



Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

Background information on
'THE INVOLVEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS IN FEAD DELIVERY'

9th FEAD Network Meeting

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1. Introduction

Volunteering plays a crucial role in strengthening fundamental European values such as solidarity and community building. About a fifth of European citizens are currently involved in voluntary work, amounting to between 92 and 94 million people aged over 15.¹ Because of diverse traditions and levels of development of voluntary sectors however, the volunteering landscape varies significantly across Europe. Member States such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Austria, Luxembourg and Germany consistently report high or very high levels of participation, with up to 57% of their population being involved in voluntary activities. In contrast, Member States such as Poland, Portugal, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Spain report low or relatively low levels of participation in volunteering, at between 9% and 15% of their population.²

The estimated economic and social contribution of volunteering also varies greatly across Europe. According to GHK,³ volunteering accounts for between 3 and 5% of the GDP in Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden. In contrast, it accounts for less than 0.1% in Slovakia, Poland and Greece. Regardless of its economic benefits, it is undoubted that volunteering delivers broader social impacts. It reinforces social inclusion and employment, education and training, and fosters civil society and democracy. Through volunteering, citizens contribute to local development, and become active and empowered citizens.

While the level of volunteering has increased across Europe over the past few years, engaging volunteers has become more challenging.⁴ Volunteers seem less willing to commit to one organisation for long periods of time and take on decision-making responsibilities. Their aspirations, as part of the new generations of volunteers, tend to mismatch the needs of organisations; it is difficult to match them with adequate organisations, and they tend to spread across an increasingly large number of organisations. Another challenge is the professionalisation of the voluntary sector, whereby volunteers need to perform increasingly demanding tasks requiring higher skill levels, while remaining willing to do so in an unpaid fashion.

Because engaging volunteers is crucial in the delivery of many FEAD projects, the upcoming **FEAD Network Meeting on 1 March 2018** will focus on how to best establish and maintain effective relationships with the volunteer community. This background paper will provide context on the topic by outlining the European policy context in terms of volunteering, articulating how volunteers contribute to delivering FEAD and outlining successful strategies to engage the voluntary community.

2. European policy context in terms of volunteering

The importance and benefits of volunteering in developing social solidarity has long been acknowledged by the EU, as early as 1997 through Declaration 38 on volunteering.⁵ Since

¹ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

² European Parliament (2011). Special Eurobarometer 75.2 – Voluntary work. Available via: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/2011/juillet/04_07/SA_en.pdf

³ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ European Communities (1997): Treaty of Amsterdam. Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities. Official Journal, 10.11.1997.

then, the European Parliament has encouraged Member States to support the recognition of volunteering and promote mobility of volunteers across Europe.⁶ Similarly, it has encouraged Member States and regional and local authorities to recognise the social and economic value of volunteering, in particular in promoting cohesion.⁷ Both the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee have highlighted the need for statistics and measurement on volunteering and its social and economic value.⁸

The European Union designated 2011 as the 'European Year of Volunteering' (EYV), with the objective of encouraging and supporting efforts to develop volunteering in the EU. The EYV aimed at working towards an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU; empowering voluntary organisations and improving the quality of volunteering; rewarding and recognising volunteering activities; and raising awareness about the value and importance of volunteering. In addition to creating significant momentum around volunteering, the EYV acted as a catalyst for policy changes at European and national level.

Following the EYV, the Commission, recognising the importance of the role played by volunteers, called upon the recognition and certification of skills gained by volunteers.⁹ The Council, under the Polish Presidency, recognised the role of voluntary activities in achieving social policy goals and invited the European Commission to explore ways in which volunteering could be further developed.¹⁰ The European Parliament, highlighting the social dimension of volunteering as an expression of European citizenship and its benefits in terms of educational and sporting activities and humanitarian aid,¹¹ called for EU funding opportunities for volunteering. EU-funded schemes are now the main suppliers of cross-border volunteers in Europe,¹² in particular through the European Voluntary Service and the EU Aid Volunteers, Europe for Citizens and Grundtvig programmes. While not directly related to FEAD, those programmes may potentially help organisations source volunteers across Europe to participate in their activities.

