

The European Year of Volunteering EYV 2011 - Discussion paper

This paper presents the contribution of the informal Alliance of European networks campaigning together for a European Year of Volunteering 2011 (EYV2011 Alliance) and is based on the EYV2011 Alliance's Background Paper as well as discussions of a EYV2011 Alliance meeting, which took place on the 3 December 2008 (for further information please visit www.eyv2011.eu).

I. Background:

A Recent Eurobarometer survey has shown that at least 3 out of 10 Europeans volunteer and 80% of Europeans say that active participation in society is a crucial part of their life (Special Eurobarometer 273). Thus, far over 100 million European citizens put our European values of solidarity, social cohesion and active citizenship into practice. Day after day they, and the organisations that they engage in, are the agents that ensure that these values are not merely laid down in the Treaties but translated into concrete action - all over Europe.

Even though there is a vast array of notions, definitions and traditions concerning volunteering in the 27 Member States of the EU, there is a common understanding that wherever people engage together in activities to help each other, support those in need, preserve our environment, campaign for human rights, support various activities of sport organisations or initiate actions to help ensure that everyone enjoys a decent life - both society as a whole and the individual volunteers benefit and social cohesion is significantly strengthened.

The common denominator of these areas is that volunteering is an expression of active citizenship. It is the means by which citizens detect, voice and respond to needs arising in society. It is also an activity that requires a mindset in society – a mindset that acknowledges that active (European) citizenship requires the motivation and the possibility to get involved. Volunteer organisations, businesses and governments need to work together to provide an enabling European environment for volunteering to flourish. Volunteering is a key expression of active citizenship and deserves - as a complement to political participation - better recognition, promotion and facilitation.

II. Current EU situation and the relevance of volunteering for EU policies

Challenges for the volunteering landscape:

However, 7 in 10 people do not volunteer and many people face barriers towards 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 rather a “compulsory duty”; discrimination; discouraging legal provisions and an absence of a legal status; missing protection against risks involved; and visa or other barriers for non EU citizens, to name just a few of these obstacles. There is still a massive untapped potential in Europe for citizens to get involved.

Challenges the EU and its Member States currently face:

- *Political challenges* – in 2004 we observed the lowest turnout in the history of the European Parliament elections with an average of 45,6%. Moreover, the surveys show that there is a significant mistrust towards political institutions and people tend to trust non-governmental organisations more than political institutions. In spring 2008, almost 62 % of EU citizens did not trust the national governments and 36 % were still reluctant towards the EU institutions (Standard Eurobarometer 69/2008 Public Opinion in the European Union). There is a visible and increasing disengagement and disenchantment of individuals with politics.
- *Socio-political challenges* - European societies become multi-ethnic and multicultural on the one hand (according to the Eurostat figures, the EU net migration is currently +3.3%) and increasing signs of racism and xenophobia can be seen on the other. (According to the Special Eurobarometer 296 'Discrimination in the European Union', 15% of respondents reported that they felt discriminated against or harassed on the basis of at least one of the grounds under consideration here: gender, disability, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief). Ethnic or religious conflicts occur increasingly often, even in traditionally very open societies, and mainly at the local level.
- *Socio-economic challenges* - increasing numbers of citizens live in or at the risk of poverty and the poverty gaps in society increase. Unemployment remains at worrying rates and it is, according to Eurostat, the least educated who have the highest risk of being unemployed. Additionally, the EU has to meet the opportunities provided by an ageing society and a renewed demographic balance. Millions of people remain unemployed.
- *Economic challenges* - the Lisbon agenda to make the European economy the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010 needs a major effort by all different stakeholders at European and national levels - and the current track record towards 2010 and the post-Lisbon agenda clearly shows that additional efforts are needed to tap into the resources of our society, namely those that enhance the potential of individuals.

Following the White Paper on Youth, volunteering has been recognised in 2002 by the Member States as a key element of youth policy. A lot of research, exchanges of experiences and discussions have been carried out since then. This work has shown its impact over the years and should be enlarged to all age ranges. 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 and its horizontal nature. 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:

- Volunteers are an example for **active civic participation**. They engage in their communities, without motivation for financial gain, for the benefit of the 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.

