

Do young community service volunteers follow the same paths as other young people?



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Since it was set up in 2010, the voluntary community service scheme has become more diversified, with regard to both its objectives and the uses made of it. Analysis of its role in young people's education-to-work transition reveals the importance of the stage in individual trajectories at which young people volunteer, of their level of qualification and of the type of education and training they have undergone. Carried out on the initiative of the Agency for Community Service and drawing on the *Génération 2017* survey, a study by Céreq adds to our knowledge of the young volunteers and provides the basis for comparing their education-to-employment trajectories with those of the other young people in their cohort.



**YOUNG
YOUTH MEASURE
EDUCATION-TO-WORK
TRANSITION
EDUCATION-TO-EM-
PLOYMENT
TRAJECTORY
GÉNÉRATION 2017
SURVEY**

Génération


* TUC • Travaux d'utilité collective/Community work

** EIL • Emploi d'intérêt local/Local community service

In the last ten years or so, the community service scheme (cf. Box 1) has acquired a particular place in both public youth policies and in the ways young people manage their lives. The scheme is a composite one, made up of various constituent elements; it is based primarily on the principle of commitment and is more or less directly linked to certain youth employment policies of general interest (TUC*, EIL**) that prioritise the goals of citizenship and social cohesion. The community service scheme is also linked to remediation policies on early school leaving. For their part, the young volunteers get involved in order to build their career plans or take advantage of this experience in order to enter the labour market.

In this respect, therefore, the community service scheme may constitute a resource for certain groups facing difficulties in effecting the transition from school to work, due notably to their educational trajectory or place of residence. Consequently, it may function rather like a labour market integration programme or other support measure, as the following results will substantiate.

The number of young volunteers has increased continually since the scheme was launched in 2010, rising from 2,900 in 2010 to 55,000 in 2016 and then to 145,000 in 2021. Of the young people who left initial education in 2017, almost one in ten (9%) completed a community service assignment while in education or during the first three years of their working lives. This is the initial result from a study carried out at the request of the Agency for Community Service that aimed to expand our knowledge of the young volunteer population, of their education-to-employment trajectories and of any specific characteristics they might have; the study drew on Céreq's *Génération 2017* survey, which is representative of those leaving education at national level (cf. Box 2). Certain questions in the

survey funded by the Agency enable us to situate the assignment precisely within the young volunteers' educational or career trajectories and thus to assess the role that community service plays in their education-to-employment trajectories. This augments the follow-up data generally collected six months after the end of an assignment and facilitates comparison with the young people whose trajectories do not include a community service assignment.

Differing positions and uses in individual trajectories

Cross-referencing levels of education with the timing of community service assignments shows that the position of the assignments in individual trajectories varies, which leads us to suspect that the various categories of young people use the scheme in different ways (cf. Figure 3). While 22% of the young people carried out their assignments during their initial education, one third started theirs during the six months after they had left education and 45% did theirs at a later stage. The higher the level of qualification, the earlier the community service assignment appears in their life trajectories (in particular, in the case of graduates, during their time in higher education).

The situation preceding the start of the community service also varied depending on the level of education: the more highly qualified were more likely to volunteer after a period of employment or study (26% and 35% of those with a qualification requiring 5 or more years' post-secondary education volunteered for community service, compared with 11% and 20% of those educated only to CAP level or lower). For the least qualified, conversely, community service tended to follow a period of unemployment or another situation, such as inactivity, holiday etc. These results are consistent

1 Community service

The community service scheme gives all young people aged between 16 and 25, or as old as 30 for those with a handicap, an opportunity to complete a 6 to 12-month assignment in the fields that have been designated national priorities: social cohesion, health, education for all, culture and leisure, sport, environment, memory and citizenship, international development and humanitarian action, humanitarian emergency intervention and European citizenship. Without special dispensation, a young person may not carry out more than a single complete assignment, during or after their education.

A very diverse range of organisations can offer assignments: government departments, regional authorities, public undertakings or any non-profit body, i.e. voluntary associations (except political or religious associations), foundations, federations, NGOs or cooperatives. The Community Service Agency authorises the organisations and certifies that they operate in the general interest.

