

Contribution to the Consultation on the Future “EU 2020 Strategy”

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2020 Strategy – CEV vision for a Europe in which volunteering is central in building a cohesive and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship

Introduction

The European Volunteer Centre’s vision is a Europe in which volunteering is central in building a cohesive and inclusive society based on solidarity and active citizenship. In Europe, more than 100 million Europeans engage in voluntary activities, live solidarity and through this make a difference to our society. Three in ten Europeans claim to be active in a voluntary activity.¹ The sector of non-profit institutions and the value of volunteers account for an average of 5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This contribution is about equal to the construction (5,1%) and the financial industry (5,6%) and twice as much as the utility industry (2,4%).²

Volunteering is, however, far from having fulfilled its potential to the full. The number of Europeans who consider helping others an important part of their life is greater than the number of those actively involved in volunteering. According to Eurobarometer 2007, seven out of ten Europeans do not volunteer while 80% of survey respondents feel that voluntary activities are an important part of democratic life in Europe.³ Regarding young generation, 16% of people aged between 15 and 30 declare to be engaged regularly or occasionally in voluntary activities and only 2% report that they participate regularly in voluntary or community work⁴ while three out of four young people consider volunteering as an incentive for their greater participation in society.⁵ According to Eurobarometer 2008, 73% of elderly in Europe are eager to participate in community or volunteer work after retirement.⁶

The EU 2020 as a successor to the current Lisbon Strategy should cover policy areas where volunteering is crucial and brings valuable benefits to both individuals and the community. In the light of developing a new vision and direction of the EU policy, volunteering and its potential should be developed to the fullest. The EU 2020 strategy should be a basis for creating an enabling environment for volunteering all over Europe so that all citizens can get involved to contribute to their communities and promote positive social change.

The following recommendations would ensure that the EU is truly the region of “Active Citizenship” in the world.

¹ Special Eurobarometer 273 Wave 66.3, 2007. ‘European Social Reality’.

² The research comes from 8 countries with satellite account data available. Johns Hopkins University, 2007. ‘Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering’, p. 4–6.

³ Special Eurobarometer 273 Wave 66.3, 2007. ‘European Social Reality’.

⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 202, 2007. ‘Eurobarometer survey on youth’, January 2007.

⁵ European Commission, 2009. ‘EU Youth Report 2009’, p. 53.

⁶ Flash Eurobarometer 247, 2008. ‘Family life and the need of ageing population’, September 2008.

Policy development: Towards enabling volunteering environment

- Acknowledge the crosscutting nature of volunteering when developing policies in respective DGs. European policies shall be assessed concerning the positive (or negative) impact they have on the citizens, enabling and motivating them to become active and get involved. Especially legal provisions that discourage unemployed people and job seekers from engaging in volunteering, need to be addressed and removed. There is still too many cases in Europe where people see their unemployment benefits cut when volunteering; where no specific programmes are available to encourage the long-term unemployed to volunteer (without obliging them to do so); where insurance schemes for volunteers lack; or finally where the reimbursement of expenses is not tax exempt.
- Feed into the efforts of creating an enabling environment for volunteering in Europe in order to make volunteering accessible for all. The EU should develop a White Paper on Volunteering recognising its horizontal nature and developing a comprehensive policy agenda to promote, facilitate and recognize volunteering and its value for the EU in order to facilitate involvement of people from all walks of life in voluntary action.
- Identify barriers to active involvement in volunteering in different areas. The identification of barriers as those mentioned below should lead to a strategy at EU level towards positive action to 'Ensure a right to volunteer for all'.
 - Youth: Youth volunteering and active citizenship: e.g. lack of clear legal and financial status, exclusion of certain social groups of young people, lack of language skills, lack of training, lack of access to appropriate information.⁷
 - Vulnerable groups: In the field of intercultural dialogue these barriers are often linked to a lack of mutual understanding, a lack of knowledge of specificities of each other's culture and missing possibilities to engage in common projects – regardless of the ethnic background. Visa restrictions are still one major barrier for non-EU citizens to engage in voluntary service programmes. The council directive 2004/114 should be obligatory for Member States to implement. A second major restriction is that asylum seekers and refugees are not always allowed to do 'paid or unpaid' work, including volunteering.
 - Unemployed: Research shows that the long-term unemployed, people coming from minority ethnic groups and unskilled workers are underrepresented in the 'volunteering force' of Europe – while they could benefit hugely by their engagement.⁸
 - Senior citizens: While before retirement 73% say they would like to be involved, at the age of retirement only 44% report being involved or planning to get involved. There is a huge untapped potential of senior citizens to volunteer.
- Devise suitable measures and instruments towards a better recognition of skills and competences learned through volunteering. Europass, the Youth Pass and other instruments should be tailored and further developed in a way to make volunteering experience and the skills acquired visible.⁹
- Ensure better recognition of volunteering in the field of employability and skills development in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy: The potential of volunteering in the further development of the European 'knowledge-based' economy and as an area of lifelong learning is far from fully realized.
- Commit to developing an enabling infrastructure for volunteering, especially in regions that are beneficiaries of the different structural funds: Citizens very often are not aware of possibilities to engage with their local community. Investing in a local volunteering infrastructure will be beneficial for regional development. In turns, the endowment with