- Volunteers **put in practice European values of solidarity and diversity**. They are the expression of the EU slogan '**United in Diversity**' as these are people of all ages, women and men, employees and unemployed, people from different ethnic backgrounds and belief groups and, finally, citizens from all nationalities who are involved. However, those involved do not necessarily make the link between their engagement and European values. People become involved because they feel that they can make a positive contribution to society and because they benefit themselves. It does not occur to them that all over Europe, people engage in volunteering for the same underlying values and motivations. 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 afford not to contribute to creating the logical link between voluntary engagement at a local level and the implementation of European values.
- The Resolution of the European Parliament [A6-0070/2008] recognises the **contribution that volunteering makes to the economic and social cohesion** of the European Union. The report says 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 the European regional and structural funds.
- Volunteers are in particular the **main agents when it comes to social inclusion** through their engagement for the socially excluded or those at risk of social exclusion. Volunteering is as 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 e.g. in the Youth Pact, the White Paper on Youth and in the BEPA report "Investing in Youth: From Childhood to Adulthood" but applies equally to all age groups. WOSM and its national organisations have carried a number of project across Europe on involving and reaching out to minorities or more generally being children in difficult circumstances, being different religions background, disabilities or roma people (http://www.scout.org/en/information_events/resource_centre/library/reaching_out)
- This applies in particular for the **integration of migrants** into our societies. 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.)
- **Social services of general interest** in Europe depend largely on the contribution of volunteers. Actions of voluntary organisations implemented in the Member States show that volunteers significantly contribute to the services provided in **the health and social care sector** through: visiting services for socially isolated people and day centres for older people, people with Alzheimers disease and homes for children in need of special care;

coaching activities: supporting and empowering people to take charge of their own lives again (e.g. so-called friendship courses); organising holidays for people with disabilities and/or chronic disease, 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

- Volunteering is a means for **active ageing**. Volunteers not only provide complementary home care to older people (psycho-social support), organise recreational and sports activities for seniors, but older people themselves who become volunteers 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 persons said that they have already planned or plan to do volunteer work. Volunteering provides a great potential for the EU when it comes to active ageing and demographic change. This issue was firstly raised during the Intergenerational Solidarity for Cohesive and Sustainable Societies during the Slovenian Presidency (27-29 April 2008) as one of the main topic and then as one of the main topics of the 2nd European Demography Forum held in Brussels in November 2008.
- Volunteering plays an important role with regards to **maintaining and restoring family links**. This helps people to find family members they have lost because of wars, conflict and disasters, and supports people who have a missing family member or friend. Volunteers contribute significantly to the enhanced satisfaction of family life and proper work balance as they often engage 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').
- Volunteering contributes to **tolerance, peace building, conflict resolution and reconciliation of divided societies**. The CEV project on this topic (V:::P/2008) as well as many other projects and activities of the members of the Alliance has shown that voluntary activities exercised together by the local inhabitants for the benefit of their communities increase peoples' tolerance and intercultural skills, reduce racism and prejudice, contributes to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, empowers people to be active in the recovery of their communities and connects them back with the societies in which they live.
- Voluntary activities are part of **informal and non-formal learning** for people at all ages and at all stages of their lives. Volunteering contributes to personal development and to learning skills and competences **enhancing employability**. Volunteering is, thus, part of the Lisbon strategy towards a more competitive European labour market, providing **life-long learning opportunities** that arise when people volunteer. This was confirmed in e.g.: Commission Communication *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, COM (2001) 678 final, Brussels, 21.11.01, 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 European Youth Forum's reports and projects etc.

