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# INFORMATION SHEET

## VOLUNTEERING OF YOUNG PEOPLE

### BELGIUM (FLANDERS)



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# 1. Volunteering of young people in Belgium (Flanders)

*Are there official national/regional recommendations (policies) concerning volunteering of young people?*

One of the main accomplishments is the Act on the rights of volunteers (2005), as it provides volunteers with a proper legal position. The Act of 27/12/2005, containing various provisions, made substantial changes to the original Bill of 3 July 2005. This resulted in a consolidated version. The Act has been applicable since 1 August 2006. In order to promote co-operation between associations covering the different spheres of social life (including the youth sector) and the authorities, a Charter was signed between the Flemish government and the "Verenigde Verenigingen" (a partnership of a large number of associations). The Charter serves as a solid basis for developing cooperation between associations of different spheres of social life and the authorities on the grounds of shared values and mutual respect. In 2007, an information campaign was launched to inform volunteers about the consequences of the federal Act for their activities. In addition, a project was set up in 2007 with the aim to provide clear information to volunteers with regard to their obligations of professional secrecy and client confidentiality.<sup>1</sup>

Volunteer work for young people is encouraged by the Act of 14 February 2003, supporting and stimulating municipal, inter-municipal and provincial youth policy and youth work policy as amended by the Act of 23 December 2005 and the Act of 29 March 2002 on Flemish youth policy. These Acts stress the promotion of youth work, experiential projects and international youth work. In 2010, the Flemish government adopted the thirteenth Flemish Youth Policy Plan as proposed by the Minister for Youth. With regard to voluntary activities in youth work, the Youth Policy Plan contains the following objective: "The Flemish government encourages voluntary work in the youth sector." In order to facilitate voluntary work in a permanent and effective way, the Flemish government commits itself to the UN objectives with regard to voluntary work, these are included in the EU resolution from 14-02-2002 concerning the added value of youth voluntary work, approved under Belgian EU chairmanship. The European Union's aims in relation to voluntary work, including the aims that all levels of voluntary activities are developed, simplified, encouraged and recognised, were concretised by the Flemish government. The 2011-2014 Flemish Youth Policy Plan states that Steunpunt Jeugd (Youth Support Centre) and other relevant actors pay attention to youth work in the framework of their mission with the aim of familiarising young people with voluntary work, providing them with information about concrete opportunities for performing voluntary work, giving them advice and promoting a positive image of voluntary work. In the 2011-2014 Flemish Youth Policy Plan it is also stated that the Flemish government supports training opportunities for young volunteers and their mentors in order to improve the quality of voluntary activities and their organisational framework.

On 3 September 2010, a legislative bill was adopted on the introduction of a social insurance regime for voluntary service for young people. According to the promoter of the bill, a new type of volunteer work should be introduced alongside the existing one. Indeed, the *European Voluntary Service and the Voluntary Service for Development Cooperation* tend to be highly selective. Moreover, the services are often performed abroad, and not all volunteers want this. In addition, people engaging in volunteer work under the Act of 3 July 2005 find it hard to devote themselves fulltime to this work, since it provides no income or any other financial support apart from the reimbursement of expenses incurred; moreover, they may also lose their social benefits. That is why the promoter of the bill would like to introduce a voluntary service which provides volunteers with a social security regime that would enable them to devote themselves fulltime to tasks of general utility for a period of six up to twelve months. People aged between 18 and 25 will qualify for this voluntary service. They will perform tasks of general utility in the areas of solidarity, culture, the environment and quality of life, as well as in public services and abroad.<sup>11</sup>

*Is volunteering usually paid? No*

No, volunteers can never be remunerated for their work, since paid labour requires compliance with all obligations with regard to employment law, social security, employer's contributions, industrial accidents insurances, etc.<sup>III</sup>

