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*Committee on Regional Development*

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## **DRAFT REPORT**

on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion  
(2007/2149(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: Marian Harkin

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion (2007/2149(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion (COM(2007)0273),
- having regard to Decision No 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme Europe for Citizens to promote active European citizenship<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to Decision No 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the Youth in Action programme for the period 2007 to 2013<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to Council Decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013)<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Resolution 2003/C 295/04 of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission entitled "Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society" (COM(2007)0498),
- having regard to the Recommendation 2001/613/EC 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<sup>6</sup>,
- having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the contribution of volunteering to economic and social cohesion (CdR xxx/08),
- having regard to the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact (SOC/243, CESE 1575/2006),
- having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the role of voluntary organizations - a contribution to a European society (CdR 306/97)<sup>7</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 55, 25.2.2006, p 20.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p 11.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 295, 5.12.2003, p 6.

<sup>6</sup> OJ L 215, 9.8.2001, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 57.

- having regard to Articles 158 and 159 of the Treaty establishing the European Community,
  - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0000/2008),
- A. whereas it is reliably estimated that in excess of 100 million EU citizens volunteer<sup>8</sup>,
  - B. whereas the initial findings from implementation of the UN Handbook on Non Profit Institutions (N.P.I's) that the economic contribution of N.P.I's is on average 5% of GDP and that even conservatively estimated volunteer time accounts for more than one quarter of this figure<sup>9</sup>,
  - C. whereas a recent study of volunteer involving organisations across Europe demonstrated a high level of added value: for every EUR 1 organisations spent on supporting volunteers, these organisations received an average return worth between EUR 3 and EUR 8<sup>10</sup>,
  - D. whereas the very significant contribution of volunteering in building up Social Capital needs to be fully recognised,
  - E. whereas the recent Report from Eurofound identified the fact that Social Capital is a key element when seeking to develop policies to foster rural economic development<sup>11</sup>,
  - F. whereas a recent study on a successful Urban Programme in Aarhus makes the central point that local citizens and voluntary effort were crucial in the successful implementation of the programme<sup>12</sup>,
  - G. whereas there is not only a measurable economic value attached to volunteering but there may be significant savings for public services, and whereas in this context the importance of ensuring that voluntary activity is additional to what is supplied by the public services and should not be used as a replacement of same,
  - H. whereas volunteering contributes to the personal and social development of the volunteer and has a positive impact on the community,
  - I. whereas there is a link between volunteering and sustainable development,
  - J. whereas it is important to promote and support Volunteer Management Best Practices amongst volunteer involving organisations,
  - K. whereas in the above mentioned Council Resolution 2003/C 295/04 the Council encourages greater participation by young people in civic life, participatory structures,

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<sup>8</sup> Eurobarometer Report. *"Social Reality Stocktaking"* (February 2007)

<sup>9</sup> John Hopkins University Report, 'Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering'. September, 2007. [www.jhu.edu/ccss](http://www.jhu.edu/ccss)

<sup>10</sup> Volunteering works", Institute for volunteering research and volunteering. England September 2007

<sup>11</sup> See Mandl, I., Oberholzner, T., & Dörflinger, C. European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/18/en/1/ef0718en.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Vestergaard Poulsen, L. *"From Deprived Neighbourhood to Sustainable Community"* English Summary. The Urban II Programme in Aarhus 2002-2007.