- **The sport** sector is the largest voluntary, non-governmental organisation activity throughout Europe with the most volunteers and participants involved. Volunteers are the most important and indispensable resource of sport clubs. According to ENGSO, the “labour force” of sport clubs consists of 86 % volunteers and only 14 % paid staff! The impact of volunteering in sport on EU policies is manifold, and this was recognised in the White Paper on Sport [COM (2007) 391 final] and in the Commission Action Plan "Pierre de Coubertin" SEC(2007) 934, Brussels, 11.7.2007 which calls for promoting volunteering and active citizenship through sport, recognises that volunteering reinforces active citizenship and that volunteering in sport organisations provides many occasions for non-formal education which need to be recognised and enhanced. Sport NGOs and networks such as ENGSO underline that the EU still needs to work on such issues as: taxation (maintain a special tax regime for not-for-profit sports organisations, create additional tax incentives for volunteers, i.e. deductibility of tax from donations), education (design European modules to train volunteers), EU funding programmes (make programmes more accessible for volunteers), and employment (better recognise voluntary work in sport) etc.
- Volunteers are the **backbone of Europe’s civil protection force**. Red Cross and Johanniter International experiences show that volunteers are indispensable for disaster responses and preparedness activities, for first aid services, and education, as well as in relief exercises i.e. ambulances, first aid, psycho-social support and emergency responses.
- **Development policies** are practically impossible to implement without the contributions of volunteers. Volunteers engage in humanitarian missions, provide assistance to refugees (humanitarian assistance, reception centres including legal counselling, health services, mental health care) etc. More than 6,000 volunteers engage every year with 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 shape of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.
- **Corporate (employee) volunteering** schemes are increasingly seen by European companies as a means to connect to society, invest time and resources in their communities and to fill their CSR policies with concrete meaning. Thousands of individuals across Europe are already benefiting from the help and support offered by employee volunteers. 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 Commission to fulfil its commitment to developing policies to 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 step up its policy of promoting the voluntary and innovative efforts of companies on CSR. This still seems to be unfulfilled. The business platform ENGAGE in its publication CSR Laboratories: Bringing the European Alliance on CSR to Life, demonstrates the effectiveness of employee community engagement in improving the skills essential for employment amongst disadvantaged and socially excluded groups of people within the EU and recommends and urges the European Commission to support and encourage

employee volunteering through announcing a European Year of Volunteering 2011.

- **Finally, volunteering is an important economic factor.** The research 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 3-8 euro. Moreover, the Comparative Non-Profit Sector project revealed that the voluntary sector contributes an estimated 2-7% to the GDP of our national economies. In the UK in 2007 volunteering contributed to the national economy by 48 billion pounds (according to the Volunteering England's figures). We do not have the necessary data and instruments in place to properly analyse the economic value nor to raise awareness of policy makers or funders about the contribution that volunteers make to our economies.

To use the full potential of volunteering we need to acknowledge these contributions of volunteering and further support and develop it across the European Union.

The Maastricht Treaty established the concept of European citizenship and in 2001 the European Commission issued the White Paper on European Governance in which it stressed the importance of the active involvement and participation of the EU. Volunteering has a capital potential for participatory democracy, the enhanced legitimacy of EU politics and, finally, in meeting the ambitious objectives not only established in the Lisbon Strategy but in the sense of a *finalité politique* in general. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the EU should not harmonise the volunteering sector in Europe, but should encourage and coordinate actions of the Member States by promoting new tools and methods to meet the existing challenges. Recognition of the great political, social and economic contributions that volunteering makes to our societies is essential.

Finally, the proposed Treaty of Lisbon will add to the currently only mention of volunteering in the Treaties (Declaration 38 annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam) new legal bases for volunteering: article 149(1) concerning sports, article 149 (2) concerning participation of young people in democratic life in Europe and article 188(5) on the Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, providing the possibility to enhance the activities of the EU in this field.

III. EYV2011 – Objectives, outcomes, focus, target groups and stakeholders

The main principles of the European Year should be:

- All the activities and celebrations should be **bottom-up** - it needs to be ensured that ownership of the Year remains with local volunteers and volunteer organisations.
- The implementation of the Year should be based on a '**multi-partite structure**: civil society, governments at all levels, businesses, representatives of formal education and academia should be fully involved in the activities.

- 'United in diversity' is the EU's motto and it also applies to volunteering. The Year does not aim in harmonising volunteering across Europe but rather could show different approaches in the EU-27 and learn from good practices and approaches and traditions both in EU-27 and beyond.

A. Objectives and expected outcomes of EYV 2011

The messages of the Year are two-fold: To celebrate current volunteers for their efforts (recognition), in other words a 'THANK YOU' approach; and to empower new people to volunteer (the 'YOU CAN' approach) (promotion and facilitation). The experience of civil society organisations shows that there is a need at all levels - EU, national, regional and local - to increase volunteering and the awareness of the added value it brings to European society, to celebrate volunteers, involve more volunteers and to improve the policy framework on volunteering.