*Is there any National voluntary service? Yes*

- 1) **The Junior Programme of the Belgian Development Agency:** the Junior Programme was created in 2006 to offer young people a first professional experience in development cooperation. Guided by a coach, young people work for minimum 1 year and maximum 2 years in a Belgian Technical Cooperation project or in a project run by a Belgian non-governmental organisation. The aim of this programme is to respond to young people's sense of solidarity by providing a structure and appropriate coaching in which they can put their services at the disposal of developing countries.<sup>IV</sup> Website: <http://www.btcctb.org/nl/news/vrijwillige-dienst-wordt-juniorprogramma>
- 2) **Voluntary service for young people.** For more information, see <http://www.platform-burgerdienst.be>

*What is the legal / financial (fiscal) / social security status of volunteers ?*

Legal status: In terms of legal status, a vote was taken on the Act on the rights of volunteers on 3 July 2005, this was then published in the Belgian Official Gazette on 29 August 2005. Thereafter, the federal Bill of 8/05/06 DOC 2496/001 amending the Act of 3 July 2005 was unanimously passed by the House of Representatives on 8 June 2006. The Act has been effective since 1 August 2006. In this Act on the rights of volunteers, volunteer work in Belgium is described as follows: "Volunteering is a non-compulsory activity which is unsalaried and accomplished to the benefit of third parties, set up by an organisation, and which is not carried out by the same person and for the same organisation in the framework of a contract of employment, a contract of service or permanent appointment." Volunteering is thus distinguished from professional activity (paid), voluntary involvement (unorganised) and paid voluntary involvement (a remuneration exceeding the costs). Liability, insurance, fees for volunteers are now legally defined, as is the ratio between volunteer work, labour and social security. The regulation on liability and insurances has been effective since 1 January 2007. There is an act that recognises and subsidises autonomous voluntary work for the welfare and health sector. Here, the Flemish Government's Resolution of 30 May 2008 concerning execution of the act of 23 March 1994 relating to organised voluntary work in the welfare and health sector applies. This Resolution contains a few modifications in relation to the earlier regulations: from now on, recognition will be for an indeterminate period (not renewable on a five year basis) and grants do not need to be requested annually (the administration itself will decide if work is being carried out around subsidised subjects on the basis of annual reports). Voluntary organisations now receive a set subsidy instead of a subsidy based on the presentation of proven costs.<sup>V</sup>

Financial status<sup>V</sup>: Volunteers can never be remunerated for their work, but the expenses incurred by volunteers can be reimbursed. Volunteers can obtain fixed compensation or real compensation for costs incurred. Cost reimbursement is exempt from taxes and from paying social security contributions. Organisations are, however, not obliged to provide a payment but must inform the volunteer of this matter. Both payments cannot be combined for one volunteer. If the volunteer prefers the repayment of real costs, he has to prove the reality and amount of these costs by means of documents with evidential value. If the volunteer prefers a fixed compensation, the amount of expenses actually incurred does not have to be proved if the total amount of allowances received does not exceed € 30.22 per day or € 120872 per year (2009 → 2010). However, proof has to be provided for allowances exceeding the aforementioned amounts. The maximum kilometre compensation for work trips with your own vehicle, motorbike or scooter amounts to €

0,3178/km (from 1.07.2010 until 30.06.2011) with a maximum of 2000 km a year and each organisation decides who receives this kilometre based reimbursement. These costs must be proven by the volunteer.

Social protection<sup>V</sup>: *The ban on child labour* permits voluntary work from the age of 16. Children younger than 16 cannot be active as a volunteer (unless they turn 16 in the same calendar year), except if it concerns 'activities with a pedagogic or educational' character. Some organisations further define the minimum age on the grounds of the 'target group', 'the sensitivity of the material', the responsibility that is required and so on .

