

## **NATIONAL REPORT – GREECE**

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# 1 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT VOLUNTEERING IN GREECE

## 1.1 History and contextual background

The tradition of organised volunteering in Greece dates back to 1913 when the Guides were first established in the country. The Institution for disabled children (ΠΙΚΠΑ) was also established to address the needs of children during the World War I. However, the tradition of volunteering in Greece can be considered to be going further back in time, to the great benefactors of the nation that was created in 1821. A history of bequests, mainly for cultural and educational initiatives started in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the Greek region of Epirus which was the place of birth of many of the great Greek benefactors. Going back even further, the tradition of offer for the common good, can also be traced further back to the direct democracy of Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, when citizens volunteered into key positions of public interest<sup>1</sup>.

In general, however, volunteering in Greece cannot be characterised as a concept widely practiced in the Greek community. Historically, the characteristics that dominated Greek civil society were:

- A strong intervention of the State and the Orthodox Church in the provision of social services;
- Weak government support towards non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and
- An individualist society dependent on strong family ties<sup>2</sup>.

Family and networks of relatives have always created the basic framework of mutual aid, solidarity and cooperation in Greece. Traditionally, Greeks have learned to rely mostly on their families and not on the community. Greeks lack social trust, which is a prerequisite for the development of voluntary organisations<sup>3</sup>. This is made worse in the context of a strongly centralised state. As a consequence, volunteering has not been widely promoted or accepted in the Greek society.

In recent years, however, a new wave of volunteering has begun to unfold in Greece. This is due to a gradual but continuous transformation of the Greek society, especially during the past fifteen years. Interviews and literature attest to an increase in the number of non-profit and volunteer organisations being created, and an increase in the participation of citizens in voluntary activities. The level of participation in, and recognition of non-governmental organisations has increased significantly and this is reflected in some government initiatives to clarify the legislative and institutional framework of voluntary organisations.

## 1.2 Definitions

There is no generally recognised and officially established national definition of volunteering in Greece<sup>4</sup>.

However, Article 2 of the Charter of Social Responsibility of the Organisations of Civil Society in Greece, developed by the National Agency for Volunteering 'Citizen in Deed' (*Ergo Politon*) implies a definition of volunteering when it says that *"Every volunteering action serves aims of common good, is conscious and without self-interest, is made with a spirit of offering and support, always with the free will and decision of the volunteer and of the person receiving the offer of the volunteering activity... The volunteer ought to have a*

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Mr Chysafopoulos, Ergo Politon (National Organisation for Volunteering), 7 Sept. 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) and the European Volunteer Centre (CEV), Legal Status of Volunteers: Country Report Greece, Brussels, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Alizioti, 2009 and interviews.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mr Chysafopoulos, Ergo Politon (National Organisation for Volunteering), 7 Sept. 2009.

*precise perception of the needs he is called to cover as well as of his own capacities*". The voluntary organisations that have signed up to this Charter can be understood to have accepted this definition.

According to the Hellenic Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations, volunteering is defined as *"willing commitment of a person to work for a specific or unlimited period of time, for the greater good of society without pay"*<sup>5</sup>.

### 1.3 Number and profile of volunteers

There have been a number of studies attempting to record the number of volunteers but the national agency have decided to stop the effort to record the number of volunteers. Hence, only a very rough estimate is possible at the moment (see below). The national agency is now focusing on recording the number of volunteering organisations and maintains a continuously updated database for this reason.

#### **Total number of volunteers**

There is no systematic record or study of the total number of volunteers in Greece, hence there is no exact picture of the extent of volunteering in the country. The available data are partial and incomplete. One estimate from the National Agency for Volunteering (Citizen in Deed) places the total number of regular volunteers to about 30,000 to 32,000 persons. This excludes large scale volunteering for specific events of national importance, such as the Athens 2004 Olympics which attracted an outstanding number of volunteers. Hence, in addition to the 30,000-32,000 regular volunteers, there had been another 45,000 persons volunteering during the Athens 2004 Olympics and it is expected that 25,000 persons will volunteer during the Athens Special Olympics in 2011 (see the report on volunteering in sport in Greece for further details).

With the total population of Greece being close to 11 million persons during the 2001 census<sup>6</sup>, and assuming that the number of volunteers is approximately 32,000 persons, this represents 0.3% of the total population and approximately 0.5% of the adult population.

#### **Trend**

Interviewees from the National Agency for Volunteering believe that the number of volunteers has been increasing over the past few years. However, there is no evidence available to support or contradict this claim.

#### **Gender**

There is no data available on the number of volunteers by gender<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Age groups**

There is no data available on the number of volunteers by age group<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Geographical spread of volunteering**

Again, the geographical spread of volunteering in Greece has not been studied and no data is available in this respect. The opinion of the National Agency for Volunteering (Citizen in Deed) is that volunteering is usually concentrated around the larger urban centres of Greece, such as Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras etc. Volunteering in the sector of the environment is concentrated around localities where volunteering organisations operate

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ngofederation.gr>

<sup>6</sup> Source: National Statistical Service (ESYE), total population during the last census of 2001 at 10,964,020 persons.

<sup>7</sup> Desk research. The lack of data was confirmed during the interview with the National Agency for Volunteering (Ergo Politon).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

around endangered species (e.g. the islands of Skiathos for seals, the island of Zakynthos for turtles etc.).

### ***Education levels***

There is no data available on the number of volunteers by level of education<sup>9</sup>.

### ***Volunteer involvement by sectors***

There is no data available on the number of volunteers by sector<sup>10</sup>.

