

# Volunteering and the European Year on Volunteering 2011



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SOLIDAR is a European network of 52 NGOs  
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SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in  
three primary areas: social affairs, international cooperation and education.

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## SUMMARY

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In view of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, SOLIDAR calls on all the relevant institutions and stakeholders to work towards the recognition of volunteering in all its forms, to acknowledge its value and to provide support within an appropriate legal framework, for instance in terms of tax and expense reimbursement. SOLIDAR also recommends empowering volunteer and civil society organisations offering volunteer services, to address the challenges faced in funding and the recruitment of volunteers, and finally, allowing for a proper infrastructure and surrounding environment to develop.

## BACKGROUND

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The European Year of Volunteering 2011 (EYV 2011) is an opportunity to promote volunteer and civil society organisations offering volunteer services, their voluntary activities and volunteering in general across all Member States. Throughout the year, SOLIDAR expects the added value of volunteering to be acknowledged, highlighting the link between its European dimension and voluntary engagement in local contexts. **With a particular emphasis on a bottom-up approach, all realities – at European, national, regional and local level – need to be involved.** It is therefore important to stress that the year does not have the aspiration or the objective to harmonise volunteering across Europe, but to raise awareness on the benefits of volunteering and show the different approaches across Member States, trying to provide the tools for an answer to the common challenges currently on the table.

On 1 January 2011 the EYV 2011 will begin<sup>1</sup>. **Volunteers are a driving force to put European values into practice, developing actions which are indispensable for individuals as well as for society as a whole.** They play a crucial role in the promotion of integration and in the fight against social exclusion by being active, for instance, in the health and care sector. Furthermore, voluntary activity is a tool to enhance respect and mutual understanding, directly reinforcing social cohesion in the European Union and promoting people's empowerment and well-being. Last but not least, volunteering is a fundamental resource for employment and it also contributes to the personal development of individuals, to their education and their training.

Yet, **too many obstacles still remain hindering voluntary activities across Europe. SOLIDAR, as part of the EYV Alliance**<sup>2</sup> – an informal grouping of European networks of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) active in volunteering – will use the EYV 2011 to address the recognition of volunteers' efforts and of their organisations. Experts and member organisations will meet throughout the year in six different thematic working groups, with the ultimate aim to formulate a policy document ("A European Policy Agenda on Volunteering") containing recommendations to be addressed to European and national decision makers.

**Building on SOLIDAR members' contributions**, this paper provides a series of recommendations to influence the discussion on volunteering at both national and European level. Structured around **three separate sections**, it firstly presents the problems that volunteers and their organisations are confronted with, proposing thereafter a series of recommendations addressed to institutions and stakeholders in order to tackle the challenges identified. The two sections, "challenges ahead" and "SOLIDAR recommendations", were developed following an in-depth analysis of research and position papers that allowed the embedding of volunteering within an EYV 2011 context, presented in Annex.

SOLIDAR would like to see, by the end of 2011, the implementation of actions towards the recognition of the impact of volunteering, the celebration of civil society organisations and volunteer associations granting voluntary services, the reduction of barriers hindering the involvement of volunteers, increased awareness among Europeans on how to get involved in activities and the development of a European policy agenda on volunteering.

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<sup>1</sup> European Council (2010). Council Decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) [2010/37/EC]

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:017:0043:0049:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> EYV Alliance 2011 <http://www.eyv2011.eu/about-the-alliance>

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Based on SOLIDAR members' experience from the ground, the following six areas have been identified as the main challenges which volunteering has to deal with.

**Lack of or not fully adequate legal framework on volunteering:** The lack of a legal framework on volunteering is an issue for certain Member States and at the EU level. This problem means, for many volunteer and civil society organisations offering volunteer services, disadvantages in terms of taxation, insurance and the reimbursement of expenses; ultimately meaning that the volunteer sector and volunteer status is not legally identified.