3. Volunteers in FEAD delivery

3.1 The importance of volunteers in FEAD delivery

The role of volunteers within FEAD-funded activities is crucial; not only do volunteers alleviate some of the financial pressures linked to paying full or part-time staff, but voluntary involvement also has a range of broader benefits. According to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, volunteers are valuable because they bring with them a diverse range of skills as well as links to the local community.¹³ Engaging volunteers can also help projects to reach a greater number of end recipients and, in some cases, to meet their needs

⁶ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers (2001/613/EC). Available via: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001H0613&from=EN>

⁷ European Parliament resolution of 22 April 2008 on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion (2007/2149(INI)). Available via:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P6-TA-2008-0131+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

⁸ OJ C 105, 25.4.2008; 2006/C 325/13

⁹ European Commission Communication on EU Policies and volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-Border Voluntary Activities in the EU. COM(2011) 568 final of 20.09.2011. Available via:

http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1311_en.pdf

¹⁰ Council Conclusions on the role of voluntary activities in social policy of 3 October 2011. Available via:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014552%202011%20INIT>

¹¹ European Parliament report on recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU. Available via:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A7-2012-0166+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

¹² European Parliamentary Research Service (2016). Volunteering in the EU. Available at:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/589841/EPRS_ATA\(2016\)589841_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/589841/EPRS_ATA(2016)589841_EN.pdf)

¹³ NCVO (2017) Why Involve Volunteers? [Accessed 1 February 2018] Available via:

<https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers-and-your-organisation/why-involve-volunteers#>

more effectively thanks to the different skills and life experiences of volunteers involved in the project. It also enables organisations to increase and improve the quality of their services through, for instance, expanded operation hours or reduced waiting time for recipients.

Volunteers are also important in FEAD delivery due to the alternative perspectives they can bring to an organisation, helping projects to evolve and adapt to more effectively meet the needs of end recipients. Volunteers have a different perspective on the local landscape, frequently bringing direct knowledge of situations on the ground that enables the provision of targeted and well-informed activities to those in need.¹⁴ Because they have stronger relationships with the communities, including with marginalised recipients, volunteers can play a crucial role in expanding the reach of mainstream services. Involving volunteers in service design can therefore add crucial perspectives and new voices, potentially leading to the development of innovative specialist services.¹⁵

Case study example: Secours Populaire Français (France)

Secours Populaire Français (SPF) aims to tackle different forms of social exclusion in a holistic way, focusing on helping people who are experiencing poverty to become actively involved in addressing their situation. SPF aims to work in true partnership with end recipients, with whom **volunteers aim to develop mutually trusting relationships based on equality**. Through this approach, volunteers and end recipients work together to find ways to overcome challenges. **Around 15-20% of current volunteers were once end recipients themselves**. This enables them to better understand the needs of end recipients, and is also an opportunity to regain their sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.

In summary, volunteers play a critical role, both in terms of meeting the needs of end recipients in a targeted way and in identifying gaps and potential improvements in service design and delivery. It is therefore important that voluntary organisations work together and exchange ideas on the most effective ways to address the social needs of particular groups, given the potential that experiences at grassroots level have to influence broader social policies.¹⁶

3.2 Motivational factors and perceived benefits of volunteering

Many people who decide to volunteer are drawn to the opportunities to meet new people, socialise and be part of a team that in many cases is doing something with a positive social impact. As unpaid workers, volunteers often bring high levels of enthusiasm and commitment to a particular cause or issue, therefore increasing the potential benefits to end recipients.¹⁷

Devoting time to voluntary work can have a range of personal benefits. Research has found links between volunteering and better mental and physical health,¹⁸ increased sense of purpose, autonomy and happiness,¹⁹ and the development of “soft” skills such as increased

¹⁴ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via:

http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

¹⁵ NCVO (2012) *Open Public Services: experiences from the voluntary sector*. Available via:

https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/practical_support/public_services/open_public_services_experiences_from_the_voluntary_sector.pdf

¹⁶ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via:

http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Brown, Neese, Vonokuir and Smith (2003), 'Providing social support may be more beneficial than receiving it: Results from a prospective study of mortality' *Psychological Science*, 14 (4): 320-327

¹⁹ 2004, Economic and Social Research Council Democracy and Participation Research Programme

confidence and self-esteem.²⁰ By providing an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing ones, volunteering can also increase overall employability.²¹

Aside from the social benefits linked to volunteering, people are also drawn to voluntary positions due to their ideological affiliation with the aims of a particular cause or organisation. Volunteering can appeal to people who are keen to “make a difference” in society and can therefore promote community cohesion.²² Looking more broadly, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement can be interpreted as an expression of solidarity and as complementary to the core values of the European Social Model. As such, volunteering is not only a valuable means of improving mental health, wellbeing and employability, but also arguably supports the functioning of a cohesive, democratic society.²³

3.3 Challenges of working with volunteers

Whilst volunteering can be enormously beneficial both to individuals and to society more broadly, sometimes challenges can arise. In particular, matching demand and supply for volunteering can prove arduous in FEAD delivery. The FEAD recipients who are most in need tend to be located in remote and poor areas, where a lower proportion of the community is likely to volunteer.

