



TEXTS ADOPTED

P8_TA(2016)0425

European Voluntary Service

European Parliament resolution of 27 October 2016 on European Voluntary Service and the promotion of volunteering in Europe (2016/2872(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Council Decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011)¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 September 2011 entitled ‘EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU’ (COM(2011)0568),
- having regard to the European Year of Volunteering (EYV) 2011 Alliance Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning²,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 December 2013 on volunteering and voluntary activity in Europe³,
- having regard to the definition of volunteer work proposed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work (2011);
- having regard to its resolution of 12 June 2012 on recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 22 April 2008 on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion⁵,
- having regard to the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers⁶,

¹ OJ L 17, 22.1.2010, p. 43.

² OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, p. 1.

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0549.

⁴ OJ C 332 E, 15.11.2013, p. 14.

⁵ OJ C 259 E, 29.10.2009, p. 9.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/volunteering_charter_en.pdf

- having regard to the question to the Commission on Volunteering and European Voluntary Service (O-000107/2016 – B8-1803/2016),
 - having regard to Rules 128(5) and 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. recalling that in 2016 the European Voluntary Service (EVS) celebrates its 20th anniversary and that 100 000 volunteers have been supported over those 20 years;
 - B. emphasising that the European Year of Volunteering 2011, strongly supported by the European Parliament, represented a major political opportunity to highlight the added value of volunteering in Europe and that now, five years later, the European Parliament should reflect on the impact the European Year of Volunteering 2011 had in terms of added value on policy development and on how volunteering is embedded in key European programmes, such as Erasmus+ and its European Voluntary Service;
 - C. recalling that the European Year of Volunteering 2011 provided the impetus and context for the establishment and/or revision of many national and legal frameworks for volunteering across Europe; stressing, however, that Europe still lacks a coordinated volunteering policy with a single contact point in the EU institutions;
 - D. recalling that volunteering is undertaken of a person's own free will, choice and motivation, without their seeking financial gain; emphasising that it can be defined as a journey of solidarity and that it is a way of addressing human, social and environmental needs and concerns;
 - E. whereas volunteering is a key factor in active citizenship and democracy, as well as in personal development, embodying European values such as solidarity and non-discrimination, and whereas it also helps to boost participatory democracy and promote human rights inside and outside the EU;
 - F. stressing that volunteering has a value and importance as one of the most visible expressions of solidarity, which promotes and facilitates social inclusion, builds social capital and produces a transformative effect on society, and that volunteering contributes both to the development of a thriving civil society, which can offer creative and innovative solutions to common challenges, and to economic growth, and that as such it deserves to be measured in a specific, targeted way in terms of both economic and social capital;
 - G. recalling that a supportive environment is key to ensuring engagement by more European citizens in volunteering, thus guaranteeing fair funding for the volunteering infrastructure, including organisations involving volunteers, in order to benefit the volunteers themselves and their activities;
 - H. emphasising that volunteering requires a combination of support mechanisms and/or appropriate organisational structures that identify rights and responsibilities for volunteers and volunteering;
 - I. stressing that every person is entitled to equal access to volunteering opportunities and protection against all kinds of discrimination, and should be given the right to reconcile their volunteering activity with their private and working life, so they can achieve a certain amount of flexibility during the volunteering activity;