⁷ European Commission, 2009. 'EU Youth Report 2009', p. 53.

⁸ Special Eurobarometer 273 Wave 66.3, 2007. 'European Social Reality'.

⁹ CEV, 2006. 'Manifesto for volunteering in Europe', p. 7, 8.

volunteering infrastructure as well as social capital shall be taken into account in statistics and indicators of regional development and benchmarking exercise.

- Devise an employer supported volunteering programme within the DG ADMIN work structure to allow civil servants getting active in their local communities or in volunteer organisations within their places of residence. Volunteer centres all over Europe will be supportive in the effort to develop a suitable and meaningful employee volunteering policy.
- Promote among employers to engage in Employer Supported Volunteering schemes and the recommendation to make a systematic link between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) concept and employee volunteering: Employee volunteers are the agents of CSR in practice.¹⁰ The designation of a European Employee Volunteering Day could accompany these efforts.
- Mainstream volunteering as a tool for development in the policies and programmes: Both volunteers from 'the North' and 'the South' are invaluable resources for the implementation of development support – complementing not supplementing paid development professionals:
 - Those from the North can bring know-how as well as carrying European values when engaging in development countries. However, their involvement in the local community is crucial if the volunteer placement is to have a lasting impact.
 - A crucial element in order to ensure real impact on communities is the design of a tailored enabling environment for civil society development and voluntary action in developing countries: An enabling legal environment for civil society development together with a local volunteering infrastructure will enable people to get involved in the development of their societies and ensure ownership of this process.
 - Volunteers from developing countries coming to Europe for voluntary engagement are equally Ambassadors for their countries; they will bring and share their experience and culture enriching our societies; gain knowledge through their engagement and ought to be supported in their efforts to contribute as volunteers in the so-called developed world.
 - Conditions for volunteers in the field of development such as social and health security, the full reimbursement of expenses, and simpler procedures to obtain visas need to be addressed if volunteering is to deploy its full potential. This also entails resources for professional volunteer management, training and capacity building of organisers of voluntary activities.
 - Encourage and build capacity with governments in developing countries to design national volunteering policies to support the creation of civil society and to promote active citizens' engagement.
- Include the track record of countries all over world on civil society development and volunteering into the negotiation. When and where the EU engages with countries, it should hold high the values of active citizenship engagement and volunteering. Countries that do not allow citizens to engage or oppress active participation should be encouraged to commit to providing an, enabling environment for active citizens engagement: This is a core European value that we ought to transport in our relationships with partner countries.