Low volunteer numbers are not always the main challenge faced by organisations reliant on volunteers; rather, matching the needs of a particular project with the availability, expectations and skillsets of volunteers can be a primary issue.²⁴ Matching volunteers with meaningful tasks can be difficult, with management potentially being torn between accepting all volunteers and balancing recruitment with actual organisational needs.²⁵

Related challenges may also arise in relation to standards and codes of practice for professionals, which can be more difficult to apply in the case of volunteers in comparison to paid employees. Tension can also arise when the roles of volunteers and paid staff are similar, with the potential for resentment to build when volunteers are doing the same work as paid staff or when volunteers feel able to take on more complex tasks that are reserved for paid employees. Furthermore, just like paid staff, volunteers need support, guidance and training to accomplish their duties. It is therefore crucial to allocate adequate resources and time to manage them, which can prove challenging for small-scale organisations.

²⁰ Thoits, P., & Hewitt, L. (2001). Volunteer Work and Well-Being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 42(2), 115-131.

²¹ European Parliament (2008) European Parliament resolution of 22 April 2008 on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion (2007/2149(INI)).

²² GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

²³ Eurofound (2011) *Participation in Volunteering and Unpaid Work*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

²⁴ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

²⁵ Joy, S., Hendry, L. & Nzegwu, F. (2011) *Quality Volunteering at the British Red Cross*. Available via:

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/Volunteer/Thinking-of-volunteering/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/Get%20involved/Volunteering/Research%20report%20quality%20volunteering%20at%20the%20British%20Red%20Cross.pdf>

4. Strategies and practices for developing a successful volunteer programme

4.1 Strategies and practices for planning the use of volunteers

Organisations should be strategic when planning how to best utilise the skills, experiences and interests of volunteers. [Verified Volunteers](#) advises conducting a needs assessment with existing staff members as a useful first step in defining gaps that volunteers could help to fill. In turn, organisations should consider the skills and interests of potential volunteers as a way to identify useful but fulfilling work for them to do.²⁶

Recording volunteer skills in an up-to-date and accessible database²⁷ can be an effective way of matching people with roles that suit their interests, in turn increasing their satisfaction with the position and hopefully leading to a longer-term commitment. An ideal outcome means both the needs of the organisation and the skills and interests of volunteers are fulfilled. If not, companies can waste time and other resources on trying to support volunteers to engage in activities which are fun and interesting, but not really contributing anything meaningful to the project overall. Likewise, if organisations think only of the tasks that they themselves need to complete, they run the risk of alienating volunteers who may have a wide range of skills and valuable experience to contribute. Whilst an organisation may need volunteers to carry out more menial tasks that paid staff are unwilling or unable to do, it is important to leverage the interests of volunteers when thinking about what kinds of roles they could take on within an organisation.²⁸

Strategically, planning potential volunteer positions therefore involves finding the “sweet spot” where the needs of the organisation coincide with the skills and interests of volunteers.²⁹ Whilst this can be difficult, strategic planning can contribute to greater satisfaction amongst volunteers and higher levels of longer-term commitment to organisations that may rely on the contribution of volunteers to operate.

4.2 Strategies and practices for recruiting (diverse) volunteers

As outlined above, it is important that organisations have a clear idea of the role of volunteers before they begin recruiting. As with paid staff, volunteer position descriptions are crucial in ultimately finding the right people to fulfil the vision and mission of any charitable organisation. Descriptions of available volunteer roles should not be limited to a description of the basic tasks within the role. Rather, organisations should also outline any key skills required and specific responsibilities, as well as the expected outcomes and any additional training or support that will be available.³⁰

Recruitment should ideally be a two-way process, at once allowing an organisation to scope out suitable candidates whilst also informing potential volunteers about what their role within the organisation would be. Research conducted by the Red Cross highlights the importance

