

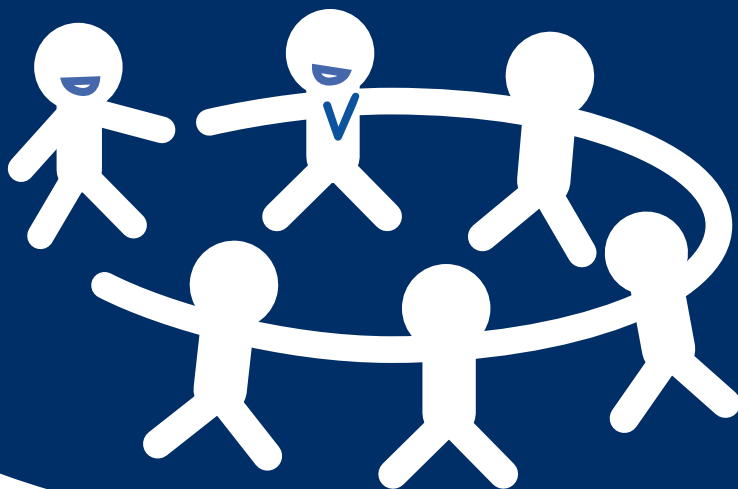
CEV

CEV Symposium

“Volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion – A bridge between the European Years 2010 and 2011”

Brussels, Belgium | 6th – 7th December 2010

FINAL REPORT – CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS



EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What, Who and Where?

What is the role played by volunteering in the fight against poverty and social exclusion? Is volunteering inclusive itself and is its empowering potential used to the full? What recommendations can we formulate for more and better voluntary action in combating poverty and social exclusion, as well as for a better recognition of the role of volunteers in this area?

These constitute a sample of the questions that were addressed by the over 150 participants of the CEV Symposium on ‘Volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion – A bridge between the European Years 2010 and 2011’, organised in Brussels from 6th to 8th December. Symposium participants included professionals from the volunteering sector; decision-makers; experts in the field of the fight against poverty and social exclusion; as well as volunteers and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The conference was organised in collaboration with CEV’s four Belgian member organisations – Vlaams Steunpunt Vrijwilligerswerk, Het Punt Brussel, Plateforme Francophone du Volontariat and Association pour le Volontariat – in the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union (EU).

Why?

While Europe is a prospering continent, poverty and social exclusion remain an undeniable reality in most European countries. These phenomena as well as their impact on individuals are multifaceted and go far beyond a lack of financial resources: the inability to secure adequate education and training; the impact on physical and mental health; the reduced ability to get access to community networks and activities; the loss of social contacts; the exclusion from decision-making processes; the loss of self-confidence and the feeling of powerlessness and distress are some of the effects we need to fight against in order to allow all members of our societies to live a dignified life.

In view of these facts, the CEV Symposium aimed to showcase the empowering potential of volunteering in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, through the presentation of good practice examples from all over Europe, and an open discussion on various fundamental questions linked to this topic. The ultimate objective was to debate a common conference statement, the ‘CEV Brussels Declaration’ and to develop and agree on it. The event was meant to be CEV’s contribution to ensuring a legacy for the European Year of the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010 – and to the kick-off for the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

How?

The Symposium was inaugurated by opening addresses from the Belgian Minister President of the Flemish Community Kris Peeters and the leader of the EC Taskforce for the European Year of Volunteering John Macdonald, followed by a keynote speech of Carmen Mathijssen, researcher for the Belgian organisation Cera, on volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion, as compared to the paternalist and restrictive activation strategies developed by the State. An opening panel of experts, composed by EAPN Director Fintan Farrell, Volunteering Ireland’s director Elaine Bradley, BTCV’s CEO Tom Flood and the Coordinator of the Poverty cell of the Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty Magda De Meyer, discussed the importance of volunteering in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the question of the inclusiveness of volunteering, and the value of volunteering as a way to acquire skills and social capital. All the Symposium participants then had the opportunity to explore, in a “dialogue café” format, the different dimensions of the role of volunteering in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. On the

second day of the Symposium, the empowering potential of volunteering was concretely showcased through the presentation of various good practice examples from all over Europe, such as: the role of volunteering for the social reconstruction of the local community in L'Aquila (Italy) after the 2009 earthquake; the "One to one volunteering" project of C.A.R.D.O. in Slovakia for seniors and disabled people in "socially-excluded" environments; the example of the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network which encourages people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to get themselves involved in voluntary activities, as a means of their empowerment; or the example of VSO, which works with volunteers to empowering the population in developing countries. Finally, the Symposium participants debated and voted on the "Brussels Declaration".

Conference Conclusions – the CEV Brussels Declaration on the role of volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion

The "Brussels Declaration" adopted at the Symposium formulates 43 concrete steps to be undertaken by key stakeholders, around four main dimensions:

1. Boosting the contribution of volunteers and volunteer organisations to promoting empowerment and social inclusion: Volunteering "with" people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
2. Enhance the inclusiveness of volunteering and its potential to be a means of empowerment; social inclusion and active citizenship – Promoting volunteering "of" people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
3. Ensure that volunteering is a right for all: providing and encouraging an enabling legal environment for the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
4. Recognise and boost the potential of volunteering as a way to acquire skills and to enhance employability.

The different recommendations are addressed to governments, civil society organisations, corporate actors and individuals, with the aim to promote and reinforce the role of the voluntary sector in the common effort towards the eradication of poverty and social exclusion in our societies

What does this report contain?

This report provides an account of the main points and issues discussed in the various sessions, and presents the main conclusions. The different sections are illustrated by examples of projects and experiences drawn from the debates and workshops.

In the **introductory section**, some facts and figures on the reality of poverty and social exclusion in Europe are presented, and the role of volunteering in this context is briefly outlined.

The first chapter "Volunteering "for" and "with" people experiencing poverty and social exclusion – how to boost volunteers' contribution in this field", presents some best practice examples of the role of volunteers in tackling poverty and social exclusion and addresses the ways to increase the impact of volunteers' contribution in this field.

The second chapter "Volunteering "of" people experiencing poverty and social exclusion – how to make volunteering inclusive" addresses the question of the inclusiveness of volunteering, the importance it has both for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and for society, and the barriers that should be overcome in order to make volunteering fully inclusive.

The third chapter "Volunteering as a means of informal and non-formal learning – how to boost quality volunteering as a way to acquire skills and enhance employability" looks at the non-formal educational dimensions of volunteering and the opportunities it provides to volunteers to develop their skills and get therefore more opportunities for inclusion in the job market.

Finally **the last chapter** concludes the report by outlining the role to be played by different stakeholders in order to promote volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion, as formulated in the Brussels Declaration.

The report also comprises four appendices: the CEV Brussels Declaration; the contact details of the organisations involved; the participants' list; and a bibliography.