*The Act on the rights of volunteers (2005)* contains provisions that refer to the legal status and social protection of volunteers. In principle, liability for damage caused to third parties by a volunteer lies with the organisation (= immunity principle). If deceit, gross negligence or recurrent minor faults are involved, the volunteer him/herself can be held accountable. In the context of international volunteering, the provisions of international private law are applicable. The type of organisation in which the volunteer is active, also plays a role in the immunity principle: for organisations in which volunteers do not have immunity (small spontaneous initiatives), the rules of common law apply. So, a volunteer may be held personally liable in civil proceedings for errors he/she commits during volunteering activities for these associations. Liability does not apply to the so-called contractual liability. The Act is silent on the subject of criminal liability. A volunteer who commits a violation of the Penal Code, may be held individually liable for this. The Act makes insurance compulsory for every organisation. Currently, an organisation is only obliged to enter into an insurance policy covering civil liability which is not included in the contract. Compulsory insurance is only applicable to organisations in which volunteers are immune under the Act.

Social benefits<sup>V</sup>: People living on social security benefits (unemployment benefit, incapacity for work benefit, income support) are allowed to do volunteer work and keep their allowance if they fulfil certain requirements (voluntary work is reported or permitted). Voluntary work in itself does not create any rights to social security. This concerns activities during free time and are not put on a par with work because no social contributions will be paid. Volunteers do not lose the right to receive family benefit. There is no difference between younger and older unemployed people as far as the legal status of the volunteer is concerned. Unemployed people are entitled to unemployment benefits, people taking a leave of absence who are receiving benefits and school-leavers receiving temporary benefits are allowed to do volunteer work, provided that they report this in writing to the unemployment agency of the National Employment Office (RVA – Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening). The request can only be rejected if the RVA is able to prove that the applicant wants to do volunteer work which is not officially defined, that the activity cannot be considered as voluntary due to its nature, volume or frequency or that the unemployed person becomes less available to the labour market due to volunteer work. The onus of proof lies with the RVA, which is an important achievement of the new law passed in 2005. Formerly, the onus of proof fell on the candidate volunteer him/herself. If young people who are unfit for work and who receive disability allowance, want to take up voluntary work, the medical consultant must establish whether the voluntary work is "compatible" with the health situation of the candidate-volunteer who, as a result of an illness, disability or pregnancy, cannot perform a paid job. This is then confirmed in writing. Obtaining this recommendation is the responsibility of the volunteer. Young people who receive a living allowance must inform their welfare officer at the OCMW (Public Centre for Social Welfare) in advance about the fact that they are going to be doing voluntary work. Disabled young people who receive benefits from the FOD Social Security can take up voluntary work without having to perform any further formalities. Young people with a replacement income can receive a payment to cover the costs of voluntary work without risking reduced benefits as long as the conditions of the law have been met.

## 2. Main actors and networks

### National:

The Federal Public Service for Social Security is responsible for all regulations on the legal status of volunteers. Contact details: FOD Sociale Zekerheid; Directie-Generaal Sociaal Beleid; Eurostation II; Victor Hortaplein 40 bus 20; 1060 Brussel. Tel. + 32 2 528 63 00. Email: [dg-soc@minsoc.fed.be](mailto:dg-soc@minsoc.fed.be). Website: <http://socialsecurity.fgov.be/>

The High Council for Volunteers is operational at federal level and collects, systemises and analyses information on volunteers and voluntary work; it undertakes research into specific problems which volunteers and voluntary work may face; gives advice with regard to volunteers and voluntary work.

Contact details: Hoge Raad voor Vrijwilligers (secretariaat); Eurostation II; Victor Hortaplein 40 bus 20; 1060 Brussel. Tel. +32 2 528 64 68. Email: [Christian.Dekeyser@minsoc.fed.be](mailto:Christian.Dekeyser@minsoc.fed.be). Website: [http://socialsecurity.fgov.be/NL/specifieke\\_info/vrijwilligers/hoge\\_raad/](http://socialsecurity.fgov.be/NL/specifieke_info/vrijwilligers/hoge_raad/)

The King Baudouin Foundation has a number of publications on volunteer work and lends financial support to 1000 voluntary projects.

Contact details: Koning Boudewijnstichting; Brederodestraat 21; 1000 Brussel. Tel. +32 2 511 18 40. Email: [info@kbs-frb.be](mailto:info@kbs-frb.be). Website: <http://www.kbs-frb.be>

### Regional:

The funding of voluntary activities and volunteer groups in the welfare and health care sectors (organised volunteer work) is laid down in Flemish Parliament Acts of the Flemish Community.

