, I am excited to see my family again, the people in this small community I'm a part of, has made it feel like a new home, a second family. The relationships I've built here, have become lifelong ones, and I have learnt so much from each and every person I meet.

I have learnt not only a lot about myself but also about Denmark and its people. In the six months I've been here, I have become comfortable in my own skin, which has led to a boost in self-confidence. Speaking in front of people has always been a challenge for me but coming here has changed all that. I'm encouraged when I speak or try to speak Danish. Volunteering has quickly become a big part of my life and I look forward to continuing with volunteer work when this trip is over.

With still half a year left, I know I still have a lot to learn and even more to experience. This whole experience has been incredible, making extraordinary memories and friends along the way. This trip has meant the world to me and I would encourage everyone to volunteer once in their lives. It has completely changed my outlook on life and definitely helped shape me into a better person.



## 2019 : ICYE's 70th Anniversary – Global Events

ICYE turned 70 this year and to celebrate our anniversary we have planned a few global events.

**Tell a Life-changing ICYE Tale:** a writing competition with two award categories.

**The first award** is open to all ICYE alumni and calls for short ICYE short stories narrating a unique, moving, humorous or life-changing volunteering experience. The winner will be invited to attend ICYE's anniversary celebrations at its General Assembly in Vietnam in November 2019.

**The second award** is open to the general public and calls for short stories that narrate fictional experience of volunteering in a country abroad. The award offer a free flight ticket and all expenses paid volunteering experience in one of ICYE 40 volunteering countries (the country will be announced later together with submission and selection criteria).

The competition will open from 2nd May - 15th July 2019.

**Best Of ICYE "Worlds of Experience":** a special edition of the ICYE Federation newsletter will present a selection of the best articles by volunteers from the ICYE Newsletter "Worlds of Experience" from its first issue in published in February 2003 to the very last issue of February 2019. The Best Of will be published in July in 2019 and the print version available in November 2019.

**Celebrations at the 31st ICYE General Assembly:** a public event in central Vietnam with local youth and 70th anniversary party will be the final events of the anniversary year.

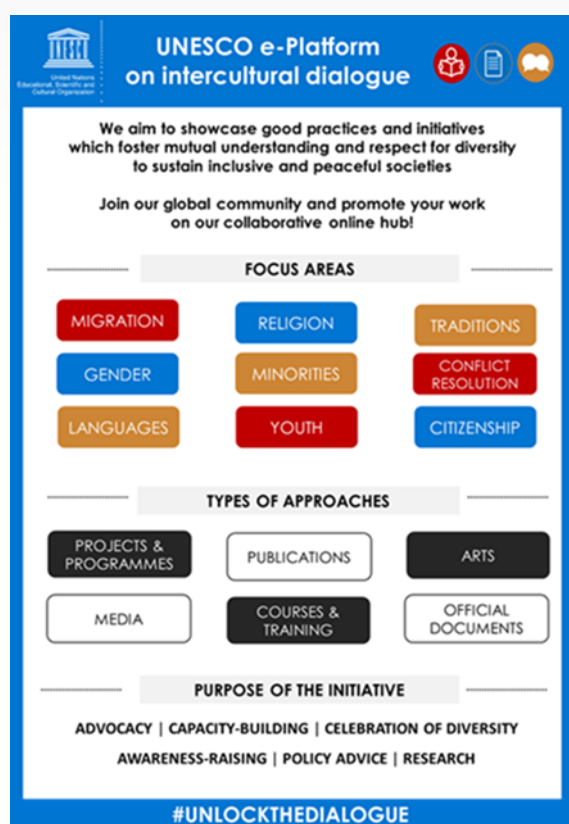
Look out for more information about our anniversary events on the ICYE Federation website and Facebook and Instagram.



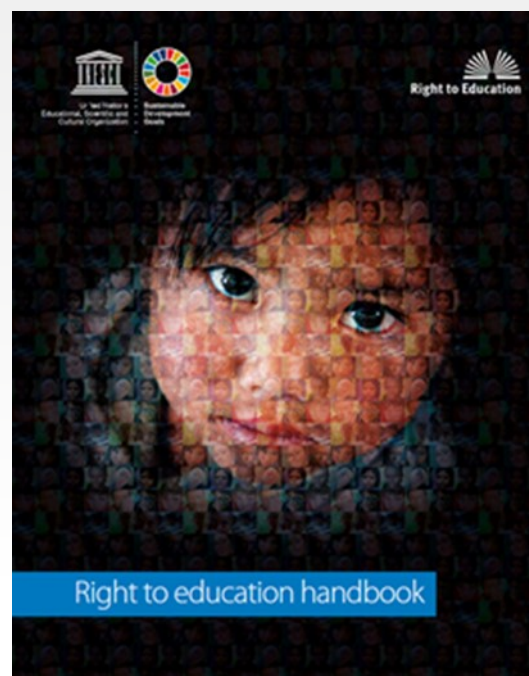


## NEW UNESCO e-Platform on intercultural dialogue!

Since 1945, UNESCO has been strongly committed to building bridges across diversity through dialogue and mutual understanding. This vision is shared all over the world, with individuals and organizations advancing concrete actions to mobilize intercultural dialogue for sustainable development and peace. More than ever, UNESCO is determined to **connect** these stakeholders and **promote** their good practices and initiatives, and to this end has recently created a **new UNESCO e-Platform on intercultural dialogue!** Read more [here](#).



## UNESCO - Right to education handbook and digital campaign #RightToEducation



[This publication](#) represents a landmark to overcome inclusion barriers and making the right to education a reality. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (link is external) marks its 70th year, UNESCO is launching a digital campaign on the #RightToEducation, a right that is at the core of its global mission to ensure equal access to quality education. Through a series of videos, animations, visuals, interviews and stories, the UNESCO campaign - running from 15 October to 18 December 2018 - will unpack the legal significance of the right to education and the major challenges that are blocking its path. Read more [here](#).



### Human Rights Watch - World Report 2019

World Report 2019 is Human Rights Watch's 29th annual review of human rights practices around the globe. It summarizes key human rights issues in more than 100 countries and territories worldwide, drawing on events from late 2017 through November 2018.

In his keynote essay, "World's Autocrats Face Rising Resistance," Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth argues that while autocrats and rights abusers often captured headlines in 2018, rights defenders pushed back and gained strength in unexpected ways. Read more [here](#).



### Peer learning on validation of transversal skills through volunteering

The [LLLPlatform](#) and the [European Volunteer Centre](#) with the support of [Cedefop](#) organised a [peer learning activity](#) in Brussels in the framework of the European Qualifications Advisory Group. Around **50 participants** from NGOs, European institutions, national governments, practitioners and research centres gathered to discuss how to strengthen the conceptual basis of the **validation of transversal and soft skills** acquired through non-formal learning, particularly through volunteering, and how to further cooperate. Read more [here](#).