CEV is most grateful to the CEV Belgian member organisations for having hosted the conference, all speakers and workshop presenters who agreed to share their expertise and knowledge through the workshops and panel discussions, the participants for their interest in the conference and their active contribution in the discussions, as well as the volunteer proofreader Tom Fuller for his contribution to this publication.

Aurélie Storme and Mária Tvrdonová
CEV – the European Volunteer Centre
Brussels, April 2011



PROGRAMME OF THE CONFERENCE

Monday, 6 December 2010

13:00 Registration

14:00 **Opening ceremony of the conference**

- **Eva Hambach** CEV President
- **Kris Peeters** Minister President of Flanders Region
- **John Macdonald** Leader of the European Commission Taskforce on the EYV 2011

14.30 **Opening panel: Volunteering as a means to combat poverty and social exclusion**

Keynote Speech: **Carmen Mathijssen**, Programme Coordinator at Cera, Belgium

- **Fintan Farrell** Director of European Anti-Poverty Network
- **Karima Delli** Member of the European Parliament
- **Tom Flood** CEO of BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), UK
- **Magda De Meyer** Coordinator of the Poverty cell of the Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty, Belgian EU Presidency

Chair: **Markus Held**, CEV Director

16.00 Coffee break

16.30 Dialogue Café: exploring different dimensions of the role of volunteering in the fight against poverty and social exclusion

17.45 **Presentation of the draft common conference statement 'the Brussels Declaration' on the role of volunteering in the fight against poverty and social exclusion**

- **Eva Hambach** CEV President
- **Silvia Costa** Member of the European Parliament

20.30 **Reception and Walking Dinner at Atomium**

Tuesday, 7 December 2010

09.00 Introduction to Day II of the Symposium / Screening of "Endless Counting", video clip of the European Year 2010

09.15 **A spotlight on good practices (I)**

WS I

Volunteering for the social reconstruction of the local community in L'Aquila (Italy) after the 2009 earthquake

Laura Tennina & Gianvito Pappalopore, CSV L'Aquila (Italy)

WS II

"BIS Award project": involving socially excluded young people in volunteering

Anne-Sophie Van der Bracht, Jongerenwerking Foyer (Belgium);

WS III

Social inclusion of elderly through volunteering

Anja Ehlers, University of Oldenburg
& **Wolfgang Nötzold**, ZWAR central office

WS IV

Cybervolunteering: Citizens' empowerment through ICTs (information and communication technologies)

Angel Sola & Yolanda Rueda, Fundación Cibervoluntarios (Spain)

WS V

The role of Senior Volunteer Associations in the worldwide fight against poverty

Jan Röben, CESES

11.15 **A spotlight on good practices (II)**

WS VI

Lifelong Learning as a means of empowerment and social inclusion – the VALUE project as an example

Nick Ockenden, Institute for Volunteering Research (UK)

WS VII

The role of international partnerships in volunteering for development; examples from Kenya, China and the Balkans

Violeta Vajda, Voluntary Service Overseas (UK)
& **Margaret Mliwa**, Kenya Ministry of Youth and Sports (Kenya)

WS IIX

Volunteering for better communities, building platforms for citizens – a project model from Caritas Germany

Eugen Baldas, Deutscher Caritasverband (Germany)

WS IX

“One to one volunteering” for seniors and disabled people in “socially-excluded” environments

Alžbeta Mračková, C.A.R.D.O. (Slovakia)

WS X

How we fight against poverty (out of our own poverty-experience) – volunteering as a tool for empowerment

Karolien Schepens, Belgian Anti Poverty Network (Belgium)

- 12.45** Lunch break
- 13:45** Introduction to the working groups on the common conference statement
- 14:00** Working Groups on the common conference statement: the ‘Brussels Declaration’
- 16.30** Presentation of conclusions and recommendations from the working groups, debate, and vote on the final ‘Brussels Declaration’

INTRODUCTION – POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN EUROPE: WHAT ROLE FOR VOLUNTEERING

Facts and figures on poverty and social exclusion in Europe

Whereas the freedom to live in dignity is a human right protected by the European Convention of Human Rights and underlying the European values¹, and while the Europe 2020 Strategy aims to turn the EU into an “inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion”, poverty and social exclusion remain an undeniable reality in Europe and worldwide:

- » almost half the world — over three billion people — live on less than US \$2,50 a day²;
- » almost 84 million people (16% of the total population) live at risk of or below the poverty line and many face serious obstacles in accessing employment, education, housing, social and financial services;
- » 73% of Europeans feel that poverty in their country is widespread³;
- » 15% of Europeans feel excluded from society⁴;
- » 23 million (9,6%) within the EU27 were estimated to be unemployed in March 2010⁵;
- » 150 million (30%) people aged 65 or over are expected to live in Europe in 2060 compared to 60 million (17%) in 2008⁶;
- » in 2007, 22% women and 17% men over 65 were at the risk of poverty⁷;
- » 6% of the EU27 population suffered from severe housing deprivation in 2007⁸.

Concepts

Absolute or extreme poverty is when ‘people lack the basic necessities for survival’. Poverty in the EU countries is more generally understood as relative poverty – ‘when way of life and income is so much worse than the general standard of living in the country or region in which they live that they struggle to live normal life and participate in ordinary economic, social and cultural activities’. (EAPN, 2009. ‘Poverty and inequality in the EU – EAPN Explainer # 1, p. 5.)

Social exclusion is ‘the process which pushes people to the edge of society, which limits their access to resources and opportunities, curtails their participation in normal social and cultural life leaving them feeling marginalised, powerless and discriminated against’. (EAPN, 2009. ‘Poverty and inequality in the EU – EAPN Explainer # 1, p. 3.)

1 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000. Preamble and Art. 1.

2 World Bank Development Indicators, 2008, available at: <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats> [cited 4.11.2010].

3 Special Eurobarometer 321 / Wave 72.1, 2010. ‘Poverty and Social Exclusion’, February 2010.

4 Ibid.

5 Eurostat, 2010. ‘Euro area unemployment rate at 10%, EU27 at 9,6%’, Eurostat News release 59/2010, 30 April 2010, available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-30042010-BP/EN/3-30042010-BP-EN.PDF [cited 2.9.2010].

6 European Commission, 2008. ‘Second demographic Report – Meeting Social Needs in Ageing Society’.

7 Eurostat, 2010. ‘Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion – A statistical Portrait of the European Union 2010’, Eurostat Statistical Books, p. 52.

