

Volunteering Why does it matter?

by Gabriella Civico,
Gabriella.civico@eyv2011.eu

There is no Europe without volunteers – they contribute greatly to both social Europe and its growth. Volunteers mirror the diversity of European society with people of all ages, women and men, employees and the unemployed, people from different ethnic backgrounds, belief groups and citizens from all nationalities being involved.

However, 7 in 10 people do not volunteer and many people face barriers to volunteering such as a lack of information on how to become involved, time pressure, scarce economic resources and the feeling of not being able to 'afford' to volunteer, a negative image of volunteering stemming from times when volunteering was a rather 'compulsory duty', discrimination, discouraging legal provisions or an absence of a legal status, the lack of protection against risks involved, and visa or other barriers for non-European Union citizens.

Why EYV 2011?

Volunteering is freely given, but not cost free – it needs and deserves targeted support from all stakeholders: volunteer organisations, government at all levels and businesses, as well as an enabling policy environment including a volunteering infrastructure.

While increasing attention has been paid to volunteering in all its forms over recent years in Europe, a comprehensive strategy and an action plan at the European level to promote, recognise, facilitate and support volunteering in order to realise its full potential are still elusive.

The EYV 2011 Alliance supported the Council of Youth Ministers and the European Economic and Social Committee in addressing this failure through a focus on several objectives in the framework of the European Year of Volunteering (EYV 2011).

Awareness-raising

Raising public awareness of the possibilities, scope, value and impact of volunteering in Europe and highlighting its contribution to our communities is essential, along with demonstrating and raising awareness about the need for a volunteering infrastructure at local, regional, national and European levels including a legal framework that foresees a right to participation in society through volunteering for everyone.



Volunteering and policy

Following the 'White Paper on Youth' (2001), volunteering was recognised in 2002 by the EU member states as a key element of youth policy. Whereas various EU activities, programmes and policies tackle volunteering at a European level, these initiatives so far do not take into account the variety of volunteering in Europe. Actions in the field of volunteering at the EU level are restricted to certain age groups and policy areas, neglecting the horizontal nature of volunteering and the relevance of volunteering in solving a variety of political, social and economic challenges that the EU faces today:

Active civic participation

Volunteers engage in their communities, without motivation for financial gain, for the benefit of other individuals and the society as a whole. Volunteering, as an expression of 'Active European Citizenship', was recognised by the European institutions in a number of areas, especially through the Europe for Citizens programme.

Celebration and recognition

Celebrating volunteers and volunteer organisations for their contribution and showcasing good practices and projects involving volunteers help to highlight the value of local volunteer action in building a European identity and working towards a comprehensive EU policy agenda to support, promote and recognise volunteering and its different roles.

European values of solidarity and diversity in practice

Volunteers are the expression of the EU slogan 'United in Diversity' and at a time when the EU lacks a link with its citizens and wants to create more ownership of the European project based on solidarity and mutual understanding, it can no longer ignore the need to create a logical link between voluntary engagement at a local level and the implementation of European values.

Promotion

The aim is the reduction of barriers and discrimination that people face when trying to volunteer, especially migrants and third country nationals and the socially excluded, and encouraging member states to exchange good practice concerning volunteering policies and define common elements of an enabling environment that would allow volunteering to flourish in all European countries.

Economic and social cohesion

The Resolution of the European Parliament (A6-0070/2008) on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion recognises that volunteering makes an important contribution to social integration at the local level and it contributes as well to partnerships which are key for making full use of European regional and structural funds.



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Social inclusion

Volunteering is a tool for the empowerment of all and especially of those that are socially excluded, as it can be a means for citizens to be and feel useful and to re-connect with society. This is highlighted in the Youth Pact, the 'White Paper on Youth' and in the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA) report 'Investing in Youth: From Childhood to Adulthood' but applies equally to all age groups. The World Organisation of the Scouts Movement (WOSM) and its national organisations have carried out a number of projects across Europe on involving and reaching out to minorities, and more generally on being children in difficult circumstances, being from different religious backgrounds, living with disabilities or the Roma. http://www.scout.org/en/information_events/library/diversity

Integration of Migrants

Integration, as a two-way process of mutual accommodation between the migrants and host society, needs tools and instruments that bring people together and that allow them to work on common projects. The number of volunteer initiatives and projects in Europe demonstrates the added value that active participation has in this area and that volunteering is a factor and indicator for the integration of migrants in host communities (CEV INVOLVE project, www.involve-europe.eu (2006)). Volunteers are also involved in programmes for the integration of migrants (labour orientation, training, etc.).

Health and social care

Social services in Europe depend largely on the contribution of volunteers. Studies of voluntary organisations' actions implemented in the EU member states demonstrate that volunteers significantly contribute to the services provided in this sector through: visiting services for socially isolated people and day centres for older people, people with Alzheimer's disease and homes for children in need of special care; coaching activities: supporting and empowering people to take charge of their own lives again (for example 'friendship' courses); organising holidays for people with disabilities and/or chronic diseases; assistance to drug users and prisoners; assistance to people living with HIV/Aids (care, hotlines, counselling, information); assistance to women threatened by domestic and/or gender-related violence.

Active ageing

Older people who become volunteers themselves stay healthy and active for longer and they have opportunities to share their life experience with younger generations. The recent Flash Eurobarometer 247 survey, conducted in September 2008, shows that 73% of older respondents indicated that they would consider participating in community and volunteer work after retirement. Also 44% of those questioned said that they had already planned or were planning to do volunteer work. Volunteering provides great potential for the EU when it comes to active ageing and demographic change. This issue was first raised during the Intergenerational Solidarity for Cohesive and Sustainable Societies conference during the Slovenian Presidency (27-29 April 2008) and then as one of the main topics of the 2nd European Demography Forum held in Brussels in November 2008.



