

THE EUROPEAN VOLUNTEER CENTRE
The Voice for Volunteering in Europe



CENTRE EUROPEEN DU VOLONTARIAT
Le Porte-Parole du Volontariat en Europe

AVSO *Association of
Voluntary Service
Organisations*

COUNTRY REPORT ON THE LEGAL STATUS OF VOLUNTEERS IN GREECE

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GENERAL DEFINITIONS OF VOLUNTEERISM

VOLUNTEERISM: refers to all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal, full-time or part-time, at home or abroad. It is undertaken at a person's own free will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. It benefits the individual volunteer, communities and society as a whole. It is also a vehicle for individuals and associations to address human, social or environmental needs and concerns. Formal voluntary activities add value, but do not replace professional, paid employees.

VOLUNTEERING: can occur informally (for example neighbourly "helping-out") or within the structures of a non-profit organisation. It is often (but not always) of a part-time nature. It may occur over one day or many years in a range of different fields. It is good practice to ensure that formal volunteers are covered by appropriate accident, health-care and third party liability insurance, that they receive appropriate training and management, as well as the reimbursement of all out-of-pocket expenses.

FULL-TIME VOLUNTARY SERVICE: refers to specific, full-time project-based voluntary activities that are carried out on a continuous basis for a limited period of time. Voluntary-service activities may occur at home and abroad. It is good practice to ensure voluntary service volunteers are afforded appropriate social protection, such as accident, health-care and third party liability insurance. Volunteers should also receive appropriate training and management, reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses as well as appropriate accommodation and subsistence allowances as agreed between the volunteer and the non-profit organisation.

Background to the Project

This is one of a series of 'country-reports' produced by the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) and the European Volunteer Centre (CEV). They aim to provide comprehensive and practical information on volunteers and the law in a number of current and future European Union Member States.

Each country report explores, in a standardised format, some of the key questions that face volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in relation to their legal positions.

Important: the information contained in each country report is subject to the resources and quality of information available. It is also subject to frequent change.

If you wish to comment on any of the country reports or contribute to their annual updates, CEV and AVSO would be delighted to hear from you.

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1. Concept of Voluntary Work in Greece

There is no legal definition for volunteerism and volunteers in Greece. According to the Hellenic Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations, volunteering is defined as the *“willing commitment of a person to work for a specific or unlimited period of time, for the greater good of society without pay”*. (See www.ngofederation.gr)

Voluntary work is seen as unpaid work that is done on a short-term basis (duration of less than 6 months) or long term if the service is provided on a full time basis.

2. Volunteerism and the Law

There is no specific legal framework for volunteers and volunteer organisations in Greece. Consequently volunteers do not benefit from any particular legal protection. In the absence of a specific law, the general regulations governing employment, residency, social and health benefits and mobility apply. Any legal conflicts that arise in relation to volunteers or their organisations are generally dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

3. Reimbursement of Expenses

There is no legal provision regarding the reimbursement of expenses in Greece. Volunteers would normally depend on the organisations to cover any expenses incurred within the framework of his/her voluntary activity. According to the current rules on taxation, taxation is the same regardless of the taxpayer's profession but tax is levied on benefits where the total annual income is up to the € 11,000 ceiling. The average volunteer earning is around this number. So if money is given to the volunteer (e.g. pocket money), it is added as earnings and will exempt of tax if it is less than 11000€.

Where a volunteer is engaged in a full-time service, the expenses may include food, lodging and living costs. These are provided, for example in the case of the European Voluntary Service programme of the EU (EVS) and for volunteers taking part in the programme of the Hellenic Post (ELTA).

4. Recognition, Facilitation

Volunteers in Greece have no legal status, hence no recognition. Volunteers do not receive official voluntary ID cards or any academic credits.

5. Welfare Protection of Volunteers

a) Volunteers insurance

There is no legal provision concerning volunteer insurance. The protection of volunteers against the risk of accident, illness or third party liability is therefore dependant on the organisation. If the organisation does not offer insurance, the volunteer should provide it for his or her personal and others' security.

Volunteers going abroad are in the same situation. They may be insured under the conditions of bilateral agreements between the organisation and the volunteer, as in the case of large voluntary organisations like the Red Cross and 'Médecins Sans Frontiers'.

b) Entitlement of volunteers to public health and social protection:

As volunteers have no official legal status, they have no specific rights to social benefits. Their entitlement depends on whether or not their volunteer activities affect their parallel legal status as a student, unemployed, employed or any other entitling them to protection.

Regarding **health coverage**, national volunteers going abroad are covered by the Greek health care scheme during their stay provided that they have a completed E111 form. This allows volunteers to consult a medical practitioner from the public sector in emergency cases. If the volunteer visits a private doctor, he or she will not be reimbursed.

The E111 form that covers public sector medical care and emergency assistance also covers volunteers from abroad. Volunteers (Greek citizens) are required to pay a percentage of the costs of medicines (25% of the prescription), chemical analyses, X-rays or any other tests. As indicated above, no contribution to the social security scheme is directly payable by the volunteer.

In order to be entitled to **unemployment benefits**, a volunteer must be available to work and must register in the corresponding unemployment office. In practice, this means that a person cannot volunteer for more than 3 days a week or 12 days a month, while receiving benefits. Full-time volunteers at home or abroad will automatically suspend their right to unemployment benefits.