8 Id., p. 84.

Poverty and social exclusion represent serious threats to material and non-material aspects of the life of a person and his/her well being. Poverty in the sense of lack of financial resources more often than not leads to a vicious circle resulting in the inability to access material goods such as adequate food, housing and quality services; but of equal importance it leads to aspects such as the loss of social contacts and to the inability to interact with the community; the inability to secure adequate education and training; a negative impact on physical or mental health; a loss of self-confidence and a feeling of powerlessness and distress. We need to fight against these in order to allow all members of our societies to lead a dignified life.

Volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion

In this context, volunteering can be a powerful means to combat poverty and social exclusion. Out of the Symposium discussions, three main ways in which volunteering can play such role were identified:

→ Volunteering “for” and “with” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

“Through volunteering, citizens can make a difference and improve theirs’ and others’ lives”

Fighting poverty and social exclusion is a complex process involving different actors ranging from governments and the European Union institutions to civil society organisations, companies as ‘corporate citizens’ and individuals. The role of volunteers in this context, either through engaging in some timely micro-volunteering actions or by committing to more regular activities in favour of the most disadvantaged, is crucial both to prevent the causes and fight the consequences of poverty and social exclusion.

→ Volunteering “of” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

“Volunteering is a tool to empower people to become subjects and no longer objects”

Volunteering can also be a means of empowerment of the most vulnerable groups when these groups get the opportunity to engage themselves as volunteers, thus becoming “service-providers” instead of “service-receivers”. Engaging in voluntary activities provides them with a unique opportunity to (re-)connect to society and take an active part in it. Volunteering also allows enlarging one’s social network and it enhances self-esteem, self-confidence and raises overall life satisfaction, because it shows people that they can also make a difference at their level.

→ Volunteering as a means of informal and non-formal learning

“Volunteering allows people to discover their own capacities, abilities and potentials, and to share them”

Volunteering is recognised as a crucial tool for informal and non-formal learning, providing volunteers with opportunities for acquiring or developing further their skills and knowledge in different fields, both at social and professional levels. The competences acquired through volunteering constitute a great springboard for the volunteers, especially those who are experiencing social exclusion or poverty, as it provides them with new tools to have access to new opportunities. In addition, when these competences are officially recognised via formal certificates or attestations, their volunteer experience is even more valuable.

These three dimensions will be explored in more depth in the following sections of this report, addressing questions such as the extent to which volunteering is inclusive, and whether the role of volunteering in this field could be further explored and promoted in order to be better harnessed to its full potential in the field of the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

I. VOLUNTEERING “FOR” AND “WITH” PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION – HOW TO BOOST VOLUNTEERS’ CONTRIBUTION IN THIS FIELD

National governments, EU institutions and civil society organisations have a duty to play a role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Europe given by the mandate that is entrusted to them by Europeans they represent. At the same time there is a lot of space for action by volunteers as the power of people driven by their motivation to act together can have an enormous impact. Indeed, although there is a vast array of notions, definitions and traditions concerning volunteering, what is common throughout Europe is that, wherever people engage together to initiate actions to help, big changes are made; volunteering benefits society as a whole as well as the individual volunteers by strengthening social cohesion and ensuring decent life to all.

In addition, the field of the fight against poverty and social exclusion, be it in Europe or abroad in developing countries, is one of the primary areas where volunteers commit, as their engagement is most of the time based on their willingness to devote part of their time and abilities to the benefit of others – their willingness to help and provide some comfort to those in need; those who do not have a family or friends; those who are lacking the necessary resources to live a decent life; those who come from a foreign country and face barriers to get integrated in society; those who are sick; those who come from underprivileged environments, etc. Volunteers’ actions are guided by the values of solidarity and equality, which is why they engage in actions that aim to provide help to the most disadvantaged.

During the CEV Symposium, several examples of volunteering projects and programmes aim to combat poverty and social exclusion were presented. These are briefly introduced hereafter, in the first subsection of the chapter. The second subsection addresses the ways in which the volunteers’ contribution to the fight against poverty and social exclusion can be better promoted and supported, and its quality increased.

1. Examples of best practices

Volunteering for the social reconstruction of the local community in L’Aquila (Italy) after the 2009 earthquake

Laura Tennina & Gianvito Pappalepore, CSV L’Aquila (Italy)

This workshop addressed the role played by volunteers and volunteering in tackling not only the material destruction but also the social damages that were caused by the earthquake that hit the region of Abruzzo in central Italy, and more specifically its capital, L’Aquila, in April 2009. After the earthquake indeed, not only houses and historical buildings were destroyed, but also social connections and hope were at risk. Local volunteer organisations, the services of which were greatly needed in this context, also suffered from the earthquake: 84% of them did not have their offices anymore because of serious structural damages.

In this context, the House of Volunteering was created as a space where voluntary organisations, deprived of their premises, can gather to organise themselves with the goal of helping the community of L’Aquila to rebuild relationships and solidarity. The House of Volunteering aims to maintain a local network of volunteer organisations, stimulating the construction of networks among the population, creating new collaborations, and giving concrete answers to the social needs of locals.

The House of Volunteering was thus created with the aim of keeping alive volunteering in the city of L'Aquila, by providing a space where volunteering organisations can maintain their activities in order to be able to contribute not only to the physical reconstruction of the city, but also to the rebuilding of social connections, relationships and solidarity among the population.

The role of Senior Volunteer Associations in the worldwide fight against poverty

Jan Röben, CESES

CESES, the Confederation of European Senior Expert Services, has introduced a concept of involving senior retired experts in individual projects all over the world, providing guidance and expertise to small and medium sized businesses (SMEs), as these form the backbone of a country's economic development. The project embarks on the idea of active retirement, taking thus full advantage of the expertise and knowledge of retirees, while providing them with a renewed sense of self-confidence, an opportunity to pursue independent choices, and the possibility of providing a useful service to the community and especially to bring constructive solutions for developing countries.

Via CESES, highly qualified retired volunteers provide low cost, flexible and on-the-spot assistance to small and medium size companies in developing countries. It has been demonstrated that the volunteers are able to provide:

- a major contribution to the development of the private sector on a micro level. Advanced technologies and management tools are introduced and important local and international networks are created through the implementation of the projects assignments;
- a particularly valuable ability to transfer directly to recipients hands-on skills in a speedy and effective manner;
- a capacity to handle real and priority problems;

In addition to these advantages, overseas missions of retired volunteers contribute to building bridges between cultures and promoting cultural exchanges and mutual understanding.

The role of international partnerships in volunteering for development; examples from Kenya, China and the Balkans

Violeta Vajda, Voluntary Service Overseas (UK) & Margaret Mliwa, Kenya Ministry of Youth and Sports (Kenya)

This workshop showcased how VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) and its programme partners seek to achieve lasting change in the lives of poor and disadvantaged people in developing countries. VSO believes in and promotes the potential of volunteering for development through improving the quality of services that support the lives of poor and disadvantaged people, and their access to these services; inspiring individuals to see how they can make a practical contribution to fighting global poverty; improving the strength of civil society to give people a voice and power over decisions that influence their lives; influencing and educating governments to develop and implement anti-poverty policies.