voluntary work etc.,

- L. whereas volunteering can have a positive effect on people's health<sup>13</sup>; whereas this health benefit can impact on all ages, and can play a preventative role in relation to physical and mental illness,
- M. whereas volunteering has a role to play in underpinning local development initiatives and in facilitating the successful implementation of a number of EU funded initiatives, such as the LEADER Programme, INTERREG and the PEACE Programme,
1. Encourages Member States, Regional and Local Authorities to recognise the value of volunteering in promoting Social and Economic Cohesion; furthermore encourages to work in partnership with voluntary organisations and following meaningful consultation with the voluntary sector to develop plans and strategies to recognise, value, support, facilitate and encourage volunteering;
  2. Calls on Member States, Regional and Local authorities to make real efforts to facilitate voluntary organisations to access funding, without excessive form-filling, red-tape or bureaucracy while maintaining the necessary controls on the spending of public money;
  3. Draws the Commission's attention to the fact that the partnership principal enshrined in both the Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013) and the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion are not always adhered to at National level<sup>14</sup> and therefore urges the Commission to take the appropriate administrative and institutional steps to ensure that its own policies, procedures and protocols are actually observed and enforced during Structural Fund consultations negotiations and subsequent operations;
  4. Recommends that all Member States produce regular N.P.I "satellite accounts" and calls for the inclusion of volunteer work in these "satellite accounts" in order that policy makers can take account of N.P.I's in their policy formulation; further asks to assess means for the inclusion of volunteering as a specific category in the statistical accounts of EUROSTAT;
  5. Strongly supports the view that volunteering and voluntary activity should not take the place of paid work;
  6. Calls on the Commission to work towards putting in place a system across all funds whereby volunteer activity is recognised as a contribution to co-financing projects, and devise mechanisms whereby voluntary activity can be suitably costed; welcomes efforts by some Directorates General of the Commission to adopt a more understanding approach to the use of voluntary activity as a means of matching funding on EU funded projects;
  7. Calls on the Commission to promote opportunities for older volunteers using programmes that might run parallel to and complement the 'Youth in Action Programme' and furthermore to promote specific programmes to promote intergenerational volunteering;

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<sup>13</sup> See *The Health Benefits of Volunteering - A Review of Recent Research* (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007)

<sup>14</sup> See *Civil Society as a Partner in European Union Structural Funds*. European Citizen Action Service. November, 2004.

8. Encourages Member States to promote volunteering within all communities, both real and virtual e.g. family volunteering, or volunteering in marginalised groups or groups that might not traditionally volunteer;
9. Calls on the Commission to strengthen the recognition of volunteering as an activity for acquiring competences and skills through YOUTHPASS, while ensuring that volunteering is not seen as a supplement to formal training but a complement to it; furthermore calls to investigate the development of a common framework and language in which national/local tools operate to enhance the mobility of volunteers;
10. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to investigate the adoption of a European Charter for Volunteers establishing the role of voluntary organisations including their rights and responsibilities;
11. Calls on the Commission, the Member States as well as the Regional and Local authorities to promote volunteering through education at all levels introducing the opportunity for voluntary activity at an early stage in the education system so that it is seen as a normal contribution to Community life; to continue to promote such activity as students grow older e.g. at third level to facilitate 'service learning' where students work with voluntary/community groups in a partnership model as part of their diploma/degree programme, to encourage the linkages between the voluntary sector and the education sector at all levels and to promote volunteering as part of life long learning;
12. Calls on Commission to investigate the introduction of a legal basis in Community Law whereby voluntary organisations would be exempted from paying VAT on purchases;
13. Calls on Member States, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, to establish a sustainable volunteering infrastructure dealing with issues such as core funding for voluntary organisations;
14. Recommends that 2011 be declared the European Year on Volunteering;
15. Recognises the diversity of volunteering in Member States but encourages Member States, Regional and Local authorities, where possible, to learn from one another through exchange of best practice at all levels;
16. Recommends the promotion of cross border voluntary projects;
17. Calls on the European Commission to mainstream "volunteer-friendliness" across all areas of policy and legislation;
18. Calls on relevant stakeholders to provide adequate information to citizens about opportunities to volunteer;
19. Urges the Commission that alongside Plan D for Dialogue, Debate and Democracy, to put in place a Plan V for Valuing, Validating and ensuring Visibility of Volunteers;
20. Asks the Commission to review its visa policy for non EU participants in recognised EU Volunteer Programmes with a view to introducing a more liberal visa regime in particular towards volunteers from EU neighbouring countries;

21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### Introduction

Volunteering makes an invaluable contribution to society. Involvement in Voluntary activities is a tangible expression of participatory democracy and there is a strong link between volunteering and active citizenship.