**Shortage of volunteering infrastructure:** As volunteering is a product of its environment, what is often missing is a series of instruments and mechanisms to guarantee the conditions needed for volunteering to prosper, for instance dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders.

**Lack of recognition of volunteers' skills and experience:** Volunteering improves people's skills and competences, often in the area of informal and non-formal learning. There is a shortage of European tools to recognise the skills gained through volunteering, and there is no discussion on the mutual recognition of methods and quality across different sectors and different countries.

**Change in funding mechanisms:** We are witnessing a changing relationship between public authorities and organisations, as an increasing number of civil society and voluntary associations are being contracted to provide public services, in particular in the fields of education, health and social services. In other words, subsidies and non-monetary support are being replaced by contract agreements, awarded through calls for projects and calls for tenders. As a consequence, organisations face increased competition amongst themselves and with other for-profit enterprises in the sector, with the risk of entering into a competition focused on price rather than on quality. Furthermore, due to complex rules and legislative and/or administrative obstacles, participating in public tenders in the framework of public procurement for volunteer and civil society organisations is extremely difficult, requiring more and/or professional financial and administrative personnel when proposing their projects (this in turn makes volunteer work more expensive). Finally, especially at the European level, there is an increased demand for impact assessments of the organisations (i.e. extensive accountancy filing and reporting) in order to prove the effectiveness of their interventions. To be able to properly work, voluntary organisations and organisations involving volunteers are therefore required to have a solid financial and legal basis.

**Mismatch between demand and supply of volunteers:** The challenge consists in amalgamating the aspirations of new volunteers and the needs of the volunteer organisation or civil society organisations offering volunteer work, or in other words finding people with the adequate competences. In addition to a shift towards well-defined tasks and objectives (consistent often with short-term projects), evidence shows increasing difficulties in finding volunteers who commit in the long-term. As the relationship between volunteers and their organisations has become more instrumental, the content of the volunteer programme and the contact with the (vulnerable/disadvantaged) persons volunteers work with are the decisive factors and motivators.

**Increased complexity of volunteering interventions:** Volunteers have to manage more complex duties as they are increasingly engaged in more difficult contexts, with highly vulnerable/disadvantaged persons, where more specialisation and capabilities are required. The risk is then a shift from using professional services to using services involving volunteers and pressure to professionalise volunteer work.

## **SOLIDAR'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### **Develop a legal framework on volunteering by**

- Calling Member States for a legal status to be allocated to volunteers; currently only eight EU countries have. This would in turn be used to define arrangements for welfare and tax benefits in order to reduce fiscal pressure penalising organisations; specify how volunteers are entitled to expenses' reimbursement; guarantee insurance protection/coverage, health and safety standards.
- Indicating, at the national level, clear objectives and policy goals outlining what has to be achieved through the regulation of volunteering, to ensure that the regulation of one form of volunteering does not hinder other forms, such as ad-hoc volunteering initiatives, from existing.
- Developing specific national strategies or frameworks to support volunteering in countries where policy measures on volunteering are implicit within a broad range of other areas.
- Avoiding, at the other extreme, regulation that will end in discouraging and controlling volunteering, creating a burden to organisations and discouraging informal spontaneous initiatives.
- Highlighting that volunteering should be granted a clearly defined and compatible legal status across the EU with regard to cross-border travel and activities for volunteering purposes.
- Revising laws to remove legal impediments for volunteering also at EU level. The EU can promote guidelines concerning, for instance, ways to distinguish volunteering from other legally regulated relations, indicating that volunteers should complement and not replace paid staff.
- Developing national and European regulatory frameworks through multi-stakeholder involvement: governments, experts and volunteer and civil society organisations offering volunteer services.