An example of VSO's activities and the way it works in partnership with both governmental and non-governmental organisations was given through the presentation of the 'Kenyan National Youth Volunteer Scheme', a deliberate effort by the government of Kenya, and supported by VSO, to involve young people in community development through volunteering. With this initiative, the Kenyan government seeks to channel the energy of young people into positive initiatives. This partnership is developed and nurtured in a way that allows it to make a long-term

impact on both active citizenship and development goals such as health, education, promoting the rights of people with disabilities, etc. VSO thus puts people at the centre of development, and brings them together to achieve lasting change for the better. Its programmes are led by the idea that poor women and men can find the solutions to their own problems, indeed that they must be in charge of their own development.

Volunteering for better communities, building platforms for citizens – a project model from Caritas Germany

Eugen Baldas, Deutscher Caritasverband (Germany)

This workshop presented a project model from Caritas Germany addressed to people facing poverty and regarding their possible engagement in their own communities. Due to their disadvantaged situation, those people are “static”, unable to move from one area to another. Therefore, they are fully dependent on the resources and services of the local infrastructure. In this framework, the project's main idea consists of motivating people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to become part of the solution. The underlying idea is that, in order to find people willing to engage as volunteers, we should not ask them “please come to the platform as a volunteer”; instead we should ask “what do you want from your neighbourhood community and what can you do to achieve it?”. Following this “philosophy”, the project aims firstly to identify the local infrastructure in which “community platforms” can be built, such as local social associations; secondly to involve local authorities in the project; and thirdly, to create the platforms for citizens.

The idea behind this project thus consists in involving the citizens themselves in the broadest possible manner in the improvement of their local environment and the life of their local community. The methods used in order to achieve this include consultations among individuals and groups concerning what they think should change in their districts to benefit the public good, and what actions should be taken in this aim.

“One to one volunteering” for seniors and disabled people in “socially-excluded” environments

Alžbeta Mračková, C.A.R.D.O. (Slovakia)

C.A.R.D.O., the national volunteer centre in Slovakia, elaborated a project aimed at the inclusion into society of people with mental and physical handicaps as well as elderly people living in nursing and senior homes by providing them with volunteers who act as a ‘bridge’ between them and the rest of society. The role of volunteers is crucial in this area as volunteers provide some comfort and company to people who experience social exclusion due to their disease or their age. Volunteers give them the opportunity to maintain social relationships and activities and thus contribute to their psychical and physical wellbeing. However, C.A.R.D.O. highlights the necessity to organise these activities in the framework of a clearly defined project, which includes training of the volunteers and assessment of the impact on the people receiving the volunteer's support, in order to ensure the quality of the activities.

The project represents an innovative concept of using volunteering in the social care area in Slovakia because it brings new perspectives to the lives of people living in “excluded environments”, changes the stereotypes and brings new friends to those who miss social contacts. This project integrates seniors and people with disabilities into society through the assistance and company that the volunteers provide them, notably in the form of taking them for a walk; discussing about society issues, or politics; taking them to the cinema or theatre or going shopping with them.

2. How to increase the impact of volunteers' contribution in the fight against poverty and social exclusion?

The motivation of the volunteers and their willingness to help others is a powerful tool in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, but other factors and elements are needed in order to involve still more people in this combat, in order to increase the impact and the quality of their action. Throughout the discussions held during the Symposium, the following crucial elements were identified:

- a. First of all, and this refers to a more general issue, there is a need for **better and more information dissemination** about the volunteering opportunities that exist, in this case more specifically in the field of poverty and social exclusion. Indeed a general lack of information is still observed, leading to many people not knowing the ways in which they can get themselves involved, individually, in activities that contribute to improving the lives of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. There remain many prejudices about volunteering, which is sometimes seen as reserved to a certain category of the population, as requiring too much time, as not well organised, or as entailing many administrative procedures; these misconceptions are due to wrong or non-effective communication and result in less people getting involved in voluntary activities.
- b. Second, the importance of **matching adequately the interests of the volunteers with the existing needs** was also highlighted as a key factor needed to produce better results in the fight against poverty and social exclusion through volunteering. Each volunteer has his/her own interests and skills, and it is thus essential to carefully assess which type of volunteer activity would be best suited to him/her: taking care of elderly or children; helping in the distribution of food or with healthcare; volunteering during the day or in the evening; ... the better the match, the better the results.
- c. Third, as already mentioned before, the ‘good will’ and involvement of the volunteers have to be supported by the public authorities with the **provision of infrastructure and financial support**. Indeed, while the motivation and action of individual people are indispensable, concrete resources are also necessary in order to be as effective as possible: shelters, homes for elderly, food, coverage of different costs linked to the activities, reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenses in the case of volunteering abroad, costs of the coordination of the volunteers, etc.
- d. Fourth, the optimum impact of volunteers’ action will be reached only if they receive the **adequate training**, which will ensure the quality of their action but also their security and the security of the beneficiaries. Volunteers in the field of social exclusion and poverty indeed need to be trained regarding the way they should behave or communicate with disabled people, elderly people, asylum-seekers or other categories of socially excluded people.
- e. Finally, as we will explain in more depth in the following chapter, it is crucial to consider volunteering in this field as **not only ‘for’ but also ‘with’** people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. It is crucial indeed to integrate as much as possible those people in the process towards their social inclusion, so that they get empowered. In addition, their own involvement in volunteering activities will provide them with new skills, but also enlarge their social networks and provide them with new opportunities which will allow them to get out of the vicious circle of social exclusion.

II. VOLUNTEERING “OF” PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION – HOW TO MAKE VOLUNTEERING INCLUSIVE

“We want to make clear that everybody has talents and competences and that those talents and competences can be made use of!”
(Testimony of a volunteer from a BAPN member organisation)

‘Empowerment’ was one of the key concepts underlying the discussions of the Symposium; it was commonly understood and defined by the Symposium participants as expressing inclusion or re-inclusion of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion into society, providing them with the possibility to be responsible for their own fate, and the opportunity to take part in collective decision making by having their

voices heard. One of the main topics of the conference was the question of whether volunteering is itself inclusive, thereby contributing to give people experiencing poverty and social exclusion a voice in society, that is, empowering them. While in theory most stakeholders in the volunteering sector agree on the importance of volunteering being inclusive and accessible to all categories of people, the practice shows indeed that there are some barriers which restrain access to volunteering to certain people, thus preventing it from being fully inclusive. Therefore, projects aimed at empowering individuals and groups who are excluded from the mainstream society have to be carefully thought out; the sole willingness to help those who in our perception need it, no matter how good our intentions are, is not sufficient. On the contrary, in the worst case it can create aversion among those who are being ‘helped’ and disappointment and resignation among the ‘helpers’. During the Symposium, it was demonstrated through showcase of good practices in the workshop sessions that the most efficient method is to allow people to be accountable for their individual situation as well as for the development of their community – through being themselves involved in voluntary activities they have decided to join.