Most voluntary activity takes place at a local or regional level and partnership is a key instrument in ensuring the meaningful involvement of voluntary groups. The synergies created by genuine partnership add real value to all outcomes. Indeed the principle of partnership is very clearly articulated in the Regulation laying down the general provisions on the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund.<sup>15</sup>

At local / regional level, voluntary activity facilitates the involvement of local actors who become empowered through participation involvement and action. This empowerment enhances self confidence and motivation and in a regional context can contribute significantly to a regional identity.

At national level this empowerment can shift the relationship between the citizen and the state from that of a client - patron situation to one where citizens through collective action have a meaningful role to play in making a positive contribution to the life of the Community. It is worth noting that such outcomes while generally seen as positive are not always welcomed by those 'in authority'. There are a number of reasons for this not least the fact that participatory procedures can be viewed as challenging the status quo and can sometimes prove inconvenient. A recent study by ECAS (European Citizen Action Service) on the involvement of civil society organisations in eight new Member States illustrates that the situation regarding partnership is unsatisfactory.<sup>16</sup> This 'Illusion of Inclusion'<sup>17</sup> needs to be addressed if the partnership principle as supported by all EU institutions is to be respected. Indeed, the White Paper on European Governance<sup>18</sup> advocates "a stronger engagement of people and grass root organisations in local democracy" in a multilevel partnership.<sup>19</sup> For many people participation in a voluntary organisation may be their only experience of democratic processes outside of the normal electorate framework<sup>20</sup> and the relevant authorities should facilitate this involvement.

According to the Commission communication on promoting the role of voluntary organisations it is estimated that in the EU. 15 between one third and a half of the population

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<sup>15</sup> Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down the general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999. Article 9. OJ L 210, 11.7.2006, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> See Harvey, B. July 2004. '*The illusion of inclusion*' Access by NGOs to the structural funds in the new member states of eastern and central Europe. Report for the European Action Service.

<sup>17</sup> See Harvey, B. July 2004. '*The illusion of inclusion*' Access by NGOs to the structural funds in the new member states of eastern and central Europe. Report for the European Action Service.

<sup>18</sup> See the Commission's White Paper on European Governance COM(2001) 428 final, Brussels, 25.7.2001. p. 11, 3.1.

<sup>19</sup> Harvey, B. July 2004. '*The illusion of inclusion*' Access by NGOs to the structural funds in the new member states of eastern and central Europe. Report for the European Action Service.

<sup>20</sup> See Communication from the Commission on promoting the role of voluntary organisations and foundations in Europe. (1997)

are involved in some type of voluntary activity<sup>21</sup>, and while numbers and types of activity vary in different countries there are in excess of 100 million citizens engaged in voluntary activity in the EU 27<sup>22</sup>. Therefore at a European level the promotion of volunteering through Community policies, the support of voluntary action using European funds, and the recognition of and commitment to voluntary activity at European level will help to establish direct links between citizens, their communities and the EU.

One of our greatest challenges is to manage the process of globalisation in particular where citizens perceive that decisions affecting their future are taken at a distance from them and where there is a sense of having little or no control over unfolding global events. Volunteering can be viewed as an antidote to some of the negative effects of globalisation where citizens are not simply consumers but where they can act as a catalyst for change by influencing local action to improve their economic circumstance and improve the quality of life of their community. In doing so they can promote a sense of place and a sense of connectedness. Equally, volunteers can add value to the positive impacts of globalisation e.g. by engaging in e-volunteering or virtual volunteering. Virtual volunteering means volunteer tasks completed in whole or in part via the internet. It permits voluntary action by those who because of time constraints, personal preference, a disability or home based obligations are unable or unwilling to volunteer on site. Volunteers who travel abroad to volunteer contribute significantly to intercultural dialogue and understanding as do immigrants who volunteer in their "new" community.