Contact details: Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap; Departement Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin; Markiesstraat 1; 1000 Brussel. Tel. + 32 2 553 33 30. Email: [welzijnszorg@vlaanderen.be](mailto:welzijnszorg@vlaanderen.be). Website: <http://wvg.vlaanderen.be/welzijnegezondheid/> or <http://www.vlaanderen.be/vrijwilligers>

The Youth Division of the Flemish Community helps create youth volunteer work opportunities through the recognition and funding of youth (work) initiatives.

Contact details: Vlaams Ministerie van Cultuur, Jeugd, Sport en Media; Agentschap Sociaal-cultureel werk voor jeugd en volwassenen; Afdeling Jeugd; Arenbergstraat 9; 1000 Brussel. Tel +32 2 553 41 30. Email: [jeugd@vlaanderen.be](mailto:jeugd@vlaanderen.be). Website: <http://www.cjcm.vlaanderen.be/jeugd/>

The Flemish support point for Voluntary Work provides support to voluntary activities and initiatives launched by Flemish people. Their support consists of advice, information and training. In addition they promote volunteer work by the annual "Volunteer's Week".

Contact details: Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk, Amerikalei 164, 2000 Antwerpen. Tel. +32 3 218 59 01. Email: [info@vsvw.be](mailto:info@vsvw.be). Website: <http://www.vrijwilligersweb.be>

In addition five provincial support centres and one Brussels ('het punt') based support centre coordinate voluntary activities in the Flemish provinces and Brussels. They manage a decentralised database, act as a mediator between organisations and candidate volunteers, get more people involved in volunteering and help organisations enhance the quality of their activities by providing information and training and by setting up certain initiatives. Finally, there are local support centres for volunteering.

*Are any organisations in this field specifically targeting youth (as participants in voluntary activities and voluntary services)?* Yes

**Platform Voluntary Service**<sup>VI</sup> is a network of civil-society associations – in particular organisations working with young volunteers – active in various domains of society: environment,

culture, social economy, education, social services, North-South relations, human rights, etc.  
Website: <http://www.platform-burgerdienst.be>

**The Flemish Youth Groups** call on young volunteers for organising various kinds of activities and games for young children. The main characteristics are group forming, volunteer work and a strong local embedding. Examples of youth movements are: Scouts (<http://www.scoutsengidsenvlaanderen.be>); Chiro (<http://www.chiro.be>), JNM (<http://www.jnm.be>), KSJ-KSA-VKSJ (<http://www.ksj.be>); Kazou (<http://www.kazou.be>); Katholieke Landelijke Jeugd (<http://www.klj.be>); etc.

*Do networks and/or co-operations exist for supporting volunteering of young people in your country? Yes*

The not-for-profit organisation *JINT*<sup>vii</sup> is the coordination body for international youth work and the National Agency for the entire European 'Youth' Programme in Flanders. It is an important contact point for the EVS (European Voluntary Service), for volunteers as well as for organisations. You can turn to the Agency for information on EVS such as criteria, forms, social security,... and also for advice and monitoring at all stages of your project. JINT also sets up training programmes for volunteers and participating organisations. Website: <http://www.jint.be>

The *Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work* runs a network consisting of numerous civil-society organisations (SoCius, King Baudouin Foundation, Verenigde Verenigingen, Linc vzw, DIVA, etc.) and public authorities (provincial support centres, Hoge Raad voor Volunteers (High Council for Volunteers), the Flemish Public Health, Welfare and Family Ministry, the Flemish Community Commission, etc.). Website: <http://www.vrijwilligersweb.be>

*Vzw Punt – Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk Brussel (Support Centre Volunteer Work Brussels)* – aims to build a bridge between volunteers and voluntary organisations by offering trainings and publications, a vacancy database, active support for organisations, information, etc. To this end they work together with the Flemish Community Commission, the King Baudouin Foundation, the Brussels youth centres, etc. Website: <http://hetpunt.vgc.be>