In relation to the topic of the inclusiveness of volunteering, the following two main questions were explored during the Symposium, and are further developed in the following sub-sections:

- » Why inclusive volunteering is important both for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and for society?
- » What are the barriers to equal participation of all in volunteering and how to make volunteering inclusive?

1. Why inclusive volunteering is beneficial both for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and for society?

When considering the extent to which volunteering is inclusive and the ways in which it can be made accessible to more people, the question arises whether the efforts are worthwhile and whether the integration of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in voluntary activities would actually bring as many benefits as it requires additional efforts and time. Indeed, integrating socially-excluded people in voluntary activities may require more support and thus more resources than when dealing with ‘usual’ volunteers. Therefore, one might have doubts on the balance between costs/benefits of efforts towards fully-inclusive volunteering.

During the Symposium, participants debated the advantages of inclusive volunteering for both people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and for the volunteering sector, as compared

to ‘one-way’ volunteering when people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are only recipients of voluntary aid. The following arguments were raised as the most important reasons favouring volunteering ‘by’ rather than volunteering exclusively ‘for’ socially excluded people.

Advantages for the volunteers themselves

Volunteering ‘by’ people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is a strong psychological ‘tool’: proactive people do not feel as subjects of assistance; by helping others and being themselves involved in voluntary activities for their community they increase their self-confidence, discover their hidden potential and can eventually create a ‘better identity’ for themselves. They realise that their own skills are as good as anyone else’s. This was demonstrated through the testimonies of volunteers coming from two member associations of the **Belgian Anti-Poverty Network**: T’ Hope and De Zuidpoort. These are called “Associations where people experiencing poverty take the floor” and their aim consists in empowering people experiencing poverty and social exclusion by encouraging them to engage in voluntary activities.

How we fight against poverty (out of our own poverty-experience) – volunteering as a tool for empowerment

Karolien Schepens, Belgian Anti Poverty Network (BAPN)

The “Associations where people experiencing poverty take the floor” are operating under the umbrella organisation ‘Belgian Anti-Poverty Network’. In order to empower socially excluded people, the main cornerstone of their various projects is ‘inclusive volunteering’, that is, volunteering for and by people experiencing poverty. The local associations tend to create an inclusive space for local people in need of help, to help them join forces, work on their societal emancipation and reach out to other people to help them get out of isolation.

People experiencing poverty work together, for example in a common local garden, which they cultivate and they provide food made from the products of the garden to the local people, who are similarly in need of help. The collective dimension of the project is important, as people who join their forces can attain greater level of empowerment. In addition, the social dimension, possibilities for networking and exchanges of experience are equally important, as well as the feeling that ‘I am important too’.

On the other hand, and as will be developed in more depth in the third chapter, volunteering has an ‘educational’ impact – people participating in volunteering use the gained competences in other situations life brings, where they have to act in an entrepreneurial and autonomous manner. A clear example of this was provided by the presentation of the **BIS Award project** run by the Belgian association Jongerenwerking Foyer, which aims to engage youth from underprivileged neighbourhoods in activities they have themselves chosen and committed to for a period of three years, such as school achievements, extra curriculum activities, volunteering, etc... The project proved to be successful in giving a different perception of life and motivation to the young people, who in most cases lack it at home. Based on their own initiative, a group of youngsters of the BIS Award project organised a charity run and managed to fundraise significant amount of money that was sent to Haiti.

Advantages for the volunteers themselves

Active participation is always a two-way road – not only excluded people re-connect with the mainstream society but prejudice and stereotypes are being torn down when people from the ‘other side of the tracks’ see active involvement and beneficial contribution to the society of

“BIS Award project”: involving socially excluded young people in volunteering

Anne-Sophie Van der Bracht, Jongerenwerking Foyer (Belgium)

The “Bis Award project” focuses on young people aged 15-19 years old, coming from underprivileged areas and families. The main idea is to involve young people in activities that help their mental, physical as well as ethical development. The participating youth are given financial subsidies to attain certain goals – either suggested by themselves and approved by the coordinators, or chosen from the given ones. They have to, step by step and over a long period of time (the overall project lasts 4 years, during which they have to reach 3 goals), work systematically in order to fulfil the tasks.

The goal is to teach them that through dedication and commitment to a task and by working systematically they can go further than they ever expected for themselves. They challenge and broaden their boundaries mentally, physically and on a social level, and they get the opportunity to enter new environments. The core underlying idea is the social sustainable inclusion of young individuals on the basis of their own active participation and self-development.

those who had been pushed towards its edge; this way sound social relationships are facilitated. In this sense, inclusive volunteering helps to build social capital and cohesion.⁹

Engagement of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in voluntary activities is not only beneficial for them but it is also sometimes inevitable for the smooth implementation of a project – in many cases, particularly in overseas volunteering projects, the success of the project actually depends on the involvement of the locals, for ethical and practical reasons. The precondition of involving the locals living in an underdeveloped area was especially highlighted by **Margaret Mliwa** of the Kenyan Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MOYAS), accountable for developing youth volunteering schemes in Kenya. **Violeta Vajda**, from VSO England, who extensively cooperates with MOYAS, supported the idea by explaining the rigorous methodology VSO has adopted and has been promoting, i.e. to supplement the already existing volunteering schemes that reflect the local culture, needs and reality, rather than creating new ones imposed from abroad. In addition to the practical considerations, involvement of locals can have a deeper ethical dimension, especially in the case of international volunteering – in order not to create a feeling of precedence of ‘the others’ which can be a very sensitive issue.

Research into social behaviour further reveals that engaging excluded people is the most sustainable way to create long term commitments and lasting impacts. **Eugen Baldas** from Caritas Germany explains in his presentation ‘Volunteering for better communities, building platforms for citizens’ (see page 10) that the reconstruction of a community is best delivered by its inhabitants. He suggests to establish a “strong, workable we and to recognise that a significant number of active individuals actually form the face of the community”.

Finally, another important argument is that voluntary involvement is ‘contagious’ – it spreads quickly and has multiplication effects – people who have reconnected with society and changed their life in a positive way often become role-models and give hope to those who have resigned. The **BIS Award project** (see page 14) provides numerous examples on former children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods becoming mentors for the new generation after they have succeeded in reaching their goals.