Providing sustainable programmes

- When developing the new generation of EU programmes for the period after 2013, establish a priority action for volunteering as an expression of active citizenship: While it is currently a horizontal feature in the Europe for Citizens Programme 2007–2013, the programme has very limited funding opportunities. Different programmes for volunteering are currently scattered over other areas such as Youth in Action, Grundtvig and Europe

¹⁰ CEV, 2006. 'Manifesto for volunteering in Europe', p. 9.

for Citizens. DG COMM should design an ambitious EU Programme on Volunteering as an Expression Active Citizenship providing funding for all ages and different forms of voluntary action.

- Further develop and expand the Senior Volunteering Programme and put a specific priority on volunteering when developing the new generation of EU programmes for the period after 2013.
- Use the Article 149 of the Treaty of Lisbon to develop policies and programmes in the field of volunteering and sports.
- Devise a new Programme for Volunteering in Climate Action: The volunteering potential needs to be capitalized on, notable as volunteers have undoubtedly a major added value to the climate actions and deserve targeted action. The good example of the 1999 Civil Protection Action Programme should be used to develop a new agenda for the promotion of active citizens' engagement in preserving nature, ensuring biodiversity and addressing climate change.

Providing favourable financial conditions

- The enabling environment for volunteering in Europe needs to comprise a favourable taxation environment voluntary organisations and volunteers including:
 - In the current revision of the EU VAT rules: Exemption from VAT and other obligatory taxes on goods and services necessary for implementing and accompanying voluntary activities;
 - Exemption from income tax for expenses reimbursed to volunteers;
 - Unambiguous, guaranteed and quantitative recognition and valorisation of the contributions volunteers make to activities co-funded by public institutions, notably the EU in its programmes: This contribution should be accepted as eligible match funding with a monetary value. A model for calculation of the financial value to be placed on the contributions of volunteers to projects or activities within the framework of an operating grant shall be established in collaboration with the European networks of volunteer organisations.
 - Introduction of a specific exemption to the Bolkenstein Directive, acknowledging the specificities of services delivered by and with volunteers, including an exemption for public services entrusted to voluntary organisations from this Directive.¹¹
 - Provide a framework for tax breaks for companies that support voluntary organisations or /and that promote voluntary engagement of their employees in the framework of Employer Supported Volunteering.
- Recognise the contribution of volunteers as eligible match funding equal to monetary support for European projects and operating grants. The new financial regulation shall foresee that:
 - Contribution through voluntary work be obligatorily recognised by the 'authorising officer' as in kind contribution in areas where volunteers are indispensable, such as Youth in Action, Lifelong Learning, Europe for Citizens, European Social Fund, Regional Funds. This should also be the case for reimbursement of actual costs incurred by volunteers during the contribution to the project.
 - These contribution through voluntary work be recognised as eligible costs / contribution to the project equal to monetary contributions / match funding. Currently, contribution of volunteers is mostly recognized merely as 'in kind' contribution with no acceptance as contribution to the eligible match-funding equal to monetary match funding.

¹¹ CSVnet – National Coordination Body of Voluntary Support Centres, 2009. 'Manifesto of Italian volunteering for Europe'. Part of the project Volunteers, European citizens.

- A model for calculation of the financial value to be placed on the contributions of volunteers to projects or activities within the framework of an operating grant shall be established in collaboration with the European networks of volunteer organisations.
- Facilitate the work of volunteer organisations beneficiaries of EU funding by reducing red tape and by revising the Financial Regulations in a way that EU programmes become more accessible.