²⁶ Verified Volunteers (2017) *Enhancing the Volunteer Cycle* [e-book]. Available via: <https://www.verifiedvolunteers.com/blog/2017/07/ebook-enhancing-the-volunteer-lifecycle/>

²⁷ Joy, S., Hendry, L. & Nzegwu, F. (2011) *Quality Volunteering at the British Red Cross*. Available via: <http://www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/Volunteer/Thinking-of-volunteering/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/Get%20involved/Volunteering/Research%20report%20quality%20volunteering%20at%20the%20British%20Red%20Cross.pdf>

²⁸ Verified Volunteers (2017) *Enhancing the Volunteer Cycle* [e-book]. Available via: <https://www.verifiedvolunteers.com/blog/2017/07/ebook-enhancing-the-volunteer-lifecycle/>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

of an effective communication strategy that can be tailored to different parts of the potential volunteer market, e.g. students, employed or retired people.³¹ Recruiting a diverse group of volunteers may require targeted methods to expand organisational reach, for example working in partnership with local communities to be able to promote opportunities to different groups. In addition, the Red Cross highlights the importance of clearly communicating the benefits of volunteering during the recruitment process, including how the organisation will use

Case study example: Maistobankas (Lithuania)

Activities to recruit volunteers include advertising via social media and other communication channels, including **outdoor advertisements** (e.g. in bus stops). Maistobankas staff also reach out to educators to let them know about volunteer opportunities, encouraging them to spread the message within schools and universities.

Paid staff are employed to oversee volunteer management (i.e. engagement, recruitment, inductions and motivational activities) and additional resources are reserved for activities to engage and retain volunteers. These include **volunteer gatherings and occasional gifts**, as well as the cost of transport for some volunteers.

New volunteers attend an induction and receive written material to give an overview of the activities they will be involved with. **On-the-job training** by experienced volunteers is provided throughout the volunteering process.

volunteers' time effectively and what will be expected of them.³² Orientation sessions can be a useful way of communicating information and providing further detail on the role of volunteers, giving potential applicants a chance to better understand the role so they can assess their interest in and suitability for the position.³³

Whilst it can be tempting to take on anyone who wants to volunteer, it is important that organisations establish a formal screening process in order to find out if they would or would not be well suited for a voluntary role. Interviews are a useful mechanism for screening, giving both the organisation and prospective volunteer an opportunity to learn about each other and to assess whether they would be a good fit. They can help to best match applicants to available volunteer positions and are also useful in helping to identify people who would not be a good fit, therefore minimising the likelihood of complications later on. It is also important to consider existing voluntary staff when recruiting volunteers, particularly for roles that involve more responsibility or particular knowledge of the organisation.³⁴

4.3 Strategies and practices for training volunteers

Key to any training is to ensure that all volunteers know the core information related to the organisation, including its history, vision and mission, as well as any health and safety policies and procedures. More experienced volunteers can play a key role here, helping new recruits and speeding up the integration process. Organisations can benefit from providing training in a structured way, primarily by ensuring that volunteers are equipped with the necessary skills

³¹ Joy, S., Hendry, L. & Nzegwu, F. (2011) *Quality Volunteering at the British Red Cross*. Available via: <http://www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/Volunteer/Thinking-of-volunteering/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/Get%20involved/Volunteering/Research%20report%20quality%20volunteerinq%20at%20the%20British%20Red%20Cross.pdf>

³² Joy, S., Hendry, L. & Nzegwu, F. (2011) *Quality Volunteering at the British Red Cross*. Available via: <http://www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/Volunteer/Thinking-of-volunteering/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/Get%20involved/Volunteering/Research%20report%20quality%20volunteerinq%20at%20the%20British%20Red%20Cross.pdf>

³³ Verified Volunteers (2017) *Enhancing the Volunteer Cycle* [e-book]. Available via: <https://www.verifiedvolunteers.com/blog/2017/07/ebook-enhancing-the-volunteer-lifecycle/>

³⁴ *Ibid.*

for their positions. Training and any other form of support can also help to demonstrate the commitment of an organisation to its volunteers, in turn boosting motivation among existing and potential volunteers.³⁵

Case study example: The Srečevalnica project (Slovenia)

In 2016, more than 50 volunteers participated in the implementation of the Srečevalnica project. Volunteers are included in the planning and execution of the project, and actively **receive training opportunities** and **mentoring support** from the Red Cross. Where possible, the Red Cross also seeks to involve participants in running the workshops, through which they are **encouraged to become volunteers** and to hopefully help to build a sense of confidence in other areas of their lives.