The weekly working time for an assignment is between 24 and 35 hours. Since 1 July 2022, the community service allowance has been set at 600.94 euros for assignments carried out in France. The contract specifies the content of the assignment. Young volunteers are supported by a tutor who, when the assignment has been completed, certifies the skills deployed and acquired in an assessment report (bilan nominatif). These skills can be added to the Diaporiente platform (a public service maintained by the Ministry of Labour in order to facilitate vocational guidance).

with the motivations cited by the young people [1]: for the least well qualified, who often find it more difficult to access employment, the primary aim was to acquire work experience and a source of income, while the public interest was frequently mentioned by the more highly qualified [2].

Community service: one way of overcoming a disrupted education

The *Génération* survey can be used to reveal the particular connections between completion of a community service assignment and educational trajectories. The young volunteers turn out to be less well qualified than the 2017 cohort as a whole. They are more likely to have left education without qualifications, and only 34% of them have higher education qualifications (cf. Table 4).

Those young people whose education had had little or no vocational content had a greater propensity to carry out a community service assignment. This applies particularly to holders of the general baccalauréat and graduates of general degree programmes. On the other hand, vocational programmes, regardless of their level, do not predispose those who take them to volunteer for community service, and the more the level of education or training rises, the less likely young people are to volunteer. While there were more young volunteers with backgrounds in specialisms

connected to the areas covered by the community service scheme, the decision to undertake an assignment was determined more by whether or not the volunteers had followed a vocational pathway.

Moreover, analysis of the educational careers shows that a “disrupted education” (repeating a year, qualification not awarded at the end of education), and in particular the fact of having been forced to leave education altogether, meant a young person was more likely to volunteer. In such cases, the role of community service is to remediate or prolong an unfinished educational career.

Leavers from secondary and higher education who had undertaken community service were more likely than others with the same profiles to return to their education or training three years after the end of their initial education (cf. Table 5). This highlights the impact that the scheme can have on young people’s efforts to construct their career plans, whether it helps them to develop an idea further, to discover a new occupation or to find a vocational pathway that sometimes requires a change of educational direction.

Volunteers’ profiles influenced by the nature of the assignments on offer

In the 2017 cohort, more young women than young men volunteered for community service (10% and 7% respectively); this is true regardless of level of education or qualification. This gendered response to the scheme can be understood by reference to its nature, to the fields of activity it covers and the assignments on offer (education, social, culture). Young women have a strong presence in education and training programmes preparing them to “work for others” and are more likely to commit to a scheme that highlights this aspect.

Participation in community service was not socially differentiated to any great extent in the 2017 cohort. Young people from the most modest backgrounds (defined as those having two parents who are manual workers, office/service workers or unemployed) were slightly more likely to undertake community service and to do so after leaving the education system, which can be linked to their level of qualification. Recipients of education support grants were also slightly more likely to volunteer than non-recipients, whether the community service was undertaken before or after they completed their education (10% of grant recipients volunteered for community service, compared with 8% of non-recipients).

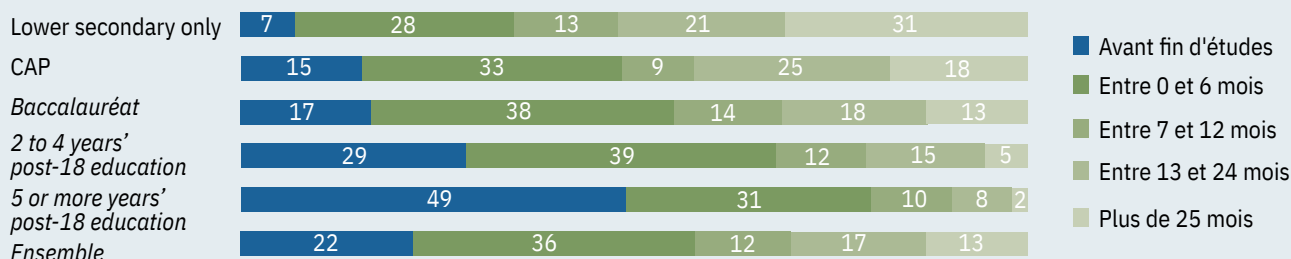
Young people who were living in urban policy priority neighbourhoods when they completed their education were more likely to volunteer for community service than those not living in such areas (12% and 8% respectively), and were more likely to do so after finishing their education. This finding has to be qualified, however, since the distribution of the young volunteers is not entirely homogeneous over the country as a whole and some of the disparities observed can be explained by local contexts in which young people experience greater difficulties in entering the labour market (young volunteers in

2 The data used

The results set out here are drawn from an analysis of the *Génération* 2017 survey. Between the autumn of 2020 and March 2021, as part of its *Génération* survey programme, Céreq questioned 25,000 young people who had left the education system during or at the end of the 2016-2017 academic year. This sample is representative of the 746,000 young people nationwide who left initial education for the first time. The young people were questioned about their educational trajectories and the first three years of their working lives. In this way, the survey aimed to investigate the differences in the conditions under which the young people accessed employment depending on their initial education and various individual characteristics.