Therefore, four general objectives of the EYV2011 are:

- 1) Recognition and awareness raising on the value of volunteering**
- 2) Celebration of volunteer efforts**
- 3) Empowerment of people and volunteer organisations**
- 4) Work towards the creating of an enabling environment for volunteering including a volunteering infrastructure**

1) Recognition and awareness raising

- To raise awareness on volunteering as an expression of active European citizenship and the contributions that volunteers make to our societies; volunteering should be seen as a tool for the improvement of social situations and the voluntary sector as a sector which provides solutions for the challenges of globalisation, market economy and multiculturalism;
- To raise awareness of societies and volunteers themselves of the underlying ethos and value of voluntary action in Europe that is common to all volunteers – and to link voluntary action to the European project that is in the end about building solidarity and cohesive societies;
- To gain recognition for volunteering by policy makers, business, civil society organisations and, most importantly, the general public at large. Volunteering shall be seen as a sector in its own right rather than an appendix to policy areas (or as part of the "Third Sector");
- To raise awareness on how people can get involved and demonstrate and promote the role of the volunteering infrastructure. Volunteering while freely given is not cost free - to step up volunteering and to provide opportunities for those that want to be involved an enabling environment is needed.

2) Celebration

- To celebrate, award and thank those 100 million volunteers in Europe (the “Thank you!” part of the Year...);
- To convey the message to all the others that they can get involved and make a difference (The “You can!” part of the Year);

3) Empowerment

- To empower and involve more people in voluntary activities; show volunteering as a way of life;
- To encourage networking, cooperation and synergies between volunteer organisations and other sectors such as research/formal education, trade unions, business and government;
- To encourage the exchange of good practices and showcase the diversity of volunteering in Europe;

4) Work towards the creation of an enabling environment for volunteering including a volunteering infrastructure

- To anchor and mainstream volunteering in EU policy making: EYV2011 will be a milestone work towards a pro-active policy plan to promote active citizenship. A follow-up to it could be a White Paper on Volunteering and Active Citizenship as a step towards EYV+10 in 2021;
- Following on from this, to create an ongoing forum for national governments to compare their policies and to exchange their experiences in promoting “volunteering-friendly policies”. The OMC method could be used for an ongoing exchange and benchmarking;
- No policy shall be designed in areas affecting voluntary activities without assessing its impact on them;
- Stronger mechanisms at EU level and national level to support organizations and infrastructures that give opportunities for volunteers to volunteer, being civil society initiatives or governmental initiatives.
- Compare different country’s policy approaches to create an enabling environment for volunteering to flourish, show what works, and work towards a catalogue of criteria for good practices in promoting volunteering at different levels of governance.

B. Target groups

The objectives of the Year lead us to several target groups:

- The volunteers all over Europe who are already involved: celebrating their involvement and creating the link between them

(common identity as volunteers in Europe – “You make Europe strong”; “You make the difference”...);

- The general public in Europe: showing ways how to get involved and creating enthusiasm about how good it feels to make a difference in society - sending to Europeans the message that the EU needs them and that at the same time they shape the Europe they want to live in;
- Volunteer organisations at local level facilitating volunteer engagement: the Year will only be successful and have the necessary impact if organisations at local level take ownership and are mobilised in the preparation of the Year;
- Policy makers at different levels: to raise awareness that volunteering can be promoted and facilitated by targeted policies; to show them what “volunteer-friendly” policies look like;
- Business: responsible employers and those that will discover that corporate (employee) volunteering is at the heart of the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda;
- Media: the emphasis should be put on local media as they can mobilise local help to support local efforts, inform people and create a positive environment for voluntary engagement;
- Formal education institutions/researchers: efforts are needed to link volunteering more (as informal and non-formal learning) with formal learning as well as to stimulate academic research on volunteering and understanding of what the “Active European Citizenship” is about and what role volunteering plays in this.
- Create links with the previous and following years with a focus on marginalized people and the seniors as well as intergenerational dialogue and solidarity.

C. Proposed activities

Objective 1 and 2 Recognition and awareness raising on the value of volunteering and celebration of volunteer efforts

- Opening and closing ceremonies at different levels to ensure that the link between the local nature of volunteering and its European dimension are the red thread throughout the Year;
- There can be some high-level events at European and national level in which ambassadors of volunteering (such as Elton John) could participate to raise awareness and boost recognition for volunteering. The focus should be put at the local and regional level;
- These European events could be: a) an AGORA of the European Parliament on volunteering and civic engagement organised to

use synergies between the Year and activities of other institutions; or / and b) A European Volunteer Assembly/Parliament together with similar events at local level. To really feel engaged in the future of volunteering in Europe, volunteers need to be given a voice. The tools of citizens panels proved to be very successful in this respect and can be used during the Year;