⁹Seyfang, G., ‘Spending time, building communities: evaluating time banks and mutual volunteering as a tool for tackling social exclusion’ in: Voluntary Action Volume 4 Number 1, 2001

2. What are the barriers to equal participation of all in volunteering and how to make volunteering inclusive?

Thus, it had been commonly agreed by the Symposium participants that, not only volunteering efforts to help people experiencing poverty and social exclusion have to be supported by all stakeholders, but also that those people shall be encouraged to participate themselves in volunteering in order to contribute to and in this way integrate active civil society. However, the circumstances do not always allow this to happen; people facing poverty and other forms of exclusion - be it because of their physical or mental health problems, ethnic background, religion, culture, sexual orientation, criminal record or any other reasons, are often barred from volunteering. Here follows some of the reasons that have been identified by the participants to the Symposium:

- **Technical barriers** – generally speaking, the lack of information about volunteering opportunities is one of the major ‘technical barriers’ that prevents more people to get involved in volunteering. More specifically, certain categories of people experiencing social exclusion may be prevented to volunteer because of technical barriers: for example, physically handicapped people are sometimes unable to engage in voluntary activities due to insufficient technical arrangements such as barrier-less spaces.
- **Psychological barriers** – this applies especially to people experiencing social exclusion in the long-term, such as homeless people; disagreeable physical appearance and lower standards of hygiene tend to be the biggest factors of their exclusion from contacts with other people, including through involvement in voluntary activities.
- **Legal barriers** – there are legal regulations in many countries preventing certain target groups from volunteering, such as ex-offenders, asylum seekers, long-term unemployed people. In some cases this is translated in a limitation to the number of hours of voluntary work that unemployed people are allowed to carry out.
- **Financial barriers** – the free nature of volunteering does not imply that it is cost-free. This is especially imminent when volunteering requires travel, tools, provision of food or refreshments to volunteers, etc... If people experiencing poverty are to be included in voluntary activities, the need to cover at least the minimum costs becomes especially striking.

In order to remove the barriers to volunteering by people experiencing poverty and socially excluded people, the participants of the Symposium have identified essential requests addressed to 4 types of stakeholders, formulated in the Brussels Declaration: (1) European, regional, national and local decision makers; (2) Volunteer organisations / civil society organisations; (3) Corporates and companies; and (4) individuals, requesting them to remove obstacles and pave the way for inclusive volunteering infrastructure to be developed. The fourth chapter of this report provides a detailed overview of these.

In general, participants were exchanging best practices and proposals to remove the still existing barriers ranging from social policy recommendations to steps to be taken by individuals. To sum up, for rendering volunteering more inclusive, the following conditions should be fulfilled:

- » make it as easy as possible to enter volunteering actions and fit the options to people’s needs and abilities; people need to be given space for realising their specific skills and interests and projects have to be designed to match these, rather than the other way around. **Wolfgang Nötzold** from ZWAR puts it very clearly in his presentation on encouraging civic commitment of elderly people: “We ask people what their skills and abilities are, what they need and what they would like to do with others”.

Social inclusion of elderly through volunteering

Anja Ehlers, University of Oldenburg, and Wolfgang Nötzold, ZWAR central office

The Eurofound project ‘Measures for social inclusion of the elderly’ has as main objective to explore measures which promote the active social participation of elderly people, with a focus on their integration through involvement in organised voluntary activities. The project aims to identify the enabling factors, but also the obstacles to voluntary involvement within the context of welfare systems in 10 different countries. Through the research, the main objectives of national policies targeting elderly people and their social exclusion will be considered as well as whether the measures include support for volunteering of elderly people at national level, and the role of volunteering in measures for transition from work to retirement. Ultimately the project aims to draw lessons from the good practices considered and to elaborate policy recommendations for improving measures taken by governments in this regard.

- » cooperation with decision makers and municipalities is important in order to create a supportive infrastructure, as social volunteering projects aiming at empowerment and social inclusion require long-term processes rather than single, unrepeated voluntary action;
- » engaging socially excluded people and people experiencing poverty requires outreach and recruitment, as lack of access to information is the starting point and at the same time a major reason behind exclusion. Calling on the non-profit sector to be more open, **Elaine Bradley** from Volunteering England suggests: “Create an inclusive volunteering environment; look who is volunteering in your organisation and who is not; think about what someone with disability, ethnic minority or ex-offender, can bring to the organisation.”

III. VOLUNTEERING AS A MEANS OF INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING – HOW TO BOOST QUALITY VOLUNTEERING AS A WAY TO ACQUIRE SKILLS AND ENHANCE EMPLOYABILITY

The value and importance of lifelong learning as a tool contributing both to promoting employability and participation, and helping combating social exclusion, is acknowledged by the EU institutions¹⁰. Broadly defined, lifelong learning includes the recognition that learning should be ongoing through life, and that it can take place in a variety of settings including formal learning and training in schools and universities, but also in informal and non-formal settings, including through volunteering.

Volunteering can indeed provide, as reiterated by the Symposium participants, learning opportunities for people with few or no formal qualifications allowing them to acquire or further develop their skills, get back into employment or access formal education – opportunities that can facilitate their social (re-)inclusion.

This chapter first considers how volunteering provides learning opportunities and can help get back to employment, thus contributing to empowerment and social inclusion. The second sub-section looks more closely at the importance of formal recognition of the skills and knowledge acquired through informal and non-formal learning in this context, specifically through volunteering.

1. Learning opportunities and employability enhancement through volunteering

Even if motivational factors to voluntary engagement are in the first place not necessarily linked to an explicit willingness of acquiring skills and competences, volunteering most of the time involves a learning process. Indeed volunteering in principle is primarily about personal engagement and fulfilment and the advancement of societal values and community development. However, each volunteer experience implies automatically a learning opportunity with a twofold effect: firstly, new skills contribute to personal, social and cultural development; secondly, these skills and the experience gained might lead to a better access into the job market or for career advancement.

In addition, the impact of learning through volunteering goes far beyond a workplace. It helps combating social exclusion by engaging individuals, from different socio-economic backgrounds, in all sorts of activities within their community. Volunteering enhances self-confidence, builds trust and increases reciprocity among one another. It empowers individuals and engages them as citizens.

Volunteering can produce different types of learning according to the context, the organisation with which a person volunteers, and the nature of the voluntary activity. This can range from problem solving, experiential learning, and teamwork to critical/reflective learning or acquisition of knowledge on specific topics or areas.

In order to promote this dimension of volunteering as a means of acquiring or developing skills, the VALUE project, which was presented in a workshop at the Symposium, aims to foster

¹⁰ European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning

links and partnerships between the volunteering sector and universities in the framework of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL). The idea is that ULLL can provide people experiencing social exclusion with opportunities to get access to learning opportunities, therefore providing them with a 'second chance' education, this way rendering education more socially inclusive. Such partnerships can be concretised into lectures, accreditation and training for volunteers, allowing volunteers to gain new skills and qualifications, to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, and to make new contacts. This is of particular importance for those volunteers who are socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion.