### ***Profile of volunteers by employment status***

There is no data available on the profile of volunteers by employment status<sup>11</sup>.

### ***Time dedicated to volunteering***

There are no estimates or calculations available on the total number of hours/days invested by volunteers in a year or month. The National Agency for Volunteering estimated unofficially that volunteers spend on average about 10 hours per week on voluntary activities. However, there is no evidence available to support or contradict this estimate.

## **1.4 Number and types of organisations engaging volunteers**

No public or third sector body has so far compiled a complete catalogue of existing NGOs in Greece, hence, their exact number is currently not known. However, all the available (piecemeal) information has been outlined below.

One of the key functions of the National Agency for Volunteering Citizen in Deed (*Ergo Politon*), since it was established in 2005 has been to record the number of voluntary organisations operating in Greece, to record and update their contact details in a database created for this purpose and to contact these organisations periodically to check if they are still active and if the National Agency can support them in any way.

The database of the National Agency is continuously updated. In September 2009, the database contained 4 168 organisations. It should be noted that this number of over 4 000 organisations operating in Greece is not exhaustive but only includes those voluntary organisations that the National Agency has been able to contact and confirm that they are indeed operating. Beyond this figure of 4,000 organisations, the National Agency has at its disposal the contact details of further 3,000 to 4,000 voluntary organisations. The National Agency aims to contact these organisations in the coming months. Once the Agency confirms that these are indeed functioning, their details will be added in the database. The Agency estimates that the actual number of voluntary organisations operating in Greece is still much larger than that.

Apart from the above estimates by the National Agency for Volunteering, the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity also maintains a register of voluntary organisations involved in the provision of health and social care services. The register was established in 2001 and currently contains the details of some 1,000 voluntary organisations. So far, the Ministry has issued accreditation to 120 of these organisations, while the files of further 335 organisations are pending accreditation<sup>12</sup>. The Ministry holds no data on the number of volunteers active in these organisations.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains a register of Greek voluntary organisations that are involved in offering international assistance and development aid. The Ministry does not have any data on the number of volunteers these organisations have at their disposal; they

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ministry of Social Solidarity.

are only able to provide data on the number of voluntary organisations that are included in their register and on whether this number has increased between 2000 and 2008.

The largest non-governmental organisations that operate in Greece and possess a strong structure are established in large urban centers and function as branches of international organisations, as Green Peace, Unicef, WWF and Actionaid.

Last but not least, the volunteering portal [www.anthropos.gr](http://www.anthropos.gr) also maintains a database of NGOs in a number of areas and up to date, more than 1,800 NGOs have registered their details on this online database.

### **Definition of voluntary organisations in Greece**

The literature review has shown that voluntary organisations or the term NGO has not been defined in Greece and interviewees have confirmed this.

The internationally accepted definition of the term voluntary organisation refers to a non-profit NGO, in which the voluntary spirit rules, denoting that a NGO operates mostly by volunteer, unpaid labour offer, is also accepted in Greece.

### **Number of voluntary organisations and distribution per sector**

According to the database<sup>13</sup> of the National Agency for Volunteering, over a third of voluntary organisations are active in the culture sector (37%), followed by social solidarity (18%), health and social protection (12%) and the environment (12%). The lowest number of voluntary organisations seems to be involved in child protection<sup>14</sup>. These figures must however be treated with caution given the fact that these statistics only include registered voluntary organisations, and the actual number of voluntary organisations is expected to be much larger.

**Table 1: Number of voluntary organisations by sector, 2009**

Sector	Number of Voluntary Organisations
Health and Social Protection	512
Environment	506
Culture	1 541
Child Protection	45
Social Solidarity	761
Research, Education	243
People with disabilities	270
Human Rights	188
Development Action	102
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4 168</b>

Source: Citizen in Deed database, as at September 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Database accessed on 7 September 2009.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the database is continuously updated and that the database does not contain voluntary sport organisations.

### **Trend**

All interviewees estimate that the number of voluntary organisations has been increasing in Greece in the past decade. This anecdotal evidence from the interviews can be confirmed when we compare the number of voluntary organisations that were estimated to be operating in Greece in 2000. A piece of newspaper research had estimated that some 3,000 NGOs were operating in Greece in 2000<sup>15</sup>. Comparing this with the (at least) 4,000 organisations registered in the database of the National Agency for Volunteering by the end of 2008, we note a definite upward trend in the number of organisations during the past decade.

### **Types of organisations engaging volunteers**

A study carried out by National Agency for Volunteering on the legislative and fiscal framework for civil society organisations in Greece (2008), lists four types of entities within the non-profit sector that may benefit from volunteer activity:

1. Association (*Somatio*): this is one form of collective activity of at least 20 persons, operating towards a non-profit aim. The capital of the association is mainly membership fees from its members.
2. Civil Non-Profit Company (*Astiki Mi Kerdoskopiki Eteria - AMKE*): This is another form of collective action. Civil law does not specifically foresee this type of company. However, such a non-profit company is implied by the law, since companies may pursue any aim, hence also non-profit aims.
3. Foundation (*Idrima*): Foundations are a sum of property/inheritance/donation devoted to a certain goal, as per its Act of establishment. Foundations are not associations of individuals, hence Foundations have no members.
4. Collection Committee (*Eranos*): this can be an alliance of at least 5 persons (that includes legal or natural persons) whose aim is the collection of funds or objects to serve a specific aim of public benefit. A collection committee is different to a foundation in that it is an association of individuals and has an ephemeral, transitory aim.