Whilst it can be useful to provide general introductory training to all volunteers, targeted development opportunities should also be available to fill specific skill and knowledge gaps. The Red Cross proposes the use of a training roadmap to give volunteers a pathway outlining what they can learn and where they may be able to progress.³⁶ Organisations should also map the skills of volunteers (e.g. gathering information via a questionnaire) to help identify where training would be most valuable.

Volunteer training can take the form of introductory or advanced training in a particular area (e.g. first aid) as well as peer volunteer support, mentoring schemes or more specialist training (e.g. to meet the specific needs of a particular group).³⁷ Instead of solely linking training opportunities to new starters, organisations should also aim to create a supportive environment in which volunteers have ongoing exposure to training and development, as well as regular opportunities to check in with other members of staff to give feedback and discuss any issues.³⁸

4.4 Strategies and practices for managing and retaining volunteers

Whilst staff may be used to manage other paid team members, managing volunteers can bring its own unique set of challenges, as outlined above. Paid staff can sometimes feel pressure to accept anyone who wishes to volunteer, regardless of their suitability for the role, and challenges can arise when tasks carried out by staff and volunteers overlap. Clearly, outlining volunteer role descriptions during the recruitment process can also help to ease volunteer management later on, by helping to make sure that boundaries between the responsibilities of paid staff and volunteers are clear. Good communication between paid staff and volunteers is also an important way of avoiding conflict over respective roles and expectations.

Creating dedicated volunteer support roles and providing staff training can be a useful way to ensure that staff feel confident in managing volunteers.³⁹ Effective volunteer leadership and coordination is key in making sure that volunteers feel that their work is valued by an organisation. Managerial training on conflict management or dealing with inappropriate

³⁵ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via:

http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

³⁶ Joy, S., Hendry, L. & Nzegwu, F. (2011) *Quality Volunteering at the British Red Cross*. Available via:

<http://www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/Volunteer/Thinking-of-volunteering/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/Get%20involved/Volunteering/Research%20report%20quality%20volunteering%20at%20the%20British%20Red%20Cross.pdf>

³⁷ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via:

http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

³⁸ Verified Volunteers (2017) *Enhancing the Volunteer Cycle* [e-book]. Available via:

<https://www.verifiedvolunteers.com/blog/2017/07/ebook-enhancing-the-volunteer-lifecycle/>

³⁹ *Ibid.*

behaviour, for example, can be useful to ensure that paid staff feel comfortable dealing with any conduct-related issues that may arise.

Organisations should also respond to the specific needs of different groups of volunteers. For example, people with jobs are more likely to be able to commit to ad hoc or short-term tasks, whereas retired people may be able to volunteer more regularly and on a longer-term basis. Younger volunteers may be interested in actively developing skills to increase their employability, so organisations may consider formalising skills recognition through volunteer passports or portfolios as a way to motivate and retain this particular group.⁴⁰

In a nutshell, volunteers need to feel like they *matter*. As outlined above, this can be through well-coordinated volunteer management and support, regular training opportunities and skills recognition. Taking time to say thank you to volunteers is also a simple but important part of ensuring that they remain motivated. Volunteer events, such as team lunches, volunteer appreciation days or awards ceremonies can all help to create a positive environment and therefore help to retain volunteers.⁴¹

5. Conclusions

Working with volunteers is key in the delivery of most FEAD projects, yet engaging the voluntary community effectively and sustainably can prove challenging. Standards and codes of practice for professionals can be difficult to maintain and apply to volunteers, and matching supply and demand of volunteers is challenging both in terms of numbers and skills. Organisations delivering FEAD hence need to carefully identify and plan the use of volunteers; develop tailored recruitment strategies; develop targeted training programmes; and provide adequate management of the volunteers.

In light of the specific challenges encountered as part of FEAD delivery, it is of crucial importance that actors involved in FEAD delivery work together and exchange ideas on the most effective ways to engage the voluntary community. The upcoming **FEAD Network Meeting on 1 March 2018** seeks to provide a platform for exchanging best practices and exploring potential solutions.

⁴⁰ GHK (2010) *Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Final Report*. Available via: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

⁴¹ Macmillan (n.d.) A best practice guide to working with volunteers in social care services: Supporting your service. Available via: https://www.macmillan.org.uk/_images/volunteers-social-care-services_tcm9-300592.pdf

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