At a personal level, volunteering promotes a sense of personal worth alongside a sense of connectedness to others. Volunteering is perhaps our most sustainable form of renewable energy.

### **Definition**

For the purpose of this report I will define volunteering using the following criteria:

- 1) Volunteering is not undertaken for financial reward, i.e. it is unpaid
- 2) It is undertaken of one's own free will
- 3) It brings benefit to a third party outside the circle of family and friends
- 4) It is open to all

There are a number of different types of volunteering and these broadly include mutual and or self help, philanthropy or service to others, campaigning and advocacy and participation and self governance.<sup>23</sup>

The European Voluntary Service E.V.S. is a particular type of voluntary service and is promoted by the European Commission under the 'Youth in Action Programme 2007-2013'. This allows young people the opportunity to express their personal commitment through unpaid and full time voluntary activities in a foreign country within or outside the EU.

### **Social Capital**

In very many, although not all cases, volunteering plays a significant role in the creation of Social Capital. Volunteering often acts as the catalyst for associational activities and hence

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<sup>21</sup> See Communication from the Commission on promoting the role of voluntary organisations and foundations in Europe. (1997). p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> See Eurobarometer Report. "*Social Reality Stocktaking*" (February 2007)

<sup>23</sup> Measuring volunteering, A Practical Toolkit. Independent Sector and United Nations Volunteers.

the building of social capital particularly in rural or economically deprived areas. Social Capital is difficult to define, but it certainly includes the following elements, trust, co-operation and sharing, social networks, participation in shared norms of behaviour, a sense of commitment and belonging. Social Capital is a latent resource residing in the relationships within and among groups.

The document Social Capital - 'The Missing Link' notes that *"natural capital, physical or produced capital and human capital have traditionally been seen as constituting the wealth of nations and forming the basis for economic growth and development. It has now become recognised that these three types of capital determine only partially the process of economic growth because they overlook the way in which the economic actors interact and organize themselves to generate growth and development. The missing link is Social Capital"*<sup>24</sup>

Various studies have shown that volunteering as an integral part of Social Capital plays an important role in reducing economic disparities.<sup>25</sup> In particular a study entitled 'Social Capital in the European Values Study Surveys'<sup>26</sup> draws the conclusion that "Social Capital in terms of active volunteering work is positively linked to regional economic growth". Similarly, 'A survey of socio-economic disparities between the regions of the EU.' by Daniel Moucque<sup>27</sup> makes the point that Social Capital is an important factor in reducing regional disparities.

### **Contribution of Volunteering to Economic Cohesion**

Volunteering supports the Lisbon Objectives by:-

#### **1) Promoting employability**

Volunteering plays an important role in gaining skills, and improving the employability of the volunteer. Volunteers gain a very wide range of skills and competences. According to the Commission in its most recent communication on promoting young peoples full participation in education, employment and society<sup>28</sup>, voluntary activities provide a valuable non formal learning experience which enables young people to acquire skills and facilitate their transition from education to employment. Furthermore the spring European Council 2005 concluded that *"greater ownership of the objectives of the new Lisbon Agenda on the ground was necessary involving regional and local actors and social partners"* It also reiterated that the Strategic Guidelines<sup>29</sup> recognise the importance of this involvement. It is important to note that while volunteering is an important instrument to promote employability, it must not be exploited as an alternative employment measure. Volunteering is also a means of life long learning.

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<sup>24</sup> Grootaert, C. *"Social Capital: The Missing Link"*. Social Capital Initiative Working Paper No. 3. The World Bank (April 1998).

<sup>25</sup> See Zak and Knack - *Trust and Growth*.

See Fukuyama's Study on Trust, (1995)

See Knack and Keefer (1995,1997) Paper on Social Capital.

See Sonja Mikkelsen, Manager, Urban programme II Aarhus, Denmark *"A model for developing deprived neighbourhoods"*.