A fifth type of entity that may be relying on volunteering is the Legal Entity of Public Right (*Nomiko Prosopo Dimosiou Dikaiau - Ν.Π.Δ.Δ.*), such as the church, chambers of commerce etc. For many of these entities, while their operational expenses are covered by the State, they have elected administrations. This gives rise to significant institutional problems, as regards their state or non-state character, which have not yet been resolved.

Lambrouopoulos refers to Afouxenidis et al (2003), who examine the largest organisations of those registered as NGOs in the database of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The study conducted an in depth assessment of 211 organisations, the majority of which were active in environmental issues and social care. The study divided Greek NGOs into three main groups:

- Organisations with the usual characteristics of Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) but regarded as anti-state or anti-government. These shared some similarities with the traditional pressure groups.
- Organisations with specific characteristics based on voluntary work, where at least the majority of their staff were volunteers.
- Organisations, which could be regarded to be connected to the wider public sector such as professional associations, charities, religious associations, etc.

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<sup>15</sup> Eleftherotipia Newspaper, Dossier on NGOs, issue 89, 2/12/2000.

## 1.5 Main voluntary activities

Anecdotal evidence from the interviews indicates that the activities that the volunteers undertake require both low and medium level skills. However, there are no studies or evidence on this aspect and voluntary activities are wide ranging, according to the area of operation of each NGO.

Three ad hoc examples from the interviews were that:

- volunteers<sup>16</sup> are mainly students, who offer secretarial support in conferences, make international contacts, and represent the NGO in conferences.
- volunteers<sup>17</sup> are trained psychologists who have recently graduated from University and assist on a helpline, after spending some time shadowing the paid staff working on the helpline.
- volunteers<sup>18</sup> are experienced professionals who apply their considerable organisational and networking skills to organising fundraising and promotional events.

# 2 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 Main public bodies and other organisations involved in volunteering

### *Main public body responsible for volunteering*

Citizen in Deed (*Ergo Politon*), the National Agency for Volunteering in Greece, was set up in 2005 and it is the main public body responsible for volunteering in Greece. The agency was created by Law 3390/2005 with the aim of promoting and embedding the ideal of volunteering in Greece.

Interviews with representatives of volunteering organisations however have indicated that Citizen in Deed has not yet earned the trust of voluntary organisations; it is felt that the organisation is too young and has not yet produced enough results to be considered a key player, even though it is institutionally intended to be the main body responsible for volunteering.

The main responsibilities of the National Agency for Volunteering (Citizen in Deed) include:

- promoting regulatory reform;
- providing training to NGOs for example on sponsorship and other pressing issues;
- providing information/advice/support to voluntary organisations;
- undertaking promoting and campaigning;
- researching and evaluating developments in volunteering.

It should be noted that the agency is not responsible for providing funding to voluntary organisations but rather, it can offer mediation for sponsorship.

### *Other public bodies involved in volunteering*

The picture concerning the public bodies involved in volunteering in Greece is again fragmented, with many Ministries involved in overseeing voluntary organisations in different sectors and maintaining different databases of such organisations. There are currently six

<sup>16</sup> Interview with NGO Ekfrassi.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with National Centre of Social Solidarity.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with the Friends of the Byzantine Museum of Thessaloniki.



different Ministries involved in different sectors and relating to different organisations and voluntary activities.

**Table 2: Public bodies involved in volunteering**

Ministry	Involvement in volunteering
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Has set criteria for what constitutes an NGO and maintains a register of voluntary organisations that meet these criteria.
Ministry of the Interior	Maintains register of Civil Protection organisations
Ministry of Public Works	Maintains register of certain voluntary organisations
Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity	Carries out the certification of non-profit organisations in the field of social care
Ministry of Culture and Sport	Oversees the functioning of Citizen in Deed and volunteering in sport
Ministry of Development	Oversees consumers' organisations

***Organisations that promote volunteering, facilitate cooperation and exchange of information***

A number of organisations promote volunteering in Greece.

The Hellenic Federation of Voluntary Non Governmental Organisations<sup>19</sup> brings together 75 NGOs from a number of sectors. The federation was established in 1996 and has set as priorities the promotion of the idea of volunteering, the protection of human life and dignity, the protection of the environment and the inclusion of the less privileged members of society. The Federation represents a response to the need for coordinated action by NGOs in Greece. The idea that led to making the Federation a reality was that working in greater numbers for a common goal can promote the societal demands more efficiently and ensure a better operating level for voluntary organisations. The active members of the NGOs that compose this NGO federation are estimated to 12,000 persons<sup>20</sup>.

The Greek Centre for the Promotion of Volunteering acts as a portal for volunteering ([www.anthropos.gr](http://www.anthropos.gr)). Created in 2005, the portal aims to be a reliable source for any subject related to the activities of Greek NGOs and volunteering in Greece. The portal itself is maintained thanks to the inputs from tens of volunteers. The portal search engine for NGOs contains 25 categories of organisations and alphabetical categorisation. The portal is updated daily and hosts information on international news, events, NGO needs in voluntary work, volunteering programs running at a given point in time, financing of programs that concern NGO, sponsorships, topics of legal interest regarding volunteering etc. It is stated on the portal itself, that approximately 100,000 persons visit the portal every month.

The Volunteer Organisations Movement is an informal union (not a legal entity) of over 50 international, national and local voluntary organisations, of which aim is the promotion of regular, committed volunteering. For the past 8 years, the Volunteer Organisation

<sup>19</sup> For further info see: <http://www.ngofederation.gr>

<sup>20</sup> Alizioti, 2009.

