

P7_TA(2012)0236

Cross-border voluntary activities in the EU

European Parliament resolution of 12 June 2012 on recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU (2011/2293(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Articles 165, 166 and 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- 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 2013¹,
- having regard to Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning²,
- 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 citizenship³,
- having regard to Council Decision 2010/37/EC of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011)⁴,
- having regard to the Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 24 April 2006, on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field⁵,
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 27 November 2007 on voluntary activities of young people (14427/1/2007),
- having regard to the Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 16 May 2007, on implementing the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people⁶,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union⁷,

¹ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 30.

² OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 45.

³ OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 32.

⁴ OJ L 17, 22.1.2010, p. 43.

⁵ OJ C 168, 20.7.2006, p. 1.

⁶ OJ C 241, 20.9.2008, p. 1.

⁷ OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 8.

- having regard to Recommendation 2006/961/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility¹,
- having regard to its declaration of 10 March 2011 on establishing European statutes for mutual societies, associations and foundations²,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 3 October 2011 on the role of voluntary activities in social policy (14552/2011),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 29 November 2011 on the role of voluntary activities in sport in promoting active citizenship³,
- having regard to the Commission’s EU citizenship report 2010 of 27 October 2010 entitled ‘Dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens’ rights’ (COM(2010)0603),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 5 September 2007 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘Promoting young people’s full participation in education, employment and society’ (COM(2007)0498),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 27 April 2009 to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘An EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering – A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities’ (COM(2009)0200),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 3 March 2010 entitled ‘Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 15 September 2010 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled ‘Youth on the Move – An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union’ (COM(2010)0477),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 20 September 2011 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU (COM(2011)0568),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 23 November 2010 to the European Parliament and the Council entitled ‘How to express EU citizens’ solidarity through volunteering: First reflections on a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps’ (COM(2010)0683),
- having regard to its resolution of 22 April 2008 on the role of volunteering in contributing

¹ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 5.

² Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0101.

³ OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 24.

to economic and social cohesion¹,

- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A7-0166/2012),
- A. whereas ‘volunteering’ means activities, including formal, non-formal, informal and vocational training and learning, which are undertaken voluntarily on the basis of a person’s own free choice and motivation, and without concern for financial gain and for a non-profit cause, which benefit volunteers, those receiving services from a volunteer association, communities and society as a whole;
- B. whereas the success of the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) at national, regional, local and European levels has positive effects in terms of increased public visibility and awareness-raising and should influence the drafting of public policy;
- C. whereas volunteering is an informal learning experience suitable for persons of all ages; whereas it offers benefits in terms of personal development, community management, strengthening of democracy, civic values, social solidarity and participation in democratic life, intercultural learning and the acquisition of social and professional skills as well as contributing to the aims of European Union policies on social inclusion and combating discrimination, and on employment, education, culture, development of skills and citizenship;
- D. whereas volunteering is an important factor in creating social capital and development and in promoting socio-economic cohesion, given the potential of non-formal learning opportunities to help volunteers gain skills that will make them more employable and thus contribute to the Europe 2020 growth strategy;
- E. whereas a growing number of EU citizens of all ages are participating in volunteering in the fields of education, culture, youth policies, sport, the environment, sustainable development, health, immigration, rights advocacy, corporate social responsibility and the EU’s relations with third countries;
- F. whereas there is a huge variety of cultures, traditions, legal systems and organisational methods for volunteering in the Member States but persistent obstacles to its practice, since volunteering is not recognised or not adequately recognised in many national Member State legal systems, and whereas it must not replace tasks which could potentially create paid jobs;
- G. whereas the economic crisis and fiscal consolidation are endangering the financial sustainability of many NGOs and volunteering providers working every day on increasing active citizenship, solidarity and social inclusion all over Europe;
- H. whereas the economic crisis and political and economic factors have an impact on sustainable funding and fundraising for voluntary activities;

¹ OJ C 259 E, 29.10.2009, p. 9.