Lifelong Learning as a means of empowerment and social inclusion – the VALUE project as an example

Nick Ockenden, Institute for Volunteering Research (UK)

The VALUE Network brings together a balanced partnership of Universities and volunteering organisations from across Europe. The overall aim of the project is to research and develop the relationship between universities and adult volunteers, and to facilitate and stimulate the development of cooperation between them in the delivery of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) to volunteers and volunteering organisation staff. Particularly, University Lifelong Learning provides 'second chance' opportunities for people who were excluded from formal education in the past, to receive non-formal education. The idea of the project is that collaboration with volunteers and volunteer organisations will allow universities to engage more fully with their communities.

The project activities include meetings, networking and sharing good practice, development of a resource base (website), and research including the publication of national reports. Based on these reports, the project found that the level of interaction between universities and the volunteering sector varies greatly across Europe, depending on factors such as the popularity of volunteering, the extent of government support, the extent to which the link between volunteering and learning is appreciated and understood, the enthusiasm and interest of individuals within universities, the extent of mutual awareness (between universities and volunteering organisations), and the level of funding available.

Apart from the fact that the participation in voluntary activities is itself a way to acquire new skills, the Spanish CEV member organisation Cibervoluntarios demonstrated that skills and knowledge can also be transmitted by volunteers to other people, including people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. More specifically the mission of Cibervoluntarios consists in empowering citizens through the social use of ICTs, with the help of volunteers who can teach groups of people who do not have direct access to new technologies and the information society on how to use IT tools and find their way on the Web.

This learning dimension of volunteering is key when addressing the question of social inclusion and empowerment, as our society is increasingly requiring that people possess qualifications in order to have their chances on the labour market. Indeed, as stated by the European Commission in its Agenda for new skills and jobs, those with medium or high level qualifications are more likely to find a job than those with low level qualifications¹¹, and "a skilled workforce is an essential asset to develop a competitive, sustainable and innovative economy in line with the Europe 2020 goals"¹². It can therefore be stated that being skilled has become crucial in order to get back to employment.

¹¹ New Skills for New Jobs expert group report

¹² Communication: "An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment" COM(2010)682 final

However, even if having a job can in many situations help getting out of poverty and reintegrate with social life, it is important not to consider this as automatic. Indeed, as stated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), “poverty is not just about income”¹³ and employment is not always synonym of social inclusion; people are sometimes pushed into precarious employment, where their salary and working conditions are so much worse than the general standard of living that it does not allow them to live a normal life and to participate in ordinary economic, social and cultural activities¹⁴. Therefore, it is necessary to be careful and not to consider skills and employment as the only factors necessary for social inclusion, even if they can greatly contribute to it in many cases.

Cybervolunteering: Citizens' empowerment through ICTs (information and communication technologies)

Angel Sola & Yolanda Rueda, Fundación Cibervoluntarios (Spain)

Fundación Cibervoluntarios is a non-profit organisation made up of social entrepreneurs whose vision is to use new technologies as a means for social innovation and citizen empowerment. To achieve this goal, its mission is to ensure that all people have the opportunity to access, learn and use new technologies to overcome the digital divide, and promoting the knowledge society.

Cibervoluntarios thus uses technologies from a social perspective and contributes to eliminate digital gaps. The most valuable assets of the organisation are the cybervolunteers, who are proactive people with solidarity, passion and enthusiasm for new technologies. They teach the potential use of these new technologies in a useful, simple and effective way to groups of people who have few opportunities for access and training. This is done both online and face to face, and takes the form of courses, lectures, conferences, workshops, events, seminars, etc.

One of the key projects of Cibervoluntarios is the e-STAS, Symposium of Technologies for Social Action and Citizen Empowerment, organised since 2006 in Spain, with the aim to provide a forum for organisations to exchange projects, ideas, and tools to develop the Information Society and fight against the digital divide. At the last edition of e-STAS the virtual portal www.empodera.org was launched, where organisations and citizens can share tools, resources, ideas, projects, and best practices in the area of citizen empowerment through ICT promotion.

2. The importance of formal recognition of skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning

The competences acquired through volunteering constitute, on their own, a great springboard for the volunteers, especially those who are experiencing social exclusion or poverty, as they are provided with new tools to move forward in their life and have access to new opportunities. In addition, when these competences are officially recognised via formal certificates or attestations, the volunteer experience is even more valuable.

Indeed, as stated in the report of the MOVE project on mutual recognition of skills and competences gained through volunteering¹⁵, through its very nature, the learning dimension of volunteering remains often invisible. Many projects at local, regional, national and European level attempt to remedy to this problem through assessing or accrediting skills and competences learned through volunteering and, thus, raising awareness on the contribution volunteering

can make to reducing social exclusion and to enhancing employability. Some of them take self-evaluation by volunteers as basis, others involve volunteer centres as “awarding” bodies.

The recognition of volunteering thus embodies social, legal and administrative dimensions (both societal attitudes towards volunteering and the formal evaluation of it), with the most appealing factor being the recognition of skills and competences gained during the volunteering period and the relevance of the volunteering experience to the labour market. Introducing an adequate certification system would ensure that the volunteering experience is more widely acknowledged, including in the labour market.

Various examples of such certification systems developed by volunteer organisations were evoked during the Symposium. For example, one was explored in more depth in the discussions: the French “Volunteer Passport”, which was created in 2007 by France Bénévolat, in order to serve as a bridge between the voluntary sector and professional life. The Passport documents and valorises the volunteer’s skills, competences and experiences acquired through the volunteering experience. It also enables the volunteer organisation to better integrate the individual volunteer, i.e. to guide and support the volunteer more effectively and to define clearly what is expected from the individual. As this initiative is strongly supported by various stakeholders including the Ministry for National Education, Youth and Sports in France, it benefits from large recognition from relevant sectors and in the labour market in general, and thus constitutes a real formal recognition of the value of the volunteering experience in terms of gaining skills and competences.

While several examples such as the Volunteer Passport exist in different countries, few, however, have such links with authorities or businesses and there are still not enough exchanges of best practices across regions and countries. There is therefore a need for a European overview of instruments and models developed to make skills and competences gained through volunteering visible; a reflection on how these models are transferable to other countries and target groups; and an ongoing debate on mutual recognition of methods and instruments between different sectors namely the volunteering sector, businesses, the formal educational sector and government and official accreditation bodies¹⁶. In parallel a better recognition is required in national and European lifelong learning policies of the positive impact volunteering can have in terms of alternative learning opportunities¹⁷.