Movement organises the Annual Fair for the Promotion of Volunteering, in Athens with the participation of volunteers from the whole country<sup>21</sup>.

***Affiliation with European umbrella organisations/networks***

Citizen in Deed, the National Agency for Volunteering is affiliated with the European Volunteer Centre (CEV).

## **2.2 Policies**

Volunteering cannot be said to be a priority in the political agenda, however, the fact that the government created a National Agency for Volunteering in 2005, is considered to be a signal that the promotion of volunteering is rising as a priority in the political agenda.

***National strategy/framework for volunteering***

Currently, the national strategy regarding the promotion of volunteering is not expressed in a strategy document as such. However, a strategy can be considered to be expressed by the priorities that the National Agency for Volunteering has set for itself<sup>22</sup>. These broad goals are the promotion of the volunteering ideal and embedding this ideal. Another target is to make something of the surge of 'volunteering for a national cause' that took place during the Athens 2004 Olympics and to encourage volunteering on a more regular basis and not as a one-off experience during a big event.

***National targets and reporting arrangements for volunteering***

There are currently no national targets for volunteering<sup>23</sup> and there are no reporting arrangements for volunteering in place.

***International policies***

Although a national strategy for volunteering as such does not exist, the general direction of national initiatives is influenced by international policies and programmes. For example, the National Agency for Volunteering often refers to the UN international year on volunteering to push forward developments in the field of volunteering.

## **2.3 Programmes**

***Key national programmes that stimulate volunteering at national level***

The General Secretariat for Youth is implementing specific volunteer programmes open to young Greeks between 18 and 30 years old. A major programme is the 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.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the Greek Centre for the Promotion of Volunteering acts as a portal for volunteering ([www.anthropos.gr](http://www.anthropos.gr)). Created in 2005, the portal aims to be a reliable source for any subject related to the activities of Greek NGOs and volunteering in Greece. The portal is updated daily and hosts information on international news, events, NGO needs in voluntary work, voluntary programs running at a given point in time, financing of programs that concern NGOs, sponsorships, topics of legal interest regarding volunteering etc.

<sup>21</sup> For further info see: <http://www.simetexo.gr>

<sup>22</sup> Interview with National Agency for Volunteering Ergo Politon/Citizen in Deed.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

***Programmes promoting/supporting volunteering at regional and local level***

At regional or local level, there are a number of programmes supporting volunteering in the environmental sector, often for the conservation of endangered species, in particular of sea turtles, seals and bears.

There are also at least two programmes supporting voluntary medical support on islands and remote rural areas:

- 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 of the Aegean and Ionian islands.
- First-Aid and Emergency Medical Treatment: Under this programme, Ioannina University medical students provide voluntary work at the Regional Health Centres of Epirus.

***Programmes promoting/supporting volunteering at transnational level***

There are numerous NGO programmes promoting volunteering at transnational level. A very detailed list of initiatives abroad that are open to Greek volunteers, or Greek NGOs in need of volunteers from abroad, is provided through the volunteering portal [www.anthropos.gr](http://www.anthropos.gr).

Regarding the mobility of volunteers<sup>24</sup>, in the absence of any specific regulations, mobility requirements for volunteers follow the Greek State regulation for all foreign citizens:

- Volunteers coming from an EU country may stay in Greece for three months with no visa required. For periods of longer than three months, volunteers they must obtain a residency permit.
- Third country nationals residing legally in an 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.
- Rights of entry for third country nationals are subject to specific bi-lateral agreements. Again the in-coming volunteer should apply for a visa in the Greek consulate of the country of residence, and would normally be issued a visa as a student or trainee.

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<sup>24</sup> Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) and the European Volunteer Centre (CEV), Legal Status of Volunteers: Country Report Greece, Brussels, 2003.

## 3 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 General legal framework

#### ***Specific legal framework which exists with respect to volunteering***

There is no specific legal framework for volunteers or for voluntary organisations in Greece<sup>25</sup>.

In what concerns volunteers, since there is no specific legal framework to refer to, they do not benefit from any particular legal protection. In the absence of any 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.

In what concerns voluntary organisations, there is no reference to the voluntary character of organisations, neither in civil law, nor in tax law. Hence, there are no provisions regulating the relations of civil society organisations with their staff on the one hand, and with their members, on the other. As a result, serious problems emerge between paid staff and members carrying out voluntary activities to an organisation. Problem can arise from the way in which overtime is counted. For example, there are cases where paid Board members can be found together with volunteer board members on the same Board. Furthermore, paid and volunteer staff can be found sharing management and administrative tasks. This can happen in the case of Civil Non-Profit Enterprises (AMKE) and can upset the functioning of such legal entities.

The characteristics of civil society organisations as non-state, non-profit and voluntary organisations are not foreseen in the current legislative framework in Greece, as a coherent whole.

In view of the above, Citizen in Deed recommends that a new legal framework needs to be created clarifying the provisions about paid and voluntary staff in voluntary organisations. This should be complemented by a new taxation regulation for civil society organisations and by a new framework of funding rules.

#### ***Self-regulation in relation to volunteering***

The initiative for a “Civil Society Parliament” is organised and promoted by the NGO “Athena”. The initiative’s objectives include the self-organisation of NGOs in Greece, the equal participation of NGOs in decision-making, and promotion of a self-regulatory framework to be created by NGOs<sup>26</sup>.

