



Volunteering as an Active Ingredient of the EU 2020 Strategy

***Response from the Volonteuropa Network to
the Consultation on the EU 2020 Strategy***

Introduction

Rising unemployment and fewer job vacancies resulting from the current financial crisis, globalisation, environmental problems caused by the climate change, as well as an ageing population, are all major structural challenges facing the European Union in the beginning of 2010.

The EU 2020 Strategy is currently being designed to succeed the Lisbon Strategy, which has been the EU's plan of reform in the last decade. The Lisbon Strategy, adopted in March 2000 by the European Council, provided an agenda with ambitious aims to be achieved within the Union by 2010. It included balanced objectives relating to growth, jobs and competitiveness, social cohesion and social inclusion. However, following the mid-term 'Kok Report' of 2004, the Lisbon Strategy was effectively revised in 2005 and saw a shift away from the social and equality objectives and re-focused the agenda solely on economic growth, creating new jobs and increasing the EU's competitiveness in the global market.

After the decade of the Lisbon Strategy guiding the development of the Union, it has achieved many positive outcomes, including the creation of over 18 million new jobs before the financial and economic crisis hit the EU. When the downturn hit, the EU took actions which helped stabilise the financial system and adopted a recovery plan to boost demand and re-introduce confidence amongst governments, businesses and consumers in the Union.

However, the Lisbon Strategy has failed to address growing economic, social and environmental problems facing citizens, particularly those groups of disadvantaged people marginalised in the societies of the Member States. The financial and economic downturn made these inequalities even more acute.

The EU is now devising the EU 2020 Strategy in order to achieve a sustainable social, smarter and greener economy. The European Commission hopes that this new strategy should enable the EU to make a full recovery from the crisis and help speed up the move towards a greener, more sustainable, and more innovative economy. The Commission has identified that the key drivers of the EU 2020 Strategy should focus on the following priorities:

- Creating value by using growth on knowledge
- Empowering people in inclusive societies
- Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy

Volonteuropa, the European network of hundreds of volunteer-involving organisations and agencies, promoting volunteering, active citizenship and social cohesion, recognises the importance of the above priorities. However, Volonteuropa also urges that new strategy should aim to effectively address the problems of the disadvantaged groups in the Union. Moreover, in each of the drivers identified by the European Commission, the voluntary sector and volunteers should be recognised as equal partners that can help to achieve the ambitious goal of a sustainable social market, smart and green EU economy, by 2020. It is necessary to recognise that voluntary activity is an important creator of social capital: its value encompasses the provision of services and advocacy, the desire to contribute to the common good and to help shape European society; it promotes solidarity, a value which is not only in great need in the current economic and social climate, but also one upon which the European Union has been built.

Piotr Sadowski

Volonteuropa General Secretary, on behalf of the Volonteuropa Board

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Context

During nearly 30 years of its existence, Volonteurope has been campaigning for recognition of the invaluable contributions of voluntary action to promoting active citizenship, social cohesion, combating poverty and social exclusion, bringing people back into the life of their communities and sometimes helping them acquire jobs thanks to new skills gained when engaging in volunteering. Volonteurope, together with the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) and a number of European NGOs, has been actively campaigning for official European recognition of volunteering and volunteers in the form of a European Year of Volunteering in 2011 (EYV2011). The NGOs joined their forces and established the EYV2011 Alliance¹ which, with the notable support of the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and, eventually, the European Commission, succeeded in realising the Year². EYV2011 is the concrete answer to the voices of those more than 100 millions of citizens across Europe who are active as volunteers. The Year could not have come at a better time when people are disillusioned with the European project, as the 2011 European elections demonstrated. EYV2011 will be one of the ways to show that the European project also belongs to people not just politicians, and celebrate the fact that active citizens put European values of social cohesion into practise day after day. In this context, Volonteurope argues that volunteering and volunteers ought to be considered as a crucial ingredient of the EU2020 Strategy.