Maintaining and restoring family links

Volunteers contribute significantly to an enhanced satisfaction with family life and a proper work balance as they often operate in areas such as childcare and care of older generations, which are perceived by many Europeans as the main difficulties in family life (Flash Eurobarometer 247, 'Difficulties in daily life faced by families'). Volunteers also help people to find family members they have lost because of wars, conflict and disasters, and support people who have a missing family member or friend.

Tolerance, peace building, conflict resolution and reconciliation of divided societies

Voluntary activities exercised together by the local inhabitants for the benefit of their communities increase tolerance and intercultural skills, reduce racism and prejudice, contribute to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, empower people to be active in their communities' recovery and reconnect them with the societies in which they live.

Lifelong learning

Volunteering contributes to personal development and to the learning of skills and competences that enhance employability. Volunteering is, thus, part of the Lisbon strategy towards a more competitive European labour market, through the opportunities that arise when people volunteer. This was confirmed in, for example, the European Commission communication 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality' (COM (2001) 678 final, Brussels), Resolution of the Council on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field (2006/C 168/01) and a number of the European Youth Forum's reports and projects. The non-formal education sector in Europe could not continue as we know it without the tireless contribution of volunteer youth leaders and educators.

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WITHOUT
VOLUNTEERING



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Sport

Volunteers are the most important and indispensable resource of sport clubs and volunteering in sport constitutes the largest voluntary, non-governmental organisation activity throughout Europe. According to the European Non-governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO), the 'labour force' of sport clubs consists of 86% volunteers and only 14% paid staff! EYV 2011 Alliance members are disappointed to see that while the impact of volunteering in sport on EU policies was recognised in the 'White Paper on Sport' (COM (2007) 391 final) and in the European Commission Action Plan 'Pierre de Coubertin' SEC (2007) 934, which calls for promoting volunteering and active citizenship through sport, the recent communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'Developing the European Dimension in Sport' (COM(2011) 12 final) failed to include concrete actions to tackle the challenges related to the work of non-profit, volunteer-based sports organisations or to promote better recognition for voluntary work in sport.

Civil protection

Volunteers are indispensable for disaster responses and preparedness activities, first aid services, and education, as well as in relief services such as ambulances, medical help, psycho-social support and emergency responses.

Development

Volunteers engage in humanitarian missions, provide assistance to refugees (humanitarian assistance, reception centres including legal counselling, health services, mental health care, etc.). Many development policies are practically impossible to implement without the contributions of local and international volunteers. More than 6 000 volunteers are active every year in United Nation missions alone. Article 188 of the Lisbon Treaty foresees for the EU 'to establish a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union' in the form of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Corporate (employee) volunteering schemes are increasingly seen by European companies as a means to connect with society, invest time and resources in their communities and to invest their CSR policies with concrete meaning. The European Parliament Resolution of 13 March 2007 on corporate social responsibility: a new partnership (2006/2133(INI)) underlines the importance of projects involving employee community engagement and calls on the European Commission to fulfil its commitment to developing policies that encourage the staff of EU institutions to undertake voluntary community engagement. In the communication from the Commission on implementing the partnership for growth and jobs: making Europe a pole of excellence on corporate social responsibility (COM (2006) 136 final), the European Commission commits to strengthening its policy of promoting the voluntary and innovative efforts of companies in terms of CSR. This still seems to be unfulfilled, but the EYV 2011 Alliance members look forward to the forthcoming European Commission communication on CSR which will hopefully take this issue into account.

Economic growth

The report of the Institute for Volunteering Research, 'Volunteering works', shows that for every euro organisations spent on supporting volunteers, they received an average return worth between 3 to 8 euros. Moreover, the Comparative Non-Profit Sector project revealed that the voluntary sector contributes an estimated 2 to 7% to the GDP of our national economies. The recent European Commission study on 'Volunteering in the EU' (February 2011) has served to show that with current data and instruments it is impossible to properly analyse the economic value or to raise awareness of policy makers or funders about the contribution that volunteers make to our economies in order to create evidence-based volunteering

policies. EYV 2011 Alliance members are calling for a commonly agreed method to measure volunteering across the EU in order to make coherent evidence-based policy making on volunteering a reality.

The EYV 2011 Alliance members are using the grant received from the European Commission together with co-funding from the 14 Steering Group Member Organisations and from Bosch Stiftung and Telefonica Foundation to work on the European Policy Agenda on Volunteering which will serve as a road map towards the creation of an enabling environment for volunteering across Europe. This agenda aims to anchor and mainstream volunteering in policy making and EYV 2011 is proving to be a turning point in the work towards a proactive policy plan to promote active citizenship. Potential legacies of EYV 2011 could be the creation of an ongoing forum for national governments to compare their policies and to exchange their experiences in promoting 'volunteering-friendly policies' and a horizontal approach to policy making that means that no policy shall be designed in areas affecting voluntary activities without assessing its impact on them. Stronger mechanisms at EU and national levels to support organisations and infrastructures that provide volunteering opportunities, both civil society or governmental initiatives, could be another element of the legacy along with a catalogue of criteria for good practices in promoting volunteering at different levels of governance.

The EYV 2011 Alliance, through its six working groups and wide consultation and engagement with stakeholders, looks forward to a post-EYV 2011 Europe with a more empowering volunteering environment and urges policy makers and stakeholders at all levels to participate in the development of the European Policy Agenda on Volunteering which will lead to an even greater contribution from volunteers and their organisations to a cohesive and integrated Europe that celebrates European diversity, of which volunteers are the reflection.