In a separate initiative, Citizen in Deed (*Ergo Politon*), the recently established National Agency for Volunteering in Greece, has responded to a need for codes of conduct for voluntary organisations by putting forward a Charter of Social Responsibility of the Organisations of Civil Society in Greece. The Charter broadly outlines the six principles that voluntary organisations should abide by. These include:

- the principle of freedom;
- the principle of transparency and accountability;
- the principle of democratic operation;
- the principle of social solidarity;

<sup>25</sup> Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) and the European Volunteer Centre (CEV), Legal Status of Volunteers: Country Report Greece, Brussels, 2003. Confirmed by interviews.

<sup>26</sup> For further info see: <http://www.athena-net.gr>

- the principle of social responsibility and trust;
- the principle of social dialogue and participation.

All non-governmental organisations who are contacted by Citizen in Deed and who confirm that they are in operation and are eventually included in the Citizen in Deed database, undertake to promise by this Charter.

### 3.2 Legal framework for individual volunteers

#### *Provisions for specific categories*

No specific legal status exists for volunteers in Greece. Their entitlements depend on whether or not their voluntary activities affect their parallel legal status as a student, unemployed, employed, or any other status entitling them to protection.

As discussed earlier, there is no coherent legal framework regulating the status of NGOs and volunteers. Discussions have been on-going between NGO committees and the Ministries about a legal framework for volunteers.

Citizen in Deed, the national agency for the promotion of volunteering, is currently in the process of preparing a proposal for a legal framework for volunteering. This is intended to take the form of a legal framework for volunteering and may entail a legal status for volunteers. The proposals on a legislative framework that Citizen in Deed are preparing will include proposals on insurance, safety, overcoming bureaucratic obstacles, taxation etc<sup>27</sup>.

Since there is no specific legal framework for volunteering, in practice there are no restrictions on who can be a volunteer. However, in principle, in order to be entitled to receive unemployment benefits a volunteer must be available to work and must register in the corresponding unemployment office. Therefore, in principle, this means that a person cannot volunteer for more than 3 days a week or 12 days a month, while receiving benefits. In practice, however, this has not caused problems and no cases are known to national stakeholders of unemployed individuals who have not been able to volunteer.

Nevertheless, full-time volunteers at home or abroad will automatically suspend their right to unemployment benefits. At the same time there are no requirements for individuals to obtain specific permission to engage in voluntary activities.

No contribution to the social security scheme is directly payable by the volunteer.

In relation to family allowances, young volunteers or their families will retain entitlement to family allowances according to the general framework under Greek Social Security Law. Several different levels of allowance may be awarded according to the parents' employment status, income, number and age of children<sup>2</sup>. 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 country of the EU.

There are no tax exemptions for volunteers.

#### *Support schemes and incentives*

There are no support schemes in place, which relate to subsidies, taxation, procurement and insurance for persons volunteering.

#### *Taxation rules on reimbursement of expenses for individual volunteers*

There is no legal provision regarding reimbursement of expenses in Greece<sup>28</sup>. Volunteers would normally depend on the organisations to cover any expenses incurred within the

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Citizen in Deed.

<sup>28</sup> AVSO country report, confirmed by interviews.

framework of his/her voluntary activity. Hence, this takes place on a case by case basis, where it is up to the voluntary organisation to decide what costs it can and will cover.

According to the current rules on taxation, tax is levied on benefits where the total annual income exceeds the EUR 7,043 ceiling. Where a volunteer is engaged in full-time service, the expenses may include food, lodging and living costs. These were 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).

#### ***Taxation rules on rewards or remuneration for individual volunteers***

According to a decision of the Secretary General for Youth of 1999 (2725/27.03.1999) volunteers hosted in the framework of EVS are exempt from taxation.

### **3.3 Legal framework for organisations engaging volunteers**

Voluntary organisations are obliged to notify the details of each volunteer to the public authorities, namely to the social security institution (IKA). There is a need to clarify the status of volunteers so that voluntary organisations do not face problems related to the social insurance of volunteers.

With regard to the taxation of voluntary organisations, there is lack of clarity regarding VAT and when NGOs are required to pay VAT or not; this is usually up to the judgement of the tax officer examining each case whether VAT is required to be paid or not. In fact, characterising a civil society organisation as a non-profit legal entity (irrespective of what type of entity its creators have assigned to the organisation) is a matter for the respective tax officer to decide. The tax office supervisor is charged with checking whether a non-profit legal entity is in fact a not-profit legal entity or carrying out enterprise activity and thereby diverging away from its original goals<sup>29</sup>. The proposed legislative framework for volunteering which is needed in Greece, will attempt to clarify these issues.

VAT is applicable to activities related to delivering profit-making products or services. For example if an association supporting adolescents has a canteen, the income from the canteen is subject to VAT. However, there are many exceptions foreseen in this rule, making the offer of nearly all goods and services offered by non-profit entity exempt from VAT. Namely, all goods and services offered by a non-profit entity to its members are exempt from VAT. Also services related to social care, sport, educational and cultural aspects are exempt from VAT.

NGOs are generally not required to pay income tax on the membership fees they receive, nor on any donations and sponsorship received<sup>30</sup>. However, whether sponsorships are subject to VAT or not, is a matter not yet resolved by legislation. The law foresees that the amount of sponsorship is discounted from the taxable income of the entity offering the sponsorship, but says nothing about whether the non-profit organisations should be taxed on sponsorships or not. In practice, it is up to each tax service to decide whether to apply VAT or not on a sponsorship. There are cases when tax offices decide sponsorships are subject to VAT as it constitutes income from profit making activity, while in other cases tax offices consider that a sponsorship are exempt from VAT<sup>31</sup>.