### **Enable a volunteering infrastructure to prosper by**

- Addressing public authorities to enable volunteering structures characterised by a bottom-up approach in a local context, where participation shapes voluntary work and local networks support it.
- Setting up intermediary offices, e.g. local window offices run by NGOs or local authorities, where citizens can learn about how to get involved in volunteer activities and offers and demands for volunteer time will be matched, supported by web-portals.
- Granting precedence for voluntary activities initiated by volunteer and civil society organisations over services initiated by public authorities, in other words, calling Member States to frame and support private (in the context of an organisation) and grass-root initiatives.
- Identifying the common elements in different Member States that allow for a volunteering infrastructure to be in place. Three general factors are: a favourable volunteering policy or regulatory framework, recognition and promotion of volunteering, committed national leadership.
- Exchanging best practices among actors, both at national and even at EU level, and enhancing cooperation and networks among volunteer and civil society organisations offering volunteer services. The EYV Alliance 2011 is a concrete example for EU-level cooperation and synergies.

### **Recognise volunteers' skills and experience by**

- Investing in the qualification of volunteers in the framework of lifelong learning programmes in both non-formal and informal learning.
- Supporting Member States to continue developing arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whereby non-formal and informal learning within volunteering are a constitutive part of lifelong learning.
- Developing projects and frameworks, at the regional or local level, to recognise skills and competences, considering that the recognition of the experience as such is important.
- Integrating information on volunteering in curricula of secondary and tertiary education.
- Encouraging the European Commission to disseminate good practices for validation of non-formal and informal learning to EU countries, outlining the necessity for its application to voluntary experience.

- Defining a single European framework for certifying and valorising the competences acquired, defining citizenship transversal competences within the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

### **Improve funding mechanisms by**

- Highlighting that volunteering in the field of public services/services of general interest (SGI) has a complementary nature and it is not a tool to enter in competition with publicly funded or supported services, but rather to complement them.
- Stressing that volunteering is not a way to save money on work done by professional staff.
- Extending measures within Member States to support voluntary services and services for volunteers, such as financial guarantees by public authorities for work of organisations offering voluntary services (e.g. for those doing the coordination work).
- Demanding co-financing by public authorities, in particular of state-framed voluntary services and services for volunteers (e.g. in Germany *Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr*).
- Supporting management facilitations and fiscal advantages (e.g. exemptions from VAT for goods and services) and granting public coverage for volunteers' insurance and training expenses.
- Establishing funds that last over several years for grassroots activities with monitoring based on quality and impact indicators.
- Addressing Member States to help organisations to adapt to new funding systems, organising schemes and programmes providing guidelines to understand public procurement arrangements, which are too often complicated requiring extremely sophisticated knowledge and professionalisation and staff as regards financing and administration.
- Clarifying European rules on the use of procurement rules applied to services granted through voluntary organisations. In this context and if used, public procurement procedures need to be addressed towards socially responsible practises, taking into account criteria such as sustainability, support for the functioning of organisations, funds granting in terms of duration.
- Lessening the legislative and administrative obstacles, the degree of complexity in both public procurement rules and in European funding procedures would allow volunteer and civil society organisations to accurately present their project proposals and to apply for calls.
- An appropriate recognition of contributions in kind, including volunteer work in EU-funded projects that acknowledge civil society's capacities of mobilising its own resources.
- The European Social Fund (ESF) should be used to incentivise providers to offer voluntary activities as a pathway to integration, especially for groups of people furthest from the labour market.

### **Match the demand and supply of volunteers by**

- Setting up intermediary offices, e.g. local window offices run by NGOs or local authorities, where citizens can learn about how to get involved in volunteer activities and offers and demands for volunteer time will be matched, supported by web-portals.
- Developing well-targeted information campaigns as a recruitment scheme.
- Involving 55+ people in voluntary activities, both as a form of people's empowerment and as a response to the demographic trend. Member States would have to promote engagement at an early stage, creating awareness through campaigns that outline solidarity values together with the benefits of activation, involving companies, public bodies in charge of pensions and lifelong learning facilities. However, this should not undermine people's employability or re-entry to the labour market (as included under the objectives of the EU2020 Strategy and as part of many strategies and initiatives at Member State level).
- Collecting reliable and harmonised data on volunteers, particularly at national and local levels, focusing on competences and abilities as well as their availability, so to better understand their skills and also their needs. A more precise idea of volunteers profiles and expectations could stimulate organisations to modify their programmes and render them more suitable to the volunteers.