The complete study can be consulted on line at <https://www.cereq.fr/service-civique-et-insertion-generation-2017>. Of the 2,000 young people surveyed who stated that they had volunteered for community service, the 220 individuals whose assignments had finished less than six months before the survey reference date (October 2020) were not included in the study of the impact on the education-to-work transition. As a result, all the community service assignments that were undertaken in part during the health crisis were eliminated from the study.

3 The stage in educational and career trajectories when community service was undertaken by level of qualification (in %)



Source: Céreq, *Génération* 2017 survey. Scope: young people who volunteered for community service.

Example: 36% of the young people who volunteered for community service began their assignments between 0 and 6 months after the end of their initial education.

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the overseas *départements* are overrepresented in the volunteer population, for example).

Finally, among those leaving secondary education, the fact of having at least one parent in state employment (fonctionnaire) increased the likelihood of volunteering for community service; this was not the case, however, for higher education graduates.

A favoured route into employment for young people leaving secondary education

Even though community service is not regarded legally as a job, for many it constitutes a stage in their education-to-work transition. Thus for 68% of the young people who volunteered during the first three years of their working lives it served as their first “work” experience and for 18% it even represented the only period that could be likened to employment. This result is further reinforced for the least well qualified (CAP level or lower); 30% of those in this group who volunteered for community service after leaving education did not have any job at all in their first three years.

The results presented above have highlighted the specific characteristics of the young volunteers’ profiles. Now Céreq’s studies show that some of these characteristics influence career trajectories and might therefore help to explain, to a greater extent than experience of community service, the differences observed in labour market integration. In order to bring to light the specific effect of volunteering for community service while taking account of these other characteristics influencing labour market integration, *ceteris paribus* modelling exercises (binary logistic regression models for wages) were undertaken, highlighting the differential effect of community service on

labour market integration depending on the young persons’ profiles and the timing of their community service (see Table 5).

Unlike existing studies on the subject, the data used here make it possible to compare the labour market integration of volunteers leaving initial education with that of their counterparts with no involvement in the scheme. Thus, all characteristics being equal, community service, whether carried out before or after completion of education, facilitates access to employment three years after the end of their education for the young people leaving secondary education, which is not the case for those leaving higher education. For this latter group, the large number of those returning to education after their voluntary service may partly explain why they were less likely to be in employment.

Those young people who volunteered for community service at a later stage were less likely to be in employment in October 2020, which may be explained by the overly short period of time between the end of their assignments and the survey. This situation is linked to the fact that the host organisations do not generally retain the young volunteers once their assignments have been completed: only 10% of the former volunteers were in this situation [3].

In order to understand the differentiated impact of community service by level of qualification, we can seek to identify the most likely situation these young people would have been in during the same period if they had not decided to volunteer for community service. This process of identification is based on a method in which each young volunteer is matched with a non-volunteering “twin” who resembles him or her very strongly. In order to match the two,

4 Information on gender and level of qualification (in %)

		Community service before end of education ¹	Community service after end of education ²	All young people who volunteered ³	Cohort as a whole ⁴
Share of women		54	60	58	51
Level of qualification (% in column)	Lower secondary only	5	18	15	12
	CAP	6	10	9	10
	Baccalauréat	32	44	42	31
	2 to 4 years' post-18 education	27	19	21	24
	5 or more years' post-18 education	30	9	13	23

Source: Céreq, *Génération* 2017 survey. Scope: young people who volunteered for community service : ¹Before the end of their education, ²After the end of their education, ³All volunteers ; ⁴Cohort as a whole. Example: 5% of the young people who volunteered for community service before the end of their initial education left secondary education with lower secondary qualifications only.