According to a decision of the Secretary General for Youth of 1999 (2725/27.03.1999) volunteers hosted in the framework of EVS are exempt from taxation. Hosting organisations are therefore not obliged to pay taxes on the volunteer allowance or on their social security contributions.

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<sup>29</sup> Citizen in Deed, Study on the Legislative and Fiscal Framework of Civil Society Organisations in Greece, 2008, p.8

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.11

All non-profit organisations (except from the Civil Non-Profit Companies) are required to pay income tax on their profit-making activities. This includes income from renting out property. The income of Civil Non-Profit Companies (AMKE) from profit making activities, after subtracting costs, is taxed at 35%. As for all other NGOs, AMKE's income from sponsorships, donations and membership fees are not subject to income tax.

No subsidies are linked to the creation of voluntary organisations.

Finally, there are certain tax rules that affect voluntary organisations negatively. These tax rules concern the 'tax on large real estate inheritance' which is levied on those individuals or entities in possession of large properties or land. It is sometimes the case of some voluntary organisations that they have received large properties as bequests or donations. It is also often the case that the organisations may choose not to take commercial advantage of such properties (e.g. renting them out) but rather keeping them as offices. This is because many lack the cash necessary to be able to pay the high tax levied on such properties.

### **3.4 Legal framework for profit-making organisations**

There are no specific provisions concerning the involvement of private organisations in volunteering.

There are no support schemes in place for private companies to accept volunteers or to allow employees to participate in voluntary activity. However, the awards for private companies that promote volunteering can be considered as moral support for such companies. There also exists a network for Social Corporate Responsibility (SCR) in Greece and the companies participating in the network support one another and also promote volunteering.

Interviewees were unable to provide any information on any legal, health and safety implications for receiving volunteers or sending volunteers on volunteering activity.

### **3.5 Insurance and protection of volunteers**

There is no legal provision concerning insurance and protection of volunteers<sup>32</sup>. The protection of volunteers against the risk of accident, illness or third party liability is therefore dependent on each voluntary organisation. If the organisation does not offer insurance, the volunteer should provide it for his/herself. Volunteers going abroad are in the same situation. They may be insured under the condition of bilateral agreements between the organisation and the volunteer. This is the case of large voluntary organisations like the Red Cross and 'Médecins Sans Frontiers'.

As volunteers have no official legal status, they have no specific rights to social benefits such as Public Health and Social Protection<sup>33</sup>. Their entitlement depends on whether or not their volunteer activities affect their parallel legal status as a student, unemployed, employed, or any other status entitling them to protection.

Regarding health coverage, national volunteers going abroad (EU) are covered by the Greek health care scheme during their stay, provided that they have a completed an 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. Volunteers from abroad are also covered by the E111 form which covers public sector medical care and emergency assistance. Volunteers (as 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.

<sup>32</sup> AVSO country report, confirmed by interviews.

<sup>33</sup> AVSO country report, confirmed by interviews.

## 4 ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF VOLUNTEERING

### 4.1 Funding arrangements for volunteering

#### ***National budget allocated to volunteering***

There is no detailed information available regarding the amount of the national budget allocated to volunteering. Citizen in Deed were only able to say that the national budget allocated to volunteering is negligible, and that it is probably not much higher than the budget allocated for the functioning of Citizen in Deed itself. The budget for Citizen in Deed is approximately EUR 1.5 million per year.

Another element of the national budget that can indirectly be considered to be allocated to volunteering is the part of the national budget that is spent on international aid.

The local authorities receive some funding from the state budget for civil protection. These funds are intended to cover things such as protection from fires, earthquakes etc. A great deal of civil protection is carried out by volunteer organisations, such as the volunteer fire-fighters, hence, the civil protection budget allocations may indirectly promote volunteering in this area. No official data is available on these amounts. However, the view of a civil protection NGO interviewed is that these funds are negligible.

#### ***Sources of funding for voluntary organisations***

The main sources of funding for voluntary organisations in Greece are:

- sponsorships either from state organisations, from private companies, or from local authorities (local authorities often provide contributions in kind, such as a venue);
- donations;
- membership fees;
- small amounts from profit making activities such as selling T-shirts, events etc.; and
- state grants or subsidies.

#### ***Social Services of General Interest (SSGI)***

National sources have no data on the share of non-profit organisations successfully tendering for the provision of public contracts to provide SSGIs.

Legislation related to NGOs offering social care services was introduced in 1998 and 1999, followed by Ministerial Decisions. Another related law was introduced in 2005.

- Law 2646 of 20.10.1998 on the 'Development of a National System of Social Care' indirectly touched upon the issue of NGO activities in the field of health and social care.
- Law 2731 of 5.7.1999 'Regulating Issues of Bilateral Governmental Development Cooperation and Regulating NGO Issues' provided for the creation of a specific directorate for the Development of Volunteering in the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity as well as the creation of a Register of non-profit and voluntary organisations active in the fields of social services.
- Law 3370 of 11.7.05, the Institute of Social Protection and Solidarity (IKPA/IKPA) supports the Register of NGOs maintained by the Ministry of Health in evaluating the applications that NGOs submit for certification. IKPA assesses applications, carries out site visits where deemed necessary and gives an opinion about the Certification of non-profit legal entities for the provision of social care services. The Institute uses an Information System for the Certification and Evaluation of Social Care Institutions (PSPA/ΠΣΠΑ) as a basic tool to support the System of Continuous Evaluation and



Certification of Social Care Institutions (SSPA/ΣΣΠΑ) in Greece. The Information Systems allows searching for institutions according to the legal status, geographic coverage, the type of services provided, their target groups etc. and complements the Register of NGOs held by the Ministry of Health.