'Het Punt' in Brussels and the Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work are both members of *The European Volunteer Centre*. EVC is a European network of 67 mainly national and regional volunteer centres and volunteer development agencies across Europe, that together work to support and promote voluntary activity. The key objectives of EVC are: give a clear voice to volunteer work in Europe, reinforce the infrastructure for volunteering in Europe, encourage volunteer work and make it more effective. The main goal of the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk is to stimulate and support voluntary activities as well as to promote interests. The Vlaams Steunpunt monitors the interests of volunteer work, e.g. by monitoring policy developments. Also cross-sector networking is a key cornerstone.

*Time4Society (T4S)*<sup>x</sup> brings enterprises and socially relevant projects together around specific and feasible portions of "corporate volunteering". The Time4Society team has only one mission: making it easier for enterprises to give time to projects with a social, ecological or cultural value, which in turn receive helping hands from the corporate world. Website: <http://www.time4society.com>

*Hu-Bu*<sup>xi</sup> stimulates and helps enterprises to offer time and skills to social-profit organisations through corporate volunteering. Its "connection platform" enables social-profit organisations to communicate their needs, the employers to create tailored volunteer programmes, and the corporate volunteers to directly select a suitable social, environmental or cultural project. Website: <http://www.hu-bu.be>

*The Platform Burgerdienst*<sup>VI</sup> (Voluntary Service Platform) aims to develop a voluntary service for young people aged between 18 and 25. To achieve this, the platform involves researchers, organisations and associations working with young volunteers or other actors involved in the reevaluation of young people in society. Website: <http://www.platform-burgerdienst.be>

*Verenigde Verenigingen*<sup>XII</sup> (Associated Associations) is a partnership of various civil-society organisations, which exchange information and collaborate on various themes, including volunteer work. Website: <http://www.deverenigdeverenigingen.be>

- What is the legal / financial (fiscal) status of organisations promoting volunteering?

### **Financial Status:**

*The Flemish Government* is the voluntary work's main funding source. The Flemish Community's general expenditure budget includes a grant for Vlaams Steunpunt vrijwilligerswerk<sup>VIII</sup> (Flemish Support Point for Voluntary Work) and grants to the provincial support centres for volunteer work. These grants are for volunteer work in general. Grants allocated to youth (work) initiatives also indirectly support volunteer work undertaken by young people. In Brussels, the *Flemish Community Commission (VGC)* subsidises, within the limits of its credit line, any Dutch-speaking organisation active in volunteer work in the Brussels-Capital Region. In addition, there are a *number of (semi)public and private organisations* that support volunteer work/voluntary activities. One of the major sources is the Koning Boudewijnstichting<sup>XV</sup> (King Baudouin Foundation), an independent and pluralist foundation that aims at improving the living conditions of the population. This foundation supports some 1,000 projects a year. Its budget – 30 million euros in 2011 – is divided over these organisations.<sup>V</sup>

### **Legal status**

There is an act that recognises and subsidises autonomous voluntary work for the welfare and health sector. Here, the Flemish Government's Resolution of 30 May 2008 concerning execution of the act of 23 March 1994 relating to organised voluntary work in the welfare and health sector applies. This Resolution contains a few modifications in relation to the earlier regulations: from now on, recognition will be for an indeterminate period (not renewable on a five year basis) and grants do not need to be requested annually (the administration itself will decide if work is being carried out around subsidised subjects on the basis of annual reports). Voluntary organisations now receive a set subsidy instead of a subsidy based on the presentation of proven costs. Independent volunteer organisations are entitled to subsidies if they insure volunteers properly and organise activities in the field of welfare and health policy in its broadest sense. XIII More information on the legal status of independent volunteer organisations can be found at <http://www.juriwel.be/smartsite.net?id=11359>

### 3. Promotion of volunteering of young people

*Which methods among the one listed below are the most used to promote volunteering of young people in your country?*