### **Strengthen volunteering interventions by**

- Training of volunteering on a regular basis to increase motivation for volunteering and encourage them to be involved in the long run (when necessary); in other words, ensuring the quality and continuity of volunteer involvement.
- Granting (national and European) standardised certificates to show their qualification in the context of emergency/rescue/first aid services.
- Defining limits to which volunteers can be activated, as they are not professional workers and should not replace waged/salaried workers.
- Setting up quality management actions and models to enable the support for volunteering, guaranteeing networking and exchange between organisations offering volunteering, measures for the qualification of professional staff to recruit, to accompany them and to frame their involvement.

## ANNEXES

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There is no European model for a (legal) definition of the terms “volunteer”, “volunteering” or “volunteerism”. In sixteen Member States<sup>3</sup> volunteering is regulated within policies on social welfare, labour, fundamental rights, tax and non-profit organisations. In those countries where a definition of volunteering is in place “voluntary work” or “volunteering” usually differs depending on traditions, culture, values and the surrounding political system<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, volunteering may not have one common characterisation even within national borders. As the German case shows, four forms of volunteering can be identified in the framework of the work of social welfare associations: volunteer activity as member of an association, related to management, administrative or representative tasks (*Ehrenamt*); voluntary work on a temporary basis, in projects or around certain issue such as social services (*Freiwilligenarbeit*), not necessarily linked to membership; voluntary services (*Freiwilligendienste*); and self-help (*Selbsthilfe*), oriented towards empowerment<sup>5</sup>.

On a broader level, a distinction can be made between voluntary service (*Freiwilligendienst; volontariat*), referring to specific full-time project-based voluntary activities, and general volunteering (*Ehrenamt; bénévolat*), usually occasional rather than regular, part time rather than full time. This jungle of definitions clearly shows how complex it is to classify and to commonly understand the intrinsic nature of volunteering across the continent.

It is useful in this context to reiterate that the European Commission identifies volunteering, on a very general level, as all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal. A series of traits are also identified within the concept:

- It is undertaken of a person’s own free-will, choice and motivation, and not for financial gain;
- it is beneficial to the individual volunteer, to communities and the society as a whole;
- a means for individuals and associations to address social, humanitarian, developmental or environmental needs and concerns;
- carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative;
- does not replace professional, paid employment opportunities<sup>6</sup>.

## 1. VOLUNTEER PROFILE

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Moving forward from the volunteering common definition, it is important to comprehend who are the actors involved. According to a 2006 Eurobarometer survey, an average 79% of EU European citizens consider “helping others or voluntary work” an important aspect of their lives – less than “work”, “family” and “friends”, but more than “religion” and “politics”. Further, around 34% of people engage in “active participation or voluntary work”. More precisely, four clusters of countries can be identified with respect to citizens’ involvement in voluntary activity: 1) more than 40% in Austria, Sweden, The Netherlands, Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg; 2) between 30% and 39% in Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia; 3) between 20% and 29% in Cyprus, Estonia, Malta, Latvia, United Kingdom; 4) and between 10% and 19% in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>GHK (2010). Study on Volunteering in the European Union.

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/eyv2011/doc/Volunteering%20in%20the%20EU%20Final%20Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Inter-parliamentary Union and United Nations Volunteers (2004). Volunteerism and Legislation: a guidance note.

<http://www.unv.org/en/news-resources/resources/on-volunteerism/doc/guidance-note-on-volunteerism-1.html>

<sup>5</sup> Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (2010). Grundsatzposition Bürgerschaftliches Engagement in der Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (BAGFW).

