



EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE

CEV Brussels Declaration

ON THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING AS A MEANS OF EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION



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'Volunteering is a chance to get out of a vicious circle. It's a positive move forward – lets you know that things aren't over.'¹

State of play in figures

Whereas the freedom to live in dignity is a human right protected by the European Convention of Human Rights and underlying the European values² 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 day³
- ! 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 services⁴
- ! 73% of Europeans feel that poverty in their country is widespread⁴
- ! 15% of Europeans feel excluded from society⁴

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.)

- ! 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

Poverty and social exclusion represent serious threats to material and non-material aspects of the life of a person and his or her well being. Poverty in a 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 of the ability to interact with the community; the inability to secure adequate education and training; to a negative impact on physical or mental health; and 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.

Focus on solutions: Framing a space for action

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 the fight against poverty and social exclusion both in preventing their causes and fighting their consequences is crucial – but far from taped into its full.

- ! 63% of Europeans trust the actions of NGOs and charities in the fight against poverty and social exclusion⁹
- ! more than 100 million Europeans engage in voluntary activities¹⁰

¹ Special Eurobarometer 321 / Wave 72.1, 2010. 'Poverty and Social Exclusion', February 2010.

² Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2000. Preamble and Art. 1.

³ World Bank Development Indicators, 2008, available at: <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats> [cited 4.11.2010].

⁴ Special Eurobarometer 321 / Wave 72.1, 2010. 'Poverty and Social Exclusion', February 2010.

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 Eurostat, 2010. 'Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion – A statistical Portrait of the European Union 2010', Eurostat Statistical Books, p. 84.

⁹ Special Eurobarometer 321 / Wave 72.1, 2010. 'Poverty and Social Exclusion', February 2010.

¹⁰ Special Eurobarometer 273 / Wave 66.3, 2007. 'European Social Reality', February 2007.

The purpose of the 'CEV Brussels Declaration' is to stimulate actions amongst all key stakeholders to:

- 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 'CEV Brussels Declaration' is aimed at being a bridge between the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and the European Year of Volunteering 2011, shedding light on the 4 objectives of each of the Years:

The objectives and guiding principles of the European Year 2010¹¹:

1. Recognition of rights – recognising the fundamental right of people in a situation of poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to play a full part in society.

2. Shared responsibility and participation – increasing public ownership of social inclusion policies and actions, emphasising both collective and individual responsibility in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the importance of promoting and supporting voluntary activities.

3. Cohesion – promoting a more cohesive society by raising public awareness of the benefits for all of a society where poverty is eradicated, fair distribution is enabled and no one is marginalised.

4. Commitment and concrete action – reiterating the strong political commitment of the EU and the Member States to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion and promoting this commitment and actions at all levels of governance.

How can we ensure that active participation in society through volunteering is part of these rights and that every citizen who wishes to do so can benefit from it?

How can we ensure that this enabling environment removes barriers towards volunteering and the provision of possibilities and opportunities for everyone who wishes to engage?

How can we communicate better that everybody can make a difference as a volunteer to alleviate the lives of those living in poverty and social exclusion?

How can we support volunteer organisations in becoming empowering and fully inclusive, open to people experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

How can we ensure that the voluntary sector contributes to this cohesion being fully inclusive towards people experiencing poverty and social exclusion?

How can we best use tools of public and individual recognition to give praise to volunteers for their contributions to their personal growth and to the cohesion of their communities?

What actions can we propose to decision makers to make better use of the potential volunteering has in this effort?

How can we boost recognition of the value of volunteering to empower socially excluded people; to provide key skills and competences and to be an expression of active citizenship?

The objectives of the European Year 2011¹²:

1. Work towards an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU – in order to anchor volunteering as part of promoting civic participation and people-to-people activities in an EU context and address existing obstacles to voluntary activities, where appropriate and necessary.

2. Empower organisers of voluntary activities – to improve the quality of voluntary activities in order to facilitate voluntary activities and help organisers to implement new types of voluntary activities and to encourage networking, mobility, cooperation and synergies within civil society and between civil society and other sectors in an EU context.

3. Recognise voluntary activities – in order to encourage appropriate incentives for individuals, companies and volunteer-development organisations and gain recognition for volunteering at EU level and in the Member States by policymakers, civil society organisations, public institutions, the formal and non-formal education sector and employers for skills and competences developed through volunteering.

4. Raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering – in order to raise general awareness of the importance of volunteering as an expression of civic participation which contributes to issues which are of common concern of all Member States, such as a harmonious societal development and social cohesion.

¹¹ As defined in the Decision No 1098/2008/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 22 October 2008 on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010).

¹² As defined in the Council Decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011).

The CEV Brussels Declaration

On the role of volunteering as a means of empowerment and social inclusion

4 key dimensions | 4 types of actors | 43 key actions

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

Volunteers are involved in a wide variety of areas ranging from sport, education or environment to health and social services and helping people in need. Volunteers and their organisations are those who on a daily basis provide ‘hands-on’ action to support people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. What would happen if there were no volunteers in the social sector?