Definition of volunteering

For the purpose of this consultation, Volonteurope is using the following definition of volunteering, as presented in a European Parliament report³:

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

Positive impact of volunteering

Amongst its many benefits, volunteering helps to fight obesity and improves health and fitness, particularly amongst young people, as evidenced by a research in the UK⁴ involving hundreds of volunteers. It also highlights that volunteering helps people cut down on alcohol consumption and smoking. Civic engagement reduces blood pressure, cholesterol level and lengthens volunteers' lives⁵. In supporting family doctors, volunteers reduce the number of prescriptions by 30% and hospital appointments by 35%⁶. Where schools have been

¹ For a list of the participating NGOs, see www.eyv2011.eu

² The official title of the Year is the "European Year of Voluntary Activities Supporting Active Citizenship"

³ Report on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion (INI/2007/2149) by Marian Harkin MEP

⁴ ICM Research commissioned by CSV Make a Difference Day and Barclays; Select Committee on Health - Third Report, 10 May 2004. <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmhealth/23/2302.htm>

⁵ University of Michigan Research: James S. House, Karl R. Landis, and Debra Umberson, "Social Relationships and Health," *Science*, Reprint Series, Volume 241 (1988): 540-545.

⁶ Pietroni, Patrick, et al., (1991) The Impact of a Volunteer Community Care Project in a Primary Health Care Setting, *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 5(1), pp.83-90

involving their pupils in learning through tackling community problems, attendance has risen, disruptive incidents have fallen and teachers and pupils enjoy life much more⁷. Volunteers working in schools, giving a child an hour a week, can raise reading levels by one year in a term⁸. In addition, volunteering gives people a sense of responsibility: one of the most powerful ways of diverting young people from crime is to give them responsibility – and responsibility for another person is the most powerful factor of all⁹. Last but by no means least, evidence from California shows that volunteers supporting families where children are being abused have reduced the level by 83% over four years¹⁰.

Recommendations

In response to the consultation, the Volonteurope Network recommends that volunteering is recognised as an active ingredient of the EU2020 Strategy. The objectives of the EU2020 Strategy should specifically recognise that:

- **Volunteering is a source of economic growth**
- **Volunteering is a creator of social capital**
- **Volunteering is a pathway to integration and employment**
- **Volunteering is a positive outcome in itself**
- **Volunteering is a mechanism for improving cohesion and reducing economic, social and environmental inequalities**

Volunteering: a source of economic growth

Volunteering has a crucial role to play in society as it leads to positive changes in people's lives: it gives them a sense of belonging; it brings communities together and increases a person's sense of pride and belonging in their community, in turn impacting positively on their health and well-being. People who engage in volunteer effort grasp a chance to give something back to their community. Increasingly, businesses are also recognising this opportunity and have, over the years, transformed their CSR policies from being just source of 'poster stories' for their annual reports to meaningful social actions.

Volunteering helps to combat environmental problems, as well as poverty and social and labour market exclusion, often by equipping the unemployed (often amongst disadvantaged and marginalised groups) with new skills that help them secure jobs. Research also proves that volunteer effort makes a valuable economic contribution.

The Centre for Civil Society Studies (CCSS) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) has been researching the economic contributions of volunteering, across the world, for a number of years. When the Centre's *Comparative Non-profit Sector Project* revealed that not-for-profit institutions constitute a much larger source of economic contributions than previously suggested, the United Nations, with the help of the JHU CCSS, subsequently published, in

⁷ Hannam, Derry, A Pilot Study to Evaluate the Impact of the Student Participation Aspects of the Citizenship Order on Standards of Education in Secondary Schools, Report to the DfEE, April 2001

⁸ Dr. David V. Moseley, Active Community Unit Volunteering and Community Activity Today: Material Assembled for the Active Community cross cutting review, (University of Newcastle, 1999-2000).

⁹ Graham and Bowling; Young People and Crime, Home Office research study 145, 1995

¹⁰ Minicucci Associates, "California Alliance for Prevention, Final Year Evaluation Report", (Sacramento, Child Abuse Prevention Council of Sacramento, 2005)

December 2003, a *Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts* which provides a comprehensive picture of the economic contributions of the voluntary sector. According to the JHU CCSS report, *Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering: Initial Findings from Implementation of the UN Handbook on Non-profit Institutions*¹¹, released on 25 September 2007, the civil society 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.

The report shows that the economic contribution of the third sector accounts for, on average, 5-7% of the GDP. Compare this with the utilities industry (including gas, water and electricity), which accounts on average for only 2.3% of the GDP, the construction industry for 5.1% and the financial intermediation industry embracing banks, insurance companies, and financial services firms, for 5.6%. Lester Salamon, the author of the report and director of JHU CCSS, points out that the *Handbook* provides “an officially sanctioned method for capturing the economic scale and importance of civil society and volunteering around the world, and what it is revealing is that this set of organisations is far more important than we have realised.” Amongst its many findings, the report shows that the not-for-profit sector accounts for a “lion’s share” of value-added in a wide-range of critical human service fields, such as health and social services.