[http://www.bagfw.de/uploads/tx\\_twpublication/BE-Grundsatzposition\\_30\\_06\\_2010.pdf](http://www.bagfw.de/uploads/tx_twpublication/BE-Grundsatzposition_30_06_2010.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2009). Commission Staff working document European Year of Volunteering 2011 [COM(2009) 254] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SEC:2009:0725:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2007). Special Eurobarometer 273 - European Social Reality Report.



Overall, a general increase in the number of volunteers is registered over the past decade. But who are they? Most countries tend to have a larger number of male volunteers than female (eleven Member States) or an equal participation between women and men (nine Member States), probably due to the involvement of men in local communities activities and sports clubs, whereas women are more engaged in social services and health. These data are also influenced by a higher female employment participation in these latter and by women's role as family carers. Volunteers are people from different background and belief groups, employees and unemployed, and of all ages, varying differently among European countries. The most active can be young adults aged 15 to 30 as in Latvia and Spain, adults aged 30 to 50 as in Denmark and Portugal, and people of all ages with an equal distribution as in France and Austria<sup>8</sup>.

## 2. WHY VOLUNTEERING? THE VALUE

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The reason why people engage in voluntary activity may vary according to different needs, aspirations and scopes. There are however common motives across Europe to volunteer and on the beneficial value that volunteering brings to the individual and to the (European) society as a whole. Several aspects can be distinguished, of which the main ones are outlined below.

**Solidarity principle:** The engagement in communities with no motivation for financial gain but simply for the benefit of other people sees volunteers putting in practise a solidarity principle which has been endorsed in European Treaties and can be seen as a corner stone of European integration. In this sense, they contribute to creating an identity which shares the same values throughout Europe. What is also important to understand, is not only the solidarity-driven motive and the respective benefits for the community but also the gains and advantages for volunteers themselves. Indeed, as a consequence of their active role, volunteers enjoy higher self-esteem or life-satisfaction, better physical health and lower depression.

**Active citizenship:** The Europe for Citizens Programme recognises the contribution of voluntary activities on active citizenship<sup>9</sup>. As volunteers dedicate their time, with no financial gains, for the benefit of others and society, they develop a sense of belonging to a community; in other words, citizens become committed to their society, to their political life, involved in local social policy, in initiatives and movements to promote participatory democracy<sup>10</sup>. Voluntary activity is carried out by citizens who promote participation, easing the involvement of local actors that, through participation, become empowered.

**Social inclusion and social capital:** Volunteering plays a crucial role in the promotion of integration and in the fight against social exclusion<sup>11</sup>. On the one hand, volunteers are the ones through which those at risk of social exclusion are engaged, and on the other hand, volunteering may provide people at the margin of the labour market and society such as poor, unemployed, elderly, migrants or people with disabilities, with ways to feel useful to their society and their local neighbourhoods<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, volunteering is a tool for empowerment, as a means for citizens to be re-connected to their society.

**Social policy:** Voluntary activities can give new responses to emerging social challenges, so to deliver innovative and proper services to citizens. Particularly in Social Services of General Interests (SSGI), volunteers are active in the health and in the care sectors but also in (re)integration measures (for homeless

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[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_273\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> GHK (2010). Study on Volunteering in the European Union.

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/eyv2011/doc/Volunteering%20in%20the%20EU%20Final%20Report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> European Commission (2009). Europe for Citizens Programme 2007-2013 – Programme Guide version valid as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/documents/EACEA\\_2008\\_0185\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/documents/EACEA_2008_0185_EN.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (2010). Grundsatzposition Bürgerschaftliches Engagement in der Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (BAGFW).

[http://www.bagfw.de/uploads/tx\\_twppublication/BE-Grundsatzposition\\_30\\_06\\_2010.pdf](http://www.bagfw.de/uploads/tx_twppublication/BE-Grundsatzposition_30_06_2010.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> EYV 2011 Alliance (2009) - The European Year of Volunteering EYV 2011 Discussion Paper.