- J. emphasising that recognition of the social and economic value of volunteering is also crucial in order to encourage appropriate incentives for all stakeholders and so increase the quantity, quality and impact of volunteering;
 - K. recalling the European Volunteering Capital Competition that recognises the achievements of municipalities across Europe in recognising and supporting the efforts of volunteers in their areas;
 - L. stressing that the new Erasmus+ programme is still offering opportunities to fund and support volunteer projects, notably through the EVS Programme, and that the EU Aid Volunteers programme has been launched by DG ECHO to provide practical support to humanitarian aid projects; recognising that the new EU MFF 2014-2020 secured some EU funds for volunteering, with, notably, the Europe for Citizens programme, currently managed by DG HOME, retaining volunteering as a priority; noting, however, that access for volunteer organisations to other major EU funds, such as the European Structural and Investment Funds, remains very limited;
 - M. recalling that the EU's response to the current refugee crisis is a relevant example, and a visible symbol, of the importance of volunteers and the way that they embody European values, contribute to resilience and are available to offer flexible, pragmatic solutions to shared challenges;
1. Recognises that volunteering is an expression of solidarity, freedom and responsibility that contributes to the strengthening of active citizenship and to personal human development, and that it is an essential tool for social inclusion and cohesion, as well as training, education and intercultural dialogue, while making an important contribution to the dissemination of European values; stresses that its benefits are also recognised in voluntary work carried out with third countries as a strategic tool for fostering mutual understanding and intercultural relations;
 2. Highlights the importance of providing a European framework for volunteering actions which identifies rights and responsibilities, and facilitates mobility and recognition of skills; encourages Member States that still need to define a legal environment for volunteers to use the recommendations in the Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe and the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers;
 3. Encourages the Member States to implement concrete validation processes in the framework of the Council Recommendation of 2012 to ensure better understanding and comparability of skills and experience; asks for any future European Skills Passport and Europass initiatives to give volunteering greater relevance as informal and non-formal learning; recalls that volunteering helps people to gain skills and competences that can facilitate their access to the labour market; underlines that volunteers should never be considered or used as replacement labour;
 4. Notes that in Europe nearly 100 million citizens of all ages are volunteers, whose work contributes to the production of approximately 5 % of its GDP; calls on the Commission to consider the economic value of goods and services provided by volunteers through more volunteer-focused policy making;
 5. Suggests that making volunteer time eligible as co-funding for EU grants, as recently proposed by the Commission in the new Financial Regulation proposal, needs to be supported and implemented;

6. Calls on Eurostat to support Member States in this exercise in order to ensure that comparative data are collected in Europe, as well as developing common EU-wide indicators and methodologies for measuring the social impact of volunteering; urges the Member States to adopt the system developed by the International Labour Organisation to measure the economic value of volunteering;
7. Encourages those Member States that have not yet done so to establish adequately funded national voluntary service schemes and to improve access to quality information on volunteering opportunities at national and local level, in particular through existing information networks and peer-to-peer information, and to create national civic service hubs, which would also promote international volunteering opportunities to people of all ages;
8. Calls on the Commission to facilitate the development of a more coordinated European volunteering policy with a view to establishing a single contact point in the Commission, which would interconnect the individual initiatives and programmes and improve access to volunteering programmes;
9. Asks the Commission to conduct a study on national voluntary service schemes, as well as civic service and solidarity corps and the existing environment for potential volunteers among Member States, in order to facilitate mutual understanding and the dissemination of good practices, and the possibility of establishing a European Civic Service complementary to existing volunteering opportunities – all with a view to fostering European citizenship;
10. Notes the Commission's idea of creating a new European youth volunteering initiative, known as the 'EU Solidarity Corps'; calls on the Commission to assess the added value of this initiative in order to assist the work already done by civil society, and to ensure that volunteer organisations are included in its design; further underlines the need to ensure that its implementation will not undermine the budgets already allocated for other programmes;
11. Supports the Commission and the Member States in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the EVS; insists that the EVS programme benefits the individuals and organisations involved, as well as society as a whole, and that the EVS should enhance the civic engagement dimension of the Erasmus+ programme; stresses the importance of promoting the EVS to all young people, especially those who are not yet interested in volunteering and mobility, thus creating motivation and changes in attitude, without excluding older generations, since they have an important contribution to make, for example as mentors;
12. Encourages the Member States to promote the EVS in their educational and academic systems as a tool to disseminate education for solidarity and civic engagement among the younger generation;
13. Recalls that the EVS is based on quality volunteering offers and follows the Volunteering Charter and the principles of the Quality Charter on Learning Mobility, and that the EVS should be based on a structure that encourages volunteering organisations to become hosting organisations, thus providing them with adequate funding and training, while strengthening the role of coordinating organisations that support a large number of hosting organisations, for example in terms of administration and training;

14. Recalls that the EVS should allow quick and easy access to the programme, and therefore calls for a simplification of its current application system;
15. Stresses the need to strengthen the follow-up and local dimension after a volunteering experience abroad by providing support not only before departure, but also upon return, in the form of post-orientation and post-integration training;
16. Urges national, regional and local authorities to make adequate funding available, streamline administrative procedures and provide tax incentives for volunteer organisations and networks, in particular small organisations with limited resources;
17. Insists that quality mentorship should be provided throughout the process by means of responsible volunteer management and by making volunteers aware of their own responsibility towards the organisation and the community;
18. Asks the Commission to improve and reshape the communication strategy on the EVS by highlighting the social, human and civic value of volunteering;
19. Stresses the role of active ageing in volunteering and reinforces the role of both young and older citizens in civic engagement in Europe, by building on the impetus of the European Year of Voluntary Activities (2011) and the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between generations (2012);
20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.