However, the above legislation does not go into public procurement; it only describes provisions on how to certify and register NGOs offering social care.

Consequently, there is no data available on how the share of SSGIs have developed over the past 10 years, but the view of interviewees is that even if the overall share of NGOs involved in the provision of social services has remained relatively stable, the type of services being offered has been changing in recent years. More specifically, the involvement of NGOs may have been declining in certain services such as orphan care but has been increasing in other areas of social services, such as, for example, care for single mothers.

In addition, there is no detailed data available on the share of volunteer labour in these organisations. Interviewees noted however, that volunteer labour in these organisations is mainly high level; volunteers often act as Board members of these NGOs, while staff are in their majority paid staff, since they usually need to be specialised carers. However, often, the regular paid staff are assisted by a small number of volunteers. To give an idea, from a social care NGO interviewed<sup>34</sup> in the context of this study, is that the helpline offered by the National Centre of Social Solidarity, benefits from the services of 6 volunteer psychologists who assist on the helpline, alongside 12 employees. It should be stressed however, that this example is ad hoc and can in no way be considered representative.

None of the interviewees were able to say whether there had been a decline in the use of non-profit organisations and if this could have been related to a lack of or unclear procurement rules (national or EU).

In terms of the contribution of non-profit organisations based on voluntary principles to the delivery of SSGIs, voluntary organisations, especially grassroots ones, have 'antennas close to the ground' and are quick to identify needs in society and gaps in social care and quicker than any government initiative to respond to such needs and gaps. Such social services then become mainstream provision after considerable time has passed.

## **4.2 Economic value of volunteering**

### ***Income generated through volunteering***

There are no known estimates available on the income generated through volunteering, which is not generated through funding.

### ***Economic value of volunteering***

As yet, no estimates have been made concerning the economic value of the voluntary sector workforce in relation to the country's total paid workforce.

### ***Value of volunteering work as a share of GDP***

Citizen in Deed, the national agency for volunteering, have identified the need to assess the economic value of volunteering and have signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Greek Observatory of Employment (PAEP SA) in order to carry out a study in the near future on the value of volunteering as a percentage of Greek GDP.

### ***Issues of service substitution and job substitution***

Interviewees were not able to identify any risk of voluntary activities replacing services provided by the state, in total or in part (service substitution).

<sup>34</sup> Interview with the National Centre of Social Solidarity.

Most interviewees were not able to elaborate on whether there is a risk that voluntary activities are in part replacing employment (job substitution). However, their view was rather that volunteering can help to create employment. When a volunteer offers their time, their activity may in fact eventually lead to a job. At the same time, there are parties who feel that in large volunteering initiatives, such as that for the Athens Olympic Games, volunteers have replaced paid employment.

What is also often the case is that a voluntary organisation is only able to pay someone for part of the time that they offer to the organisation. Hence, a volunteer may be receiving payment for some of his/her time and offering unpaid services for the rest of the time they spend for the organisation.

## 5 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION OF VOLUNTEERING

### 5.1 Key benefits for volunteers, the community and direct beneficiaries

The key cultural and social benefits of volunteering relate to stronger social cohesion, which is connected with greater safety and solidarity in a society. Volunteering helps people become more open minded and come to contact with others that may belong to different social and cultural groups. In this way, volunteering promotes the values of tolerance, compassion, diversity and increased understanding of social problems and potential solutions.

#### *Volunteers*

The perceived added value of volunteering for individual volunteers is a sense of fulfilment, giving and satisfaction. Aside from that, volunteers can gain new or develop further their social and professional skills and competences. These knowledge and skills can then prove useful to them in other areas of their life. Hence, volunteering is both a part of the lifelong learning trajectory of an individual and a part of their role as member of society.

#### *Direct beneficiaries of voluntary activities*

The perceived added value of volunteering for beneficiaries is the sense of belonging and being cared for, not that it is someone's duty or job to offer care but that it is their wish to do so, without obtaining financial rewards.

#### *Community*

The perceived added value of volunteering for the community is a stronger social fabric and a stronger sense of community. Volunteering is a form of civic action, and it also contributes to more cohesive communities.

Furthermore, volunteering has certainly contributed to social policy goals at national level, especially in terms of social cohesion and social inclusion. One recent example illustrating this in Greece was the 2004 Paralympics that helped many Greeks familiarise themselves with disability issues. Volunteers gained first hand insight into the challenges facing people with disabilities, but also celebrated the sporting endeavours of athletes with disabilities.

### 5.2 Factors that motivate individuals to volunteer

The motivations are (or should mainly be) selfless offer for the common good, on a cause that speaks to the heart of individuals. Interviewees said that "volunteering is a bug, a good habit". A minority of volunteers may be motivated by certain 'perks' that go with volunteering, such as free attendance to cultural events, or a fancy uniform during a sporting event, or even the social status that accompanies a voluntary position on the Board of a high-profile association. These 'perks' however are only added bonuses for most volunteers, while it is their devotion to a cause that is their main motivational factor.