- I. whereas many volunteer-led projects and organisations do not have the resources to access and secure funding under existing EU programmes due to excessive red tape and bureaucracy;
- J. whereas EU action has an added value in promoting cooperation between the Member States and the exchange of information and good practice concerning volunteering, while respecting the subsidiarity principle;
1. Calls on those Member States who do not have a clear or adequate legal framework for volunteers to put one in place and to draw up national strategies to promote the growth of volunteering activities, including the recognition of the rights of volunteers, and to ensure quality, protection and equal access for everyone, without discrimination, particularly in terms of adequate access to health and social protection;
 2. Invites those Member States that have not made substantial progress in the area of volunteering to devote more attention to this sector in their future policy-making, programmes and financing;
 3. Calls on the Member States to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of volunteers are recognised and respected and that volunteers themselves are aware of them; suggests that, in this regard, Member States use the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers, drawn up by the stakeholder conference at the 2nd Youth Convention on Volunteering in 2011 as a reference for policy-making and national legislation in this field;
 4. Asks the national, regional and local authorities and the EU to pay particular attention to disadvantaged young people and young people with fewer opportunities (especially people with disabilities), so that they may participate in volunteering activities and, to that end, benefit from adequate educational and financial support;
 5. Points out that volunteering reduces the risk of social exclusion and that it is essential to attract all social groups to such activities, especially people with disabilities; draws attention to the need to ensure that volunteering becomes more widely recognised and less hampered by barriers of all kinds;
 6. Reiterates the need to make volunteering accessible to immigrants and minorities as an essential element in encouraging their integration and social inclusion;
 7. Notes the benefits arising from cooperation between volunteers from the European Union's Member States and third countries and points out that such cooperation is particularly important in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy; notes, too, that, in addition to the primary benefits associated with volunteering, it can also help to promote democracy and the rule of law in third countries;
 8. Calls on the Council and the Commission to continue to make progress in the negotiations towards easier visa regimes for non-EU citizens wishing to enter the EU for the purpose of volunteering, provided they fulfil the criteria to perform volunteering activities;
 9. Calls on the Member States to implement the provisions of Council Directive 2004/114/EC¹ on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil

¹ OJ L 375, 23.12.2004, p. 12.

exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service and to simplify the procedures for the granting of visas for those wishing to undertake voluntary activities as part of the EU neighbourhood policy;

10. Notes that volunteering involves citizens in economically, socially and ecologically sustainable local and cross-border development and can often ensure the swift provision of aid when disasters occur; points out that it also plays a role in fostering solidarity, active citizenship and inter-cultural learning, providing volunteers with the opportunity to learn the language and culture of the country in which they work, thereby strengthening social cohesion and participative democracy;
11. Encourages the Member States to recognise the benefits of participating in cross-border volunteer activities to provide citizens with new skills, contributing to their employability and mobility and strengthening the development of social inclusion, and to support cooperation between organisers of voluntary activities in EU countries in order to promote the mobility of volunteers of all ages across Europe, with the aim of fostering mutual intercultural enrichment;
12. Calls on the Commission to improve the facilities of volunteering organisations and volunteer centres for providing information and training and for coordinating activities between volunteers and volunteering organisations;
13. Calls on the Commission to publish a report identifying the obstacles to cross-border volunteering, for example age limits in insurance policies, and, where appropriate, legislative proposals;
14. Highlights the need to ensure that high-quality volunteering is developed, both nationally and at cross-border level, through a structured framework of comprehensive information and appropriate training for volunteers which includes current best practice, the development of hosting capacities for providers and organisations at local and national level, a recognition of the rights of volunteers to reconcile their voluntary work with their personal lives, and by creating the necessary infrastructure at all levels;
15. Highlights the importance of developing activities that can bring together and channel the motivations of potential volunteers, capitalising on every individual's personal assets and increasing the quality of volunteering in every entity and partnership and in every Member State, and with a particular focus on cross-border volunteering;
16. Calls on the Member States to promote the use of volunteer time as matching funding for European projects, particularly in cross-border initiatives;
17. Urges the Member States to develop international volunteering initiatives and programmes that extend beyond EU borders and draws attention to the successful examples and practices already implemented in certain Member States for this purpose;
18. Calls on the Member States to promote training programmes and develop guides and materials on the management of volunteers and schemes to motivate people to engage in cross-border volunteering activities;
19. Calls on the Commission and the national, regional and local authorities and the various civil society organisations to improve information networks in order to make everyone

aware of volunteering opportunities, tackle barriers to participation, enhance access to volunteering best practice and promote cooperation across borders;