- European-wide campaign with a common slogan (something like “You make the difference”, “You make Europe strong”) that local organisations could identify with and tap into. This campaign should focus on the media (TV, radio etc) and use the internet and SMS technology to spread the slogan. A professional PR campaign all over Europe should have the same strong message understood / easily translated in different languages. Experiences of volunteer organisations at national level shows that pro bono partnerships with expert PR firms and the most widely recognised media have been very successful in the past;
- “VIP volunteer”: high level politicians and celebrity volunteers throughout the Year (Commissioners, MEPs, national politicians, music stars, sportsmen etc) could be linked to the media campaign: “Volunteers are the VIPs of our society”.

Additionally, some organization suggest the following activities:

- *Focus weeks: putting the spotlight on the reality of volunteering in different regions of Europe, where chosen regions could twin and showcase volunteer reality, good practice, lighthouse projects and some facts and figures all through the year. These regions can organise events similar to this happening anyway throughout the Year (volunteer weeks / ‘Make a Difference’ days) adding the European dimension to these activities. Putting the spotlight on different regions at the same time would also foster collaboration and twinning dynamics;*
- *Thematic focuses of the Year (e.g. thematic months or 2-3 thematic focuses in a year) which would be another (additional / complementary) way to keep up the same level of interest and energy throughout the whole year (themes such as volunteering in sports / environment / development would enable stakeholders to more deeply engage in the work on each of theme;*

Objective 3 Empowerment of people and volunteer organizations

- Developing tools for volunteer organisations on how to work with local media/business;
- Developing accompanying communication tools such as leaflets and fact sheets about volunteering in different countries and a website that shows all the different activities throughout the Year as well as links to volunteer databases for people to get involved;
- Organising workshops for volunteer organisations, local authorities, media and businesses on how to successfully work together; informative sessions in schools, universities, public institutions and private companies on how to get involved.

Objective 4 Work towards the creation of an enabling environment for volunteering including a volunteering infrastructure

- A main part of the Year should also be focused on the policy level: bringing local, regional, national and European policy makers, businesses and volunteer organisations together to debate successful volunteering policies and extract criteria of good practice concerning the creation of enabling environments for volunteering in Europe. A concrete part in this could be developing a label of “volunteer friendly city / community / region” that provides for a particularly developed and welcoming framework for people to get involved.

D. Role of different stakeholders

- Lead by DG EAC but with the involvement of other DGs as a “joint venture” Year (particular focus on DG EMPL, COMM, REGIO, ENV, DEV, ELARG);
- There should be a **European-level steering group** with a function to coordinate European activities and at the same time to ensure input from the grass roots level at an early stage. Ownership and uptake of the Year will only work if the activities are designed on the basis of input from local organisations. Representatives from the EYV 2011 Alliance, the European Commission, the Council (or some “champion” Member States, especially the Presidency countries 2009, 2010 and 2011), the EESC and the Committee of the Regions could play a major role here. To ensure local ownership of the Year, an idea would be to “contract out” some activities of the Year to this EU steering committee, national steering committees and the stakeholders represented here and to implement the Year on the basis of a **co-management** system;
- There is therefore a key role to play for **national/regional steering committees** (volunteer organisations, government, business, formal education, academia) in order to plan local activities and, not least, to raise funds at local and national level. Steering groups should pay particular attention to the diversity of volunteering (involving different ethnic groups, age groups, disabled people, religions etc.);
- Regular contacts shall be sought with the UNV and the preparatory team for the 10th anniversary of IYV 2001 and with the Council of Europe, especially the International NGO group with participatory status at the CoE. The CoE will debate in January 2009 its own involvement in the Year and will adopt a resolution that also calls for the Year of Volunteering in 2011. The European Year on Volunteering exercised by **EU, UNV and the Council of Europe** would not only draw on the common synergies and enrich the process, but would also be an unprecedented joint action between those entities.;
- **EU level volunteer organisations and networks** will ensure dissemination and valorisation if information about the Year is made available and its ownership at the local level is facilitated. They will create - in cooperation with their members - toolkits for their national members for preparation of the Years activities (ensure support and funding for national and local actions).

- There is a need to **collaborate** at an early stage with the stakeholders of the **European Years in 2010 on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and 2012 on Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity** in order to ensure that these Years build on each other's successes.