## **6 VOLUNTEERING IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

### **6.1 Recognition of volunteers' skills and competences within the national educational and training system**

Unfortunately, volunteers' skills and competences are neither accredited, nor recognised within the context a national educational and training system in Greece. However, Greek authorities follow EU developments in this field.

Moreover, the role of volunteering is not expressly recognised in national policies and the role of volunteering is not really recognised at the different levels of the education system.

However, schools do encourage students to participate in voluntary initiatives, mostly of environmental character. For example, schools take part in coast cleaning or tree planting initiatives every year. Such encouragement is rather sporadic and not carried out on a systematic basis.

### **6.2 Education and training opportunities for volunteers**

The type of support and training received by volunteers varies widely and depends on the voluntary organisation. Training for volunteers is provided on a case by case basis, usually volunteers learn by shadowing paid staff or more experienced volunteers.

## **7 IMPACT OF EU POLICIES**

Although a national strategy for volunteering as such does not exist, the general direction of government initiatives to promote volunteering do follow the guidelines implied by EU policies/programmes and are greatly influenced by them.

Interviewees were unable to respond to the questions in this section specifically for each policy field but all agreed that, in general, the impact of EU policy on volunteering in Greece has been high, especially in terms of funding programmes and in terms of helping to build the capacity of local NGOs. Such capacity building has taken place through contacts with European counterparts or umbrella organisations and through participation in EU and transnational programmes. EU policies also help towards policy shaping in Greece, even though changes and the clarification of the legislative framework is moving forward slowly.

## 8 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERING

Interviewees have highlighted a number of challenges and opportunities for volunteering in Greece.

### 8.1 Challenges for volunteering

A new and more complete institutional framework is required for non-profit non-governmental organisations. Clear and realistic definitions are required in order to clarify which organisations are non-profit, non-governmental, etc. The current institutional framework does not assure a clear separation of the non-profit NGOs from the state or the market. The result is the creation of misunderstandings about the role of non-profit organisations in the society. A general strategic plan for volunteering must be designed and implemented, that will include awareness raising and training in organisational and operational issues, tax reductions and grants, as well as other incentives that will lead to further development of the non-profit sector in Greece.

The promotion and creation of incentives for volunteering is of utmost importance in order to increase the number of volunteers and the cultivation of a volunteering mentality in Greece. It is not enough to promote a temporary volunteering – volunteering during Christmas and Easter holidays, the Olympic Games, etc. While volunteering for major sporting events has been blossoming in Greece since 2004, NGOs in other sectors are not experiencing this growth in volunteering. What is needed is a stable, regular participation of volunteers in a variety of different sectors which will be able to lead to increased social cohesion<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, volunteering needs to be supported by legislative provisions and by concerted action promoting volunteering. Such concerted action can either be the result of a coherent government strategy to promote volunteering or from concerted action by NGO umbrella organisations in the country.

The most significant challenge identified by the majority of interviewees is the absence of a clear legal and regulatory framework. The current legislation is fragmented and leaves key questions unanswered, causing contradictory interpretations (as for example, tax offices deciding on a case by case basis, whether sponsorship is subject to VAT or not). Due to the many laws and regulations that non-profit organisations may refer to, many NGOs are not aware of certain advantageous provisions. Rules and controls would then be required to ensure that such beneficial provisions are not taken advantage of by profit making entities.

In particular, Citizen in Deed (the national volunteering organisation) believes that:

1. There are challenges on many fronts, but the key challenge is promoting and embedding the **volunteering mentality** in the Greek society.
2. A **new legal framework** for civil society organisations is required. This should clarify the position of paid and voluntary staff in voluntary organisations.
3. **New tax regulations** for civil society organisations are required in order to clarify which activities are subject to tax and when, especially in terms of sponsorship and VAT;
4. Last but not least, a new, **coherent framework of funding rules** is also needed in order to clear the confusion that currently surrounds the funding that voluntary organisations receive by the state, the wider public sector, local authorities at sub-regional and local level as well as funding provided by the private sector and by individuals.

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<sup>35</sup> Source: interviews and Alizioti (2009).

Beyond that, different voluntary organisations face different challenges, for example the volunteer fire-fighters suffer from the lack of materials, lack of funding and lack of infrastructure while other organisations lament the lack of insurance and protection for volunteers. In addition, as already highlighted, the perception of the public on funding arrangements of NGOs has been negatively tinted by allegations of fraud. Lastly, the very fragmented nature of the volunteering sector in Greece and the lack of definitive and detailed information and data on volunteering and on voluntary organisations is a key challenge for the sector.

In order to address these challenges and to gradually improve the current situation, Citizen in Deed has chosen to take initiatives on all fronts. Putting forward proposals for a framework law on volunteering that will tackle many of the issues where vague or general provisions (not tailored to the volunteering sector) currently apply, is a priority, together with undertaking further research and promoting volunteering.

Regarding the issue of promoting the volunteering mentality in Greece, in order to be promoted and thus “discovered” by the community, occasional advertising of volunteering is not enough. What is required is true awareness and systematic education promotion that will, hopefully, lead to a change of mentality.

## **8.2 Opportunities for volunteering**

The field of volunteering in Greece is still underdeveloped but full of potential. The main opportunity for volunteering arose from the very positive experience of the Athens Olympic Games in 2004 where many people volunteered and others saw volunteers in action for the first time.

Even bad experiences have recently helped mobilise volunteers. For example, the big forest fires that Greece has since 2007 have mobilised many citizens to become volunteer fire-fighters.

Opportunities also arise from EU policies and programmes, which promote volunteering and which are received with enthusiasm in Greece.

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