In relation to **family allowances**, young volunteers or their families will retain entitlement to family allowances according to the general framework under the Greek Social Security Law.

Several different levels of allowance may be awarded according to the parents' employment status, income, number and age of children (www.eurofound.eu.int European Foundation for the Improvement of Living & Working Conditions). Greek families are entitled to a tax reduction according to the number of children. A child's participation in voluntary service does not affect this right. However the child must be residing in Greece or another EU member state.

6. Volunteering Abroad

- **Laws**
- **Reimbursement**
- **Welfare Protection**

7. Foreign Volunteers in Greece

In the absence of any specific regulations, mobility requirements for volunteers follow the Greek State regulation for all foreign citizens.

- Volunteers coming from a EU country may stay in Greece with no visa requirement.
- Third country nationals residing legally in a EU country are allowed to stay in Greece without restriction and no visa is required. The volunteer who stays longer than three months needs to apply for a visa in the Greek consulate of the country of residence and for a work permit.
- Rights of entry for third country nationals are subject to specific bi-lateral agreements. The in-coming volunteer should apply for a visa at the Greek consulate in the country of residence and would normally be issued a visa as a student or trainee.

8. Governmental Action for Promotion – From the Past to the Future

A provision for an alternative civilian service for conscientious objection was legally created in 1998. Nevertheless, participation in the alternative Greek civil service is limited because of its duration (2 years, twice as long as the obligatory military service) and the limited vacancies.

Development of volunteerism was one of the main priorities of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. A specific law 2646/98 was adopted in 1998 related to the promotion of initiatives for the elderly, enabling them to play a more active role as volunteers, and promoting volunteer services in the field of care provision.

In addition, a new unit specifically focused on volunteerism and NGOs in being established within the Ministry of Health and Welfare. It is in charge of the promotion and implementation of volunteer programmes and of the evaluation and funding of volunteer projects. For further information www.yppy.gr

The National Action Plan for social inclusion 2001-2003 foresaw in 2001 the preparation of a national action plan for volunteerism that would include the creation of an institutional framework for volunteer organisations and would stimulate the active contribution of volunteers to society.

Furthermore, the General Secretariat for Youth is implementing specific volunteer programmes open to young Greeks between 18 and 30 years old. The three main programmes are see: <http://www.eu2003.gr/en/cat/58/>:

- Volunteer programme of the Hellenic Post (ELTA), where young volunteers are given board, lodging and travel expenses to support the work of the Greek postal service during the summer holidays. The voluntary work takes place in popular tourist areas of Greece, mainly on the islands.
- The volunteer programme 'Medical Assistance for the Frontier Islands' is being implemented in cooperation with the Scientific Association of Medical Students of Greece. Under the programme, medical students do voluntary work as assistant medical personnel at hospitals and clinics on the Aegean and Ionian islands. In the period 2000-2001, the programme operated at 25 health centres, hospitals and clinics. In 2002, a total of 280 medical students participated in the programme offering their services on 31 islands.
- First-Aid and Emergency Medical Treatment: under this programme, Ioannina University medical students provide voluntary work at the Regional Health Centres of Epirus.

The Hellenic Médecins Sans Frontières and KESSA DIMITRA in cooperation with the Hellenic International Development Co-operation Department of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs have also created the first humanitarian portal www.anthropos.gr, linked to the implementation of the programme 'Society Network for the promotion of volunteerism which aims to stimulate volunteerism and improve the role of Hellenic NGOs. Detailed information can be found in <http://kessa.dimitra.gr>.

During the Olympic games there was a large-scale campaign towards voluntary service. Municipalities try to keep the spirit alive by promoting their own plans. However there are still no concrete political plans or laws within the government on the legal status for volunteers.

9. Final Remarks, Overview and Recommendations

Historically, the following 3 characteristics dominated Greek civil society:

- Strong intervention of the state and the Orthodox Church in the provision of social services;
- Weak government support for NGOs;
- An individualist society dependant on strong family ties.

However, the situation has changed dramatically over the last 10 years. Church intervention has decreased and the level of participation in and recognition of non-governmental organisations has increased significantly. This is reflected in several government initiatives and policy documents. For example in June 1999 the Hellenic Parliament passed a bill creating a framework for cooperation between international aid NGOs and the government. Furthermore, the National Action Plan for social inclusion 2001-2003 states that '*volunteer organisations play an important role since they can complement State care*'.

Today, approximately 4000 NGOs work in fields such as education and culture, environment, human rights, etc. Nonetheless, there is no unified legal framework to regulate the status of NGOs and volunteers. Discussions have been ongoing between NGO committees and the Ministries about a legal framework for volunteers but nothing definitive has been decided. A draft of a legal framework was outlined but has not yielded any formal results.

Nonetheless, the third sector and volunteerism are in the process of growth and development, and are receiving a greater degree of recognition. EU support has particularly encouraged the development of NGOs and it seems that Greek society and especially young people are more and more receptive to social participation through volunteering.

This enthusiasm has to affect the government to create a legal framework that supports and acknowledges the work of volunteers and gives them more rights and a better position before, during and after their service.

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