Research on volunteering: Towards evidence-based policy

- Benchmark Active Citizenship and Volunteering in Europe: An effort should be undertaken on basis of the recently commissioned Study on Volunteering in Europe to gather different understandings of volunteering and active citizenship in the EU 27 and extract common ground. Both concepts are intertwined but not clear definitions are available to describe the different perspectives the EU 27 have.
- Conduct regular research on volunteering and make sure the results feed into both the comprehensive policy agenda and the design of the new generation of EU programmes. Set-up an advisory group to propose a focus on volunteering. The following elements are largely not researched at a comparative level in the EU:
 - The impact of volunteering on and relationship with active citizenship;
 - Volunteering and the creation of social capital as well as the impact of social capital in societies;
 - Volunteering as part of European identity building;
 - The economic value of volunteering;
 - Alternative ways of measuring well-being in societies.
 - The impact of volunteering infrastructure organisations on the ability and motivation of citizens to volunteer.
- Acknowledge the economic value of volunteering commissioning EUROSTAT to establish satellite accounts and collect systematically data on volunteering and its economic value. The Johns Hopkins University, the ILO Manual for Labour Force Surveys and the UN Handbook on Not-for-Profit Organisations in the system of National Accounts are precedents in this respect. The European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship 2011 can serve as a momentum.
- Encourage Member States to collect ongoing data on the different elements of volunteering mentioned above, for example through household surveys or as adjunct to national census.
- Continue funding for networks of experts and researches in the field of civil society development and volunteering such as the CINEFOGO network.

Establishing continuous dialogue and cooperation

- In the light of the newly created DGs, establish a dialogue with the volunteer organisations at European level such as the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) from the very beginning of the work in order to develop a comprehensive policy agenda on how to better harness volunteers to contribute to the delivery of the respective policies and programmes.
- Devise an ongoing process of dialogue with volunteer organisations and volunteers in Europe. The Open Method of Coordination could be a model for this as shown in the OMCs in the field of DG EMPL, ELARG and JLS. But a separate mechanism for the further promotion and development of "Volunteering and Active European Citizenship" should be developed and implemented.

- Collaborate with the volunteer organisations at European level such as the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) when taking the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps forward. As the ex-ante evaluation of EVHAC commissioned by the services of the EU has been overall very cautious as to the usefulness of this initiative, it will be crucial to carefully assess options of its implementation together with the organisations concerned. Issues to be addressed are:
 - Mapping the field, notably existing volunteer programmes and lessons learned from these, and assessing whether an additional scheme at European level is needed and what its added value could be.
 - Identifying best practice and minimum standards for recruiting, training and management of humanitarian volunteers;
 - Ways to capitalize on the complementary nature of professional humanitarian aid workers and volunteers;
 - The necessity of targeted efforts and resources for capacity-building in developing countries to encourage governments and local organisations to develop own disaster relief and civil protection programmes. A focus should be on the ownership of local communities in these processes.
- Invite the volunteer organisations at European level such as the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) when developing the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda at European level and in any multi-stakeholder forum operating in this area.

Recognition and visibility of volunteering

- Support events to showcase good examples of volunteering across Europe as a follow up of the European Year Promoting Active Citizenship Activities in 2011 activities. The stakeholders should have opportunities on regular basis to exchange good practice and maintain cooperation.
- Deploy specific action to bring the value of volunteering to peoples' and decision-makers' consciousness. Volunteering and active citizenship is part of the European identity, of European culture. Although there are differences in numbers and in traditions of voluntary action across the countries in Europe, citizens volunteer all over the continent. The communicative potential of local volunteers is massive if appropriately tapped into. The European Commission should raise awareness with volunteers all over Europe that what they are doing is living practice of European values; they are agents of European integration.

Conclusion

In order to realise the full potential of volunteering in Europe, all relevant stakeholders at different levels need to put efforts into enabling this. There are many policy areas related to volunteering in the competence of the national, regional and local authorities. However, the European Union has equally relevant and important role to play – among all, serve as a catalyst and convener to bring stakeholders and different levels of government together for a change for the better. The European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship in 2011 should be used for an ambitious policy agenda for an enabling environment for citizens' engagement, volunteering and active citizenship in Europe in 2011 and beyond.