<sup>26</sup> See Van Schaik, Tilburg University. *"Social Capital in the European Values Study Surveys"*.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Moucque is with Directorate General for Regional Policies at the European Commission. He was editor of the sixth periodic report and one of the co-authors of the First Cohesion Report.

<sup>28</sup> COM(2007)498

<sup>29</sup> Council Decision No 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion. Recital No. (7). OJ L291/12

Through volunteering the most vulnerable groups in society are empowered to transform their lives, get actively involved in society and through acquired skills and competences, get access to better paid jobs or find a path back to education.

## **2) Promoting social inclusion**

As an informal and non-formal learning experience volunteering offers real opportunities to those excluded from the formal education system and also the long term unemployed. Available research data suggests that people who have been involved in volunteering are less likely to be unemployed.<sup>30</sup> Given that nearly one- in- six young people in the EU are early school leavers and one- in- four young adults(ages 25-29) has not completed upper secondary education level,<sup>31</sup> the skills obtained by volunteers can prove to be extremely valuable in accessing employment and promoting social inclusion.

### **The Economic Value of Volunteering**

According to the John Hopkins University Report, 'Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering', released on September 25th 2007,<sup>32</sup> the Non Profit Institutions N.P.I sector contributes about as much to gross domestic product in a wide range of countries as do the construction and finance industries and twice as much as the utilities industry. This means that it accounts for 5-7% of the GDP in the countries surveyed. These findings emerge from data generated by official statistical agencies in eight countries, (Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Japan, New Zealand and the United States). It is worth noting that twenty additional countries, both developed and developing, have committed to issuing these satellite accounts and a number of others are about to begin implementation. This clearly indicates that more and more countries are recognising the importance of including volunteering in their National Accounts.

### **Contribution of Volunteering to Social Cohesion.**

Volunteering plays a major role in promoting social cohesion. At a European level volunteering translates European Values such as solidarity, social cohesion and inclusiveness into practice. Engagement in volunteering enables people to regain a sense of purpose and responsibility and structure in their lives.

### **Volunteering across the generations.**

Volunteering increases the connectedness of young people to their community By handing back responsibility to young people - it allows young people to do something for themselves.. Older people who volunteer can make a contribution drawing on their experience and expertise. Due to demographic changes, elder volunteering is a huge untapped resource residing in our communities. When young people and older people engage in local activities volunteering is a means of bringing the generations together, where they can learn from one another and enhance mutual understanding.

### **Volunteering in divided societies.**

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<sup>30</sup> Final Report CEV General Assembly 23.03.07. (Paris, France)

<sup>31</sup> COM(2007) 498

<sup>32</sup> John Hopkins University Report, 'Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering'. September, 2007. [www.jhu.edu/ccss](http://www.jhu.edu/ccss)

In Northern Ireland volunteers in many cases supported by PEACE or INTEREG funding have played a key role in reconciliation and peace building. Volunteers from different social and political traditions and religious backgrounds have worked together on concrete projects and through these activities have helped to rebuild bonds of trust between divided communities. Similar outcomes have occurred in Cyprus and the Baltic States.

**Volunteering can promote integration and intercultural dialogue.**

Volunteering facilitates migrants and third country nationals to become involved in local communities. It also facilitates intercultural dialogue and exchange of experience and can also be an instrument whereby young people who volunteer abroad gain a positive experience of diversity and therefore contribute to the prevention of discrimination and prejudice.

**Volunteers contribute directly to cultural development.**

Voluntary activity ensures an increased number of opportunities for cultural expression and participation.

**Final Comment**

In the Parliament our role should be to add value where possible to the good work already underway in Member States. We need to ensure that Community policies, procedures etc are observed to create the synergies that will give added value.

We should encourage the development of civil society and of participative democracy thereby facilitating citizens to become part of that process and consequently giving real meaning to the aim of bringing Europe closer to its citizens. The promotion, support and facilitation of volunteering and voluntary action, accompanied by the growth of social capital will prove to be an invaluable tool in achieving those outcomes.