! Voluntary organisations and their volunteers work with isolated groups and add value to the social sector. In Lithuania, 55% and in Spain, 31,80% of voluntary sector activities are concentrated in the field of social care and services.¹³

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

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

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

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

Corporates and companies need to engage in the following actions:

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

Individuals need to engage in the following actions:

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

2) 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

One of the side-effects of poverty is loss of confidence, dignity and self-respect. A recurrent effect of poverty is social exclusion, a feeling of loneliness, stigmatization and no ability to actively make use of citizens’ rights of participation to society, especially when people experiencing poverty become insecure about their purpose in life and underestimate their value to society. Volunteering is a way to re-build this confidence and allow people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to become active and to allow people marginalised from society closer to more active participation.

On the other hand, the volunteering sector appears not to be always able to live up to the values of being fully inclusive: the majority of volunteers still come from rather well-off, middle class backgrounds – worryingly enough sometimes referred to as those being able to ‘afford’ to volunteer.

Moreover, volunteering is a very important way of ensuring social participation, empowering, feeling useful and being active for good purpose for people who are temporarily or permanently unemployed

! ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.’¹⁴

¹³ CSVnet – National Coordination Body of Voluntary Support Centres, 2009. ‘Brief compendium of the research: Volunteering across Europe. Organisations, promotion, participation’, p. 14, 18.

¹⁴ United Nations, 1948. ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’.

¹⁵ Volunteering Ireland, 2004. ‘Opportunity knocks – Opening doors for volunteers with additional support needs’, p. 17.

! Inclusive volunteering would bring benefits to different groups. As examples from Ireland suggest, through volunteering, ‘people on the margins can identify and articulate their needs and design ways to overcome their own disadvantage’, transforming ‘decision-making more inclusive and democratic’.¹⁵

! Volunteering improves self-confidence. Over ‘80 % of English volunteers report that engagement in voluntary work makes them happy and improve their self-esteem’.¹⁶

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

- 1) Recognise that volunteering is a value in its own right – and not an instrument
- 2) Promote mainstreaming of citizens’ participation enabling all citizens to get involved
- 3) 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.
- 4) Systematically involve volunteer organisations and their networks as partners in policy-making decisions in this area

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

- 1) Empower people who are socially excluded to participate in volunteering
- 2) 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.
- 3) Use synergies and work in partnerships with other organizations, notably with organizations representing people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Corporates and companies need to engage in the following actions:

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

Individuals need to engage in the following actions:

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

3) 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

Not everyone in Europe is allowed to volunteer. There are legal obstacles and barriers preventing people from getting involved – or on the other hand forcing people to “volunteer”. Social insurance or unemployment benefit provisions at times discourage active participation in voluntary activities. An enabling legal environment also includes provisions to reimbursement of expenses, and provides insurance in support of people while they are involved in volunteering. Finally, volunteering shall remain ‘voluntary’, may under no circumstances be misused to replace paid work or misused to force citizens into ‘voluntary contributions to society’.

! Research shows that the unemployed, people coming from minority ethnic groups and unskilled workers are under-represented in the ‘volunteering force’ of Europe.¹⁷

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

- 1) Recognise the need to support volunteer organisations to encourage volunteering by people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and provide financial support in this aim.
- 2) Promote and mainstream volunteering across all policy areas in order to meet the needs of marginal groups.

¹⁶ Volunteering England, 2007. ‘Volunteering works – Volunteering and social policy’. The Institute for Volunteering Research and Volunteering England, p. 24.

¹⁷ Special Eurobarometer 273 Wave 66.3, 2007. ‘European Social Reality’, February 2007.

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

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

Corporates and companies need to engage in the following actions:

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

Individuals need to engage in the following actions:

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

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

While obstacles to join the labour market are many and complex, it is undeniable that while volunteering people acquire skills and competences - extending their networks and social capital and improving their self esteem thus enhancing their employability - more can be done to unleash the full potential of volunteer opportunities in this respect as well as engaging the corporate sector in promoting the recognition of these skills and the positive impact of volunteering on employability.

- ! According to a study among job seekers in England, '81% of respondents said that volunteering gave them a chance to learn new skills'.¹⁸
- ! Almost 3/4 of employers prefer to recruit candidates with volunteering experience in their CV.¹⁹

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

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

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

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

Corporates and companies need to engage in the following actions:

- 1) Identify and valorize employees who volunteer
- 2) Consider one's volunteering experience when recruiting new employees
- 3) Develop CSR strategies which encourage the development of corporate volunteering

Individuals need to engage in the following actions:

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

¹⁸ Volunteering England, 2007. 'Volunteering works – Volunteering and social policy'. The Institute for Volunteering Research and Volunteering England, p. 29.

¹⁹ McBain, Cathy and Amanda Jones, 2005. 'Employer Supported volunteering – the guide'. Volunteering England, p. 35.