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5 Results of the modelling exercises (effect direction) on the indicators after three years of working life (October 2020)

(Reference : no community service)	Probability of being in education or of return to education ¹		Probability of being in work ¹		Probability of being in a permanent job ²		Pay ³	
	Secondary	Higher	Secon-dary	High-er	Second-ary	Higher	Secon-dary	Higher
CS before end of education	=	+	+	=	=	=	-	=
CS between 0 and 12 months	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
CS after 13 or more months	+	+	-	-	-	Insufficient numbers	-	Insufficient numbers

Scope: 1 Cohort as a whole 2 Of the young people in work in October 2020; 3 All the young people in waged work in October 2020. Example: Of the young people with secondary-level qualifications (lower and upper secondary) and with the same characteristics controlled for in the model (cf. report Box 2), the fact of having volunteered for community service increased the probability of being in employment in October 2020.

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Further reading

[1] Q. Francou, A. Ploux-Chillès, *Les volontaires en Service Civique: des parcours de formation et d'insertion variés*. INJEP, Analyses & Synthèses, n° 32, 2020.

[2] G. Houdeville, R. Perrier, C. Suaud, « Sous l'universalité (du service civique) les parcours (des jeunes) », dans *Qualifications et parcours – Qualification des parcours*, Céreq Échanges n°10, 2019.

[3] Q. Francou, *Évaluation du service civique. Résultats de l'enquête sur les parcours et missions des volontaires*, INJEP, Notes & rapports/Rapport d'étude, n°9, 2021.

the survey information on both individuals' initial education, individual characteristics and career trajectories preceding the beginning of community service is compared (cf. report cited in Box 2).

Thus among the leavers from secondary education, while our population of interest was doing their community service, their "twins" were more likely to be unemployed than in work. Conversely, among the higher education graduates, the volunteers' "twins" were more likely to be in work than unemployed. For this latter group, therefore, it would appear that community service was not equivalent to a "normal" job in their career trajectories.

A favoured route into employment for young people leaving secondary education

Three years after completing their education, the employment conditions (pay and access to a permanent job, i.e. an open-ended contract, governmental employment or non-wage job) of the young people who volunteered for community service while in education were close to those of their counterparts who had not volunteered and who were also in employment at that time (the only exception being the slightly lower pay for higher education graduates who had volunteered). This close comparability between these two populations can be explained by the equivalent number of months spent in work. This is not the case, on the other hand, for those young people who completed their community service after leaving education; for this group, the community service constituted an interlude, as it were, in their education-to-work transition, unconnected with either a job or their search for a job. Thus those leaving secondary and higher education who had volunteered after the end of their education enjoyed less favourable employment conditions, in terms of stability of employment and of remuneration, than those who had not volunteered. There is a parallel to be drawn here with the specific nature of the jobs held by the young people who had volunteered: more jobs in the public sector, in voluntary associations and in areas involving "work for others", such as teaching, the cultural sector and health and social work. Thus for the more highly qualified in particular, community

service may seem like a strategy adopted with a view to obtaining jobs in organisations, sectors or occupations in which jobs are more scarce or employment conditions less favourable but which fulfil individual aspirations other than the search for a stable, well-paid job (serving the public interest, having a job that has meaning, finding one's chosen career path, etc.).

— The specificity of this young volunteer population is to have acquired characteristics generally associated with a difficult education-to-work transition (qualifications with little vocational content, disrupted education, living in an overseas département and so on). Nevertheless, when these characteristics are taken into account, some positive effects of the community service scheme become apparent, notably in terms of access to employment in the case of those with secondary education qualifications and a return to education after community service in the case of the volunteer population as a whole. On the other hand, participation in the scheme does not seem to have had a positive influence on employment conditions after three years of the young people's working lives. Might this result be explained in part by specific career plans, oriented towards occupations and sectors in which employment conditions are often less favourable?

This study could be extended and supplemented by data on the actual content of the voluntary service and its link with young volunteer's subsequent career trajectory, the type of host organisation, the skills acquired and any benefits declared by the young volunteers.

The inclusion of community service in the 2020 recovery plan "1 jeune, 1 solution/1 young person, 1 solution", supported by the Ministry of Labour, was a response to political concerns about young people's integration into the labour market in the context of a health crisis. The changes this measure might bring about in volunteers' profiles and in the scheme's impact on labour market trajectories will be assessed when the results of this study are updated with data from the next *Génération 2021* survey.—

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