By governmental organizations <sup>xvii</sup>:

*In general:* The promotion of voluntary work (Volunteer's Week being the annual highlight) is one of the objectives of Vlaamse Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk.<sup>viii</sup> (Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work). This is done by providing information and/or support to initiatives aimed at linking volunteer work to specific target groups, by cooperating in specific initiatives in which volunteers/voluntary activities play a special part and by managing [www.vrijwilligerswerk.be](http://www.vrijwilligerswerk.be) in order to ensure the efficient use and maintenance of the database. Also, The Provincial Support Centres and the Brussels 'Punt'<sup>ix</sup> perform a key task in promoting volunteer work. The support centres have developed material that allows young people from the age of fifteen to get to know voluntary work: a brochure called 'Voluntary Work at School', a video called 'I do it voluntarily' and the game 'You're Welcome' (developed by the Centrum Informatieve Spelen [Centre for Informative Games]). Provincial youth services set up training programmes together with the provincial support centres for volunteer work. In addition, promotion is done at local level, in particular by the associations themselves, by means of flyers, posters, the holiday newspaper, the volunteer newspaper, signposting. The information is collected on the Internet at [www.vrijwilligerswerk.be](http://www.vrijwilligerswerk.be), from which various links are made to a number of organisations and informative sites on volunteer work (JINT, VIA,...).

*Specific actions aiming at promoting voluntary work within minority groups<sup>v</sup>:* The Flemish Government's youth policy provides a framework to value (cultural) diversity. A number of initiatives are aimed at promoting the participation of young people from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' in youth work. In 2005, Steunpunt Jeugd together with the Youth and Sports Division gave an impetus to the cultural diversity process in the youth work sector. This led to the Flemish action plan on inter-culturalisation launched by Bert Anciaux in February 2006. In the Act of 29 March 2002 on Flemish Youth Policy, funding possibilities for experiential youth work were provided. The 'Act containing broad and stimulating measures for the encouragement of participation in culture, youth work and sports' from 2008, encourages people in poverty, people from ethnic/cultural diverse backgrounds, those in detention, disabled people and families with young children to take part in the wealth of culture, sport and youth work that is on offer<sup>v</sup>.

Good practices:

'The *'Vrijwilligersbeurs'* (Volunteers' Fair) has been organised in recent years by a number of provinces. During such a fair, all volunteer organisations from the province introduce themselves to applicant volunteers.

The *'Dag van de Jeugdbeweging'* (Day of the youth movement) is a supportive initiative that focuses explicitly on young people and youth work. Both at provincial and local level, a large number of promotions are set up to focus on the power of the youth movement. Website: <http://www.dagvandejeugdbeweging.be>

'*Volunteers' Week*' is an annual, recurring highlight for the promotion of voluntary work in Flanders. During this week, extra attention is paid to voluntary work and a seminar is organised to support this kind of work.<sup>xvi</sup>

Together with the "8", the *Antwerps Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk* (Antwerp Support Centre for Voluntary Work) organises an educational activity called "coloured volunteer work". This practice-oriented training is destined for volunteer organisations that are already working with immigrant volunteers or are planning to do so.<sup>xvi</sup>

*The Platform Vrijwilligersjaar* (Year of the Volunteer Platform) aims to develop a voluntary service for young people aged between 18 and 25. To achieve this, the platform is working together with over 30 non-profit organisations. This year, the voluntary service will be put to the test: sixty to seventy young people will be working for one of the non-profit organisations which are part of the Platform. By the end of the year, the Platform will formulate policy recommendations, hoping that the Year of the Volunteer for young people in 2012 can be given a legal foundation. Source: <http://www.vrijwilligersjaar.be>

To promote volunteer work, the Flemish Government, jointly with the Verenigde Verenigingen (Associated Associations), is presenting an annual *Award for Volunteer Work*. Website: <http://www.prijsvrijwilligerswerk.be>

#### By Non Governmental Organizations

Several non-profit organisations organise appreciation campaigns, offer trainings and disseminate information promoting voluntary work in Flanders. A few examples:

##### Campaigns:

“Make Families Happy”: A large-scale campaign by the Family League in view of canvassing volunteers. Website: <http://www.maakgezinnenblij.be>

“Pluim” (Feather) is an initiative by the King Baudouin Foundation and the ten Flemish regional television channels. All those who involve themselves in an open and pleasant society can obtain a *feather in their cap*. In 2010, *The Feather* was launched for the seventh time. Website: <http://www.depluim.be>

##### Trainings:

Youth Red Cross organises monitor courses for young volunteers who wish to give first-aid courses to children. Website: <http://www.jeugdredkruis.be> (Youth Red Cross)

AFS Vlaanderen: AFS organises talks at schools for canvassing and informing potential exchange students and host families. Website: <http://www.afsvlaanderen.be>

##### Information:

Initiatives that are specifically aimed at providing information for young people often also contain information on volunteer work. This concerns organisations such as the Youth Support Centre, the not-for-profit JINT, youth work organisations, Youth Information Point. In addition, there are several sites that offer information on volunteer work: <http://www.jeugdwerknet.be>; <http://www.jips.be>; <http://www.jongereninformatie.be>; <http://www.jongerenplaneet.be>

- Which among the followings are methods of recognition of volunteering of young people in your country? Explain and provide examples for each of the box ticked.

##### Methods of recognition

European Youth Pass, certificates, awards, they are valued in the CV, incentives

##### Explanation and examples

The five Provincial Support Centres, the Brussels Steunpunt (Support Centre) and the Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk (Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work) are responsible for the coordination and support of voluntary work in Flanders. These Support Centres also strive for a broader social – and formal – recognition of volunteer work. In addition organisations working with

volunteers usually provide a form of training, education or support for volunteers which may or may not lead to the award of a certificate. Although such certification is not legally recognised, these initiatives give an indication of the basic quality. The Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk (Flemish Support Centre for Volunteer Work) initiated a project called 'Accreditation of experiential learning for management volunteers' in co-operation with SoCius, the Steunpunt voor Sociaal-cultureel werk (Support Centre for Socio-cultural work). Recently the Flemish government is also making efforts to better recognise voluntary activities and, therefore, value the social involvement of young volunteers and the skills they have acquired (EVC). The 2011-2014 Flemish Youth Policy Plan sets out the Flemish government's aims to ensure that voluntary involvement is accredited by different actors at all levels (government, business, social partners, the civil society and young people themselves). Competencies acquired through volunteer work should be translated into a language that is meaningful in other domains of life as well. An excessively instrumental approach to competencies – merely in function of the labour market – should be avoided since it makes us lose sight of meaning and talents and causes young people to quit prematurely. The Flemish Government has taken steps to work on competencies. The development and implementation of various tools and formats allowing young people to make their competencies visible are facilitated and supported. Examples are My VDAB, the Oscar for social-cultural work for young people and adults, and a pilot project on personal developments plans. In addition, the Flemish Government and the provincial support centres present several awards for volunteer work every year.<sup>XVII.</sup>

Flanders co-organises three European developments, viz. the development of the *European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers*, the development of the *Europass* project, based on the EU Resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning, and the *Youth Pass*. Any young person participating in an activity within the "Youth In Action" programme can apply for a Youthpass certificate. Using the specific code of an activity, organisations can log in to the website [www.youthpass.eu](http://www.youthpass.eu) and create certificates online. Young people can use the Youth pass certificate for various purposes (for instance as evidence in a portfolio or as the starting point of a personal development plan).

- *What obstacles to young people's engagement in volunteering do exist and how are these faced by national policies ?*

Obstacles<sup>XVII</sup>

Discouraging legal provisions: Due to increased legislation in various fields, it is becoming increasingly difficult to encourage young volunteers to different types of youth work. The legislator treats youth centres and youth associations on an equal basis as all kinds of commercial initiatives and in some cases they must meet the same conditions regarding environmental legislation, copyright, legislation on health and safety, as well as other detailed regulations.<sup>XVIII</sup>

Lack of social recognition: Due to the fact that training is not legally provided in all sectors, volunteer work often is not treated with the esteem it deserves. Social recognition is often linked to high quality training.