The JHU is also working in partnership with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and a Technical Experts Group to develop the first-ever set of international guidelines for generating regular and reliable statistics on volunteering which will be comparable across countries and regions. In December 2008, the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) approved a first draft of the ILO *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*, authorising additional testing, drafting and eventual publication of the *Manual*. Volonteuropa asks the European Institutions to work closely with the ILO and liaise with the JHU CCSS, as well as volunteer-involving agencies in the Union, to ensure that volunteer effort is formally measured in terms of its contributions to economic growth in the EU, as part of the EU 2020 Strategy.

Volunteering:

- **A creator of social capital**
- **A pathway to integration and employment**
- **A positive outcome in itself**
- **A mechanism for improving cohesion and reducing economic, social and environmental inequalities**

While the economic value of volunteering is immense, the social value of volunteer effort can be even greater. Across the whole of Europe volunteers are, on a daily basis, delivering change and tackling many problems that face today’s society. For many people, particularly those coming from disadvantaged groups, volunteering leads them to gain ambition and a motivation to do something positive with their lives – including acquiring new skills, re-engaging with their community and often gaining employment. Where volunteering activities are present, there is a higher percentage of growth: such activities, replicated throughout the EU, generate social capital. High levels of social capital lead to the creation of stable and

¹¹ Johns Hopkins University Report, 'Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering'. September, 2007.
<http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/pdfs/ILO/MCS.pdf>

flourishing environments and have a direct positive relationship to levels of growth in European regions¹².

A debate undertaken by policy-makers, NGOs, volunteers and academics during a recent *Value of Volunteering* seminar (London, 2 November 2009), organised through a partnership between Volonteurope, CSV, Third Sector European Network and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), shows that, with an increase in unemployment and the financial crisis, there has been a renewed policy emphasis in the EU on volunteering as a route to employment. The European Commission's EU2020 Strategy Consultation document argues that having a job is probably the best safeguard against poverty and exclusion. Volonteurope agrees, but also argues that volunteering in itself is an important outcome and mechanism for social inclusion for many individuals who would otherwise not re-engage themselves in the life of their communities and remain socially excluded.

A report¹³ prepared by the ESRC to accompany the *Value of Volunteering* seminar shows that volunteering can not only help people into jobs, but also offers them a possibility to change their lives for the better. It also calls for a more effective use of the European Social Fund (ESF) to incentivise providers to offer voluntary activity as a pathway to integration, especially for groups of people furthest from the labour market. However, in 2005 (when the Lisbon Strategy was revised) EU Member States committed themselves to spending large proportions of current ESF funds against targets relating to economic growth and jobs, with the aim of making the EU more dynamic and competitive. While social inclusion remained an ongoing concern of the ESF programme, in reality this has not been matched in practice by dedicated resources nor outcomes appropriate to those furthest from the labour market. An over-emphasis on results whose primary objective is a market-led economic growth, may underplay the richness and breadth of volunteering.

Therefore, if the aim for 2020 is to have more jobs, higher employment rates of the working age population, better jobs, thereby a healthier workforce that empowers people in an inclusive society, then volunteering is a key ingredient in all employment and social policies to be adopted by the European institutions in the coming years. Any revisions of the ESF programme – both at EU and Member State level – should further strengthen the recognition of volunteering as a positive outcome. For the funds to reach those who are the most disadvantaged in the labour market, a more sophisticated targeting of ESF outputs is needed – such as voluntary activity.

Volonteurope argues that when designing the EU2020 Strategy, European policy-makers remember about the need to include volunteer effort as a generator of economic growth and recognise volunteering as a rich source of social capital, helping to improve cohesion in the Union and reduce the existing economic, social and environmental inequalities. Volonteurope argues that the current process of designing the EU2020 Strategy is an appropriate time for European institutions and policy-makers to critically discuss and explore the contribution that volunteering makes in helping to building an inclusive and cohesive society in the EU.

¹² Social Capital and Regional Economic Growth (Beugelsdijk and van Schaik, 2003).

¹³ http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/The%20Value%20of%20Volunteering%20Publication_tcm6-34855.pdf