¹³ EAPN Poverty and Inequality in the EU Explainer, p.9

¹⁴ Idem

¹⁵ Final report of the MOVE project

¹⁶ Final report of the MOVE project

¹⁷ The European concise approach towards recognition of volunteer skills is indeed still missing, even if there have been some positive developments, such as the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU which encourages Member States to recognise the learning outcomes of volunteer activities through instruments such as Europass and Youth pass.

IV. CONCLUSIONS – THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS IN PROMOTING VOLUNTEERING AS A MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The CEV Symposium aimed at showcasing the empowering potential of volunteering in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and at formulating concrete recommendations for further acknowledging and promoting this potential. In this context, the participants debated and voted on a common conference statement, the 'Brussels Declaration', which presents 43 concrete steps to be undertaken by key stakeholders, around four main dimensions. These recommendations are reiterated here, classified by stakeholders:

1. Decision makers at European, national, regional or local level need to engage in the following actions

Boosting the contribution of volunteers and volunteer organisations to promoting empowerment and social inclusion: Volunteering “with” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Give a voice to organisations representing people living in poverty or experiencing social exclusion and actively listen to them;
- Develop awareness-raising programmes on volunteering against poverty and social exclusion in education systems;
- Provide support for effective volunteer programmes and for training of volunteers active in the field of combating poverty and social exclusion;
- Exchange experiences and best practices in the field of tackling poverty and social exclusion with other countries' governments.

Enhancing the inclusiveness of volunteering and its potential to be a means of empowerment; social inclusion and active citizenship – Promoting volunteering “of” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Recognise that volunteering is a value in its own right – and not an instrument;
- Promote mainstreaming of citizens' participation enabling all citizens to get involved;
- Re-think social policies to enable inclusive volunteering, such as allowing unemployed people receiving social benefits to volunteer where and for how long they decide to; further develop social protection systems to acknowledge volunteer engagement for pension schemes;
- Systematically involve volunteer organisations and their networks as partners in policy-making decisions in this area.

Ensuring that volunteering is a right for all: Providing an encouraging and enabling legal environment for the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Recognise the need to support volunteer organisations to encourage volunteering by people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and provide financial support in this aim;

- Promote and mainstream volunteering across all policy areas in order to meet the needs of marginal groups.

Recognizing and boosting the potential of volunteering as a way to acquire skills and to enhance employability

- Develop in collaboration with civil society an enabling framework for volunteering for all EU member states;
- Further develop tools at European level such as Europass to acknowledge skills acquired through volunteering;
- Member states' governments to put in place national systems for accreditation of learning and skills acquired in an informal context.

2. Volunteer organisations / civil society organisations need to engage in the following actions:

Boosting the contribution of volunteers and volunteer organisations to promoting empowerment and social inclusion: Volunteering “with” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Work “with” – not only “for” – people who experience poverty and or social exclusion;
- Collect and exchange good practice examples of volunteering “for” and “with” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, notably through networks such as CEV;
- Provide training and preparation and foresee insurance coverage for the volunteers
- Widely communicate to the general public the importance of volunteering in the field of combating poverty and social exclusion.

Enhancing the inclusiveness of volunteering and its potential to be a means of empowerment; social inclusion and active citizenship – Promoting volunteering “of” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Empower people who are socially excluded to participate in volunteering;
- Be aware of and mitigate against adverse effects of volunteering of socially excluded people – promoting the voice of the volunteers in the development of their own communities; providing specific training; reimbursing expenses; and supporting activities for income generation where appropriate;
- Use synergies and work in partnerships with other organizations, notably with organizations representing people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Ensuring that volunteering is a right for all: Providing an encouraging and enabling legal environment for the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Embrace a strong democratic approach that enables participation from the socially excluded groups, including their involvement in the decision making process;
- Provide decisions makers with the evidence of the benefits of inclusive volunteering.

Recognizing and boosting the potential of volunteering as a way to acquire skills and to enhance employability

- Train the volunteers and provide accreditation of the skills acquired during the training;
- Create portfolios & help volunteers to fill them in;
- Use knowledge readily available from other organisations in this field, notably through networks such as CEV.

3. Corporates and companies need to engage in the following actions:

Boosting the contribution of volunteers and volunteer organisations to promoting empowerment and social inclusion: Volunteering “with” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Engage in long-term partnerships with NGOs and grass-root associations working with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
- Be open to working differently with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
- In particular, media should treat with respect people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and information about volunteering “for” and “with” them.

Enhancing the inclusiveness of volunteering and its potential to be a means of empowerment; social inclusion and active citizenship – Promoting volunteering “of” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Engage in partnerships with NGOs to support programmes that aim to combat poverty and social exclusion in communities;
- Adopt acceptable corporate social responsibility geared towards benefitting employees and immediate communities.

Ensuring that volunteering is a right for all: Providing an encouraging and enabling legal environment for the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Use CSR programmes to become involved with local communities, targeting marginal groups;
- Make funds and expertise available to volunteer organisations to support them in making volunteering inclusive.

Recognizing and boosting the potential of volunteering as a way to acquire skills and to enhance employability

- Identify and valorise employees who volunteer;
- Consider the volunteering experience of new employees when recruiting;
- Develop CSR strategies which encourage the development of corporate volunteering.

4. Individuals need to engage in the following actions:

Boosting the contribution of volunteers and volunteer organisations to promoting empowerment and social inclusion: Volunteering “with” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Spend time with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and engage in voluntary activities to help them;
- Respect the specific culture, the roots and the experience of each target group you work with / for;
- Engage in “Micro-volunteering”: small steps and gestures may lead to big impact.

Enhancing the inclusiveness of volunteering and its potential to be a means of empowerment; social inclusion and active citizenship – Promoting volunteering “of” people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Recognise that everybody has a valuable contribution to make – including yourself;
- Actively engage in community programmes and share one’s own experiences – volunteers becoming ambassadors of volunteering;
- Make individuals aware that volunteering in a community is an efficient way of empowerment.

Ensuring that volunteering is a right for all: Providing an encouraging and enabling legal environment for the active participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion

- Individuals who are already active citizens should encourage other citizens to have the confidence to participate and make a difference.

Recognizing and boosting the potential of volunteering as a way to acquire skills and to enhance employability

- Be aware of your needs and potentialities and, on this basis, choose correctly the organisation for which you volunteer.

With regard to the Brussels Declaration and the conviction of all those who have joined their forces to formulate it, **Markus Held, CEV Director**, said: “We at the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) are very pleased to have served as a convener for so many stakeholders active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion at this pivotal moment: It was our contribution to close the European Year 2010 highlighting the potential of voluntary action for empowerment and social inclusion – and the launch for our Year of Volunteering 2011. It is always so amazing to see in how many different ways volunteers are crucial actors in our society and the CEV Brussels Declaration will ensure that we continue the debate and take concrete action to further boost these roles.”

APPENDIXES

1. CEV Brussels Declaration

2. Contact details

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