Expectations of scholastic achievement: The heavy demands placed on young people by education can be seen as an obstacle to their leisure time.

The attractiveness of various commercial leisure time activities: young people nowadays find 'having fun' and financial comfort more important than doing voluntary work. A lot of them have a job after school and during weekends, and therefore less time is available for voluntary activities. On the other hand, more young people are involved in 'informal' care, helping friends and relatives.

The lack of information: The knowledge of young people about volunteer work is often limited. The 'over-legalistic' approach to the legal status of volunteers does not provide any information about the social or social value of volunteering.

People also think that the status of volunteers is mainly favourable to large, strongly organised bodies, thus leaving the reality of local youth work initiatives uncovered by law. Certain forms of voluntary engagement in society such as voluntary involvement in the neighbourhood, at work, ... are not recognised by this Act.

Fear of the unknown.

Many organizations working with young volunteers are not adequately equipped to address the requirements of this target group. The organizations do indeed wish to procure the services of young volunteers, but are often unwilling to amend their existing policy whereby the young people themselves do not feel comfortable with the organization.

Measures which are being taken:

In recent years, the Flemish government has been devoting more attention to the quality of regulations and to limiting their number. In 2007 priority is given to the reduction, simplification and, in particular, to the improvement of the rules on associations and volunteers. In October 2006 the Flemish Minister for Administrative Simplification and Flemish Minister for Culture, Youth, Sports and Media, together with the cooperative partnership 'Verenigde Verenigingen' (a partnership of a large number of associations) launched the project 'Samen Vereenvoudigen voor vrijwilligers and verenigingen' (Simplification for volunteers and associations). All Flemings who are confronted, via their associations, with time consuming, unnecessary administrative procedures were invited to highlight the problems and, from within their role as experienced expert, also come up with practical solutions. The campaign ran until the end of February 2007. The final report combined the reports received, an analysis of the issues, proposals for solutions and checks on progress.

The Youth Support Centre inventories federal, Flemish and Walloon forms of legislation, as well as good and bad examples of local regulations that generate restrictive or superfluous consequences for youth work. The Steunpunt Jeugd audits Flemish regulations and checks them on superfluous or strongly restrictive provisions. If possible, the Flemish government repeals or simplifies superfluous or strongly restrictive provisions and proposes alternatives where necessary. Within the framework of the volunteer statute, the Flemish Government, together with Steunpunt Jeugd (Youth Support Centre), will inventory the various remaining issues concerning the volunteer statute (for youth volunteers, specifically) and press the federal government to find fully integrated solutions for these. The Flemish Government analyses the factors that lead to the exclusion of certain groups of young people from voluntary activities and is developing strategies for better involving these groups with voluntary activities, for example by ensuring that voluntary activities link to the interests of these groups of young people. Research will be conducted into the extent to which the recruitment of volunteers is affected by certain environmental factors such as the increasing numbers of rules, initiatives for encouraging student working, the commercialisation of the youngsters' environment and the renewal of examination procedures in higher education. The Vlaamse Jeugdraad stresses the fact that acts passed should cause as little administrative burden as possible.<sup>xvii</sup>

#### **4. Mobility of young volunteers**

No data are available

## 5. Sources of information

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- III. [http://www.vrijwilligerswetgeving.be/ECMS\\_CLIENT/configuration/pages/faqs.php?PHPSESSID=5f2b43b\\_8c15deaa8dae7e90b341a4f6](http://www.vrijwilligerswetgeving.be/ECMS_CLIENT/configuration/pages/faqs.php?PHPSESSID=5f2b43b_8c15deaa8dae7e90b341a4f6)
- IV. <http://www.btcctb.org/nl/news/vrijwillige-dienst-wordt-juniorprogramma>
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- IX. <http://www.hetpunt.vgc.be>
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