20. Proposes, therefore, that a centralised EU portal be created, in cooperation with organisations and associations working in this sector and in particular their European networks, to include a best practice volunteer resources bank and a section on cross-border volunteering, with information on the programmes available, their costs and the conditions for participation, allowing for an exchange of information on administrative burdens, the legal and fiscal aspects of volunteering, barriers encountered in accessing programmes and the best ways to tackle them;
21. Encourages the Member States to adopt the use of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work and the United Nations Handbook on Non-Profit Organisations with a view to making available comparable statistics and data providing a clear picture of the significant contribution made by volunteering and of the needs of volunteers and providers throughout the European Union;
22. Calls on the Commission to encourage the Member States to adopt the ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work in order to ensure robust comparable data which can help improve monitoring and policy-making;
23. Notes that older people who engage in volunteering find it easier to make the transition from work to retirement, i.e. gradually to leave active work;
24. Stresses the importance of providing information, adequate funding and support for senior citizens wishing to volunteer in another EU country, encouraging active ageing as a rich source of wisdom and experience for society;
25. Notes that volunteering contributes to integration, social inclusion and social innovation, and can also contribute to poverty reduction, thus helping to achieve economic and social cohesion; points out that volunteering also promotes solidarity between generations by encouraging cooperation between young people and senior citizens, and that it contributes to active ageing and social involvement in all phases of life, as well as helping to improve environmental protection;
26. Notes that volunteering increases people's tolerance, creates human and social capital and plays a vital role in the empowerment of socially excluded groups; emphasises the need to provide access to as wide a range of volunteering opportunities as possible and encourages the Commission to make European programmes more inclusive and open to all age groups;
27. Encourages the Member States to set national targets for volunteering and to establish official reporting, monitoring and evaluation of volunteering actions;
28. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to give a high profile to volunteering in sport, particularly at the grassroots level, to acknowledge the important role played by volunteer-led sporting organisations in strengthening culture, promoting social inclusion and enhancing communities and to reduce the barriers to sports volunteering across the EU;
29. Urges the national, regional and local authorities and the EU to recognise the important contribution also made by volunteering to protecting the environment, and to support volunteering activities in environmental education, prevention and crisis management, and

in defending artistic and cultural heritage;

30. Encourages businesses in the European Union actively to support their employees and retired staff in becoming involved in volunteering activities;
31. Supports the Commission's proposal to establish a 'European Skills Passport', so that the skills acquired through volunteering may be officially recognised, both for professional and learning purposes, which is a vital element in motivating potential volunteers and in creating a link between non-formal learning and formal education;
32. Emphasises that the European Skills Passport should not be a series of new separate certificates but, rather, a comprehensive document listing all practical experience, training and soft and vocational skills acquired through life-long learning, including those gained through volunteering, if desired by the volunteer;
33. Suggests therefore including the skills acquired through volunteering in the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) for students;
34. Calls on the Commission to consider developing a similar calculation and recognition system for skills acquired through volunteering for adults who are not at university;
35. Calls on the Commission to make the European Skills Passport a reality as soon as possible; emphasises that the skills acquired during volunteering work are also of considerable significance in working life and provide added value to a CV, and notes that volunteering can help young people in their choice of a career;
36. Stresses that recognition of competences and skills gained through volunteering as non-formal and informal learning and work experience is essential;
37. Notes that voluntary work helps volunteers to broaden their horizons and develop their personalities, and highlights the fact that volunteering also brings economic benefits to Member States, as people who engage in voluntary activities contribute to the generation of GDP;
38. Calls on the Commission to address in the 'European Skills Passport' the need for a cohesive and transferable approach to proper screening and vetting of volunteers who work with children and/or vulnerable members of society;
39. Urges the Member States to develop mechanisms for validating non-formal and formal learning outcomes, which will improve the value and transferability of the skills acquired outside formal education, facilitating in particular the acquisition of additional ECTS credits at university thanks to volunteering, and a standardised mechanism for recognising the skills acquired through volunteering in the ECTS, and also to explore ways of eliminating the tax obstacles that volunteers encounter when participating in cross-border activities;
40. Proposes that a training and qualifications framework for volunteer coaches be established and incorporated into the European Qualifications Framework in order to improve the mobility of volunteer coaches and enhance the transferability of skills and competences developed through volunteering;
41. Calls on the Member States to support employee volunteering and employer-supported

volunteering also in the context of corporate social responsibility;

42. Supports the Commission's proposal to create a 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps', which will increase the participation of volunteers in solidarity actions in the context of the EU's humanitarian aid policy;
43. Calls on the Commission also to take existing structures into consideration and actively to incorporate these from the outset when establishing this voluntary corps; emphasises, too, that the duplication of organisations in the area of civil protection is not desirable and should be avoided;
44. Urges the national, regional and local authorities and the EU to ensure adequate and stable funding and to simplify administrative procedures, including tax incentives, for the organisations involved in volunteering work, including all the relevant associations and networks, particularly for small associations with limited resources, with a view to enhancing their roles, activities and achievements for the benefit of society;
45. Calls, therefore, for the concept of grants to associations to be clarified so that association funding is not confused with state aid, which could hinder competition in the financial sector;
46. Calls on the Commission to propose a mechanism to allow Member States wishing to strengthen civil society to exempt from VAT all or most of the activities and transactions carried out by voluntary non-profit-making organisations; stresses that at least the smaller non-profit-making organisations should be covered by such a mechanism;
47. Calls on the Member States to ensure legal certainty for volunteers, not least with regard to insurance issues, so that the various regimes in the different Member States encourage cross-border volunteering, and also to ensure better provision of information to volunteers in connection with their rights and the regulatory and institutional arrangements pertaining in the various Member States;
48. Calls on the Commission to assist with the process of dismantling existing barriers;
49. Calls on the Member States to review their cross-border tax and social security arrangements in connection with cross-border volunteering, so as to ensure that they do not create additional barriers to such activity and that cross-border volunteers are able to receive the social security benefits to which they are entitled under Regulation (EC) No 883/2004;
50. Stresses that, although it is an important resource in our economy and society, volunteering must not be an alternative to or a substitute for regular, paid work and must not, under any circumstances, constitute a reason for governments failing to fulfil their social obligations;
51. Considers that this aspect should be particularly emphasised in the care sector, where the amount of volunteering is continuing to grow; points out, furthermore, that promoting volunteering as a means of acquiring, developing or maintaining skills should not result in volunteering becoming a mandatory requirement, as this would undermine its fundamental nature;
52. Calls on the national, regional and local authorities and the EU in particular to communicate existing European programmes to the actors and partners involved in volunteering,

especially those with 'European territorial cooperation' objectives under the cohesion policy, and to facilitate access to them so that they can take advantage of them more effectively in their projects and cross-border activities;

53. Calls on the Member States to promote and implement national schemes for cross-border volunteering in order to contribute to its development across the EU;
54. Calls on the Commission, in particular, as part of the creation of new multiannual programmes and considering the important experience gained from the European Year of Volunteering 2011, to ensure that funding is guaranteed for volunteering projects and for the structures organised by voluntary activities and to develop and encourage efficient inter-institutional coordination in order to promote the role of volunteering in EU policies;
55. Calls on the Commission to ensure that information on available funding and the relevant programmes is freely available to volunteer-led projects and that the application procedures are not made inaccessible due to excessive red tape;
56. Asks the Commission to ensure that adequate funding is provided for programmes in various policy areas to support cross-border volunteering activities; calls on the Member States to actively implement schemes for fostering national and cross-border volunteering; asks for particular attention to be paid to financial support for volunteering infrastructure; maintains that public subsidies for volunteering should be allocated without discrimination against any organisation;
57. Proposes that a cross-border network of voluntary organisations in the various Member States should be set up by coordinating the existing voluntary organisations while facilitating the exchange of good practice and experience, and takes the view that new contact points should be opened only in Member States that do not already have such structures;
58. Calls on the Commission to propose a European Statute for Associations to give them the legal framework within which to operate, reduce the administrative costs associated with cross-border volunteering activities and establish voluntary structures at a European level which encourage mobility of volunteers in the EU;
59. Emphasises the role that volunteer work can play in promoting EU policies;
60. Calls on the Commission to give due recognition to and promote volunteering in the relevant EU policies, taking account of the cross-cutting nature of such activities and ensuring that the policies themselves promote the development of volunteering and foster the involvement of all sections of society;
61. Calls on the Commission to give due recognition in EU programmes and projects to the genuine contribution that the work performed by volunteers makes to the community;
62. Calls on the Commission to allocate adequate resources to the creation of a European Volunteer Centre Development Fund aimed at developing infrastructure to support volunteering;
63. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to allow volunteer time to be included as co-funding in all EU-funded programmes on the basis of a contribution in-kind with a

financial value;

64. Recommends that the Commission and the Member States maintain a continuity between 2011 and future years by strongly integrating the volunteering dimension, which is an expression of active citizenship that promotes social integration, including that of older citizens, within both the European Year for Active Ageing (2012) and the proposed European Year of Citizens (2013);
65. Draws attention to the need to promote volunteering, in particular during the European Year of Citizens in 2013, and calls on the Commission to include volunteering support in international development assistance policies, not least with a view to meeting all the targets laid down in the Millennium Development Goals;
66. Supports a formal examination of the ‘Solidarité proposal’ for an inter-institutional human resources programme in the EU institutions to facilitate the involvement of the institutions’ staff and trainees in volunteering, humanitarian and social activities, both as part of staff training and volunteering in their own time;
67. Highlights the fact that the proposed programme is cost saving and highly value-adding and would help to implement EU policies and programmes;
68. Recommends that the Commission maintain the useful contact points set up both with ‘EYV 2011 Alliance’ and the successor Volunteer Platform, which include many civil society volunteering and networking organisations, and with the national coordinating bodies, strategic partners and national government spokespersons in this sector, given the large variety of bodies responsible for volunteering in the EU, and encourages these contact points to engage with the proposed centralised EU portal, as a pan-European platform, to facilitate further coordination and increased cross-border activity;
69. Stresses the importance of contact networks and the exchange of good practices to distribute information about existing EU procedures which can help and support cross-border volunteering;
70. Calls on the Commission to act, where it deems appropriate, on the Policy Agenda on Volunteering in Europe (PAVE), which was drawn up by the volunteering organisations involved in the EYV 2011 Alliance;
71. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.