[http://www.cev.be/data/File/Alliance\\_discussion\\_paper\\_EYV\\_2011.pdf](http://www.cev.be/data/File/Alliance_discussion_paper_EYV_2011.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Eurodiaconia (2010). Policy Paper Volunteering.

[http://www.eurodiaconia.org/images/stories/Our\\_work/Volunteering\\_Policy\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.eurodiaconia.org/images/stories/Our_work/Volunteering_Policy_Paper.pdf)

people, migrants). Most importantly, it is widely recognised that the future of SSGI, whether in areas such as education, culture or health, will depend on the active role played by voluntary and charity organisations<sup>13</sup>. In practise, volunteers may assist prisoners and drug users; help people living with HIV/Aids through specialized counselling, hotlines and care; coach activities, organise holidays for people with disabilities or people affected by particular diseases, empowering and encouraging them to take control of their lives again; visit socially isolated people<sup>14</sup>. It must be clearly stated that volunteering, in this context, is not a form of job substitution and should not be abused.

**Education and training:** The fact that volunteering contributes to the personal development, education and training, the learning capabilities of a person, is also extremely important. Voluntary activities enhance the skills and competences acquired outside formal education and any work environment<sup>15</sup>. The effects, or actually the recognition of volunteering as informal and non-formal learning are currently under discussion, together with the possible life-long learning opportunities arising when people volunteer and clearly this recognition has to be improved.

**Sport:** Without a doubt the main voluntary activities throughout Europe are concentrated in the sport sector, where volunteers are the major resource for many sports clubs. It is also because of the volunteer-driven structures and volunteers' engagement that there is a clear role for sport in the European society, in terms of health, education, social integration, and culture<sup>16</sup>.

**Young & elders/active ageing:** For young and elders, volunteering is a crucial development resource. It is fundamental to increase solidarity among young people, to develop tolerance and mutual understanding, to directly reinforce social cohesion in the European Union. It contributes to professional and individual maturity, it is a resource for young people's needs<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, while volunteers can provide services to older people, volunteering also is the means for their direct engagement, to stay active and to remain healthier for longer in their lives. There is a trend registered in all European countries on the increasing participation of older people in voluntary activities, particularly in countries such as Austria, Romania, Spain and Sweden.

**Economic value:** Volunteering is a fundamental resource for economic activity in Europe, from the social to the environmental sphere, from the transport to the educational sector. However, due to the lack of reliable data estimating the character of volunteer work, volunteers are clearly undervalued. Probably the most consistent study on the economic value of the non-profit sector, with an assessment on volunteering, was carried out by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies (JHU/CCSS) at the end of the nineties. According to the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project<sup>18</sup>, volunteering accounted for between 0.04% and 4.70% as share of GDP in seventeen European countries (among the thirty-six analysed)<sup>19</sup>. It was also estimated that volunteers "workforce" represents between 0.4% and 5.1% of the economically active population<sup>20</sup>. What is more important, if the aim is to have a widely recognised study on the economic value of

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<sup>13</sup> European Commission (2003). Green Paper on Services of General Interest [COM(2003) 270 final]  
[http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2003/com2003\\_0270en01.pdf](http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2003/com2003_0270en01.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> EYV 2011 Alliance (2009) - The European Year of Volunteering EYV 2011 Discussion Paper.  
[http://www.cev.be/data/File/Alliance\\_discussion\\_paper\\_EYV\\_2011.pdf](http://www.cev.be/data/File/Alliance_discussion_paper_EYV_2011.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> European Commission (2007). Staff Working Document - Accompanying document to the Communication on "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation" [COM(2007) 703 final]  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/policy/sec1484\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/policy/sec1484_en.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> European Commission (2007). White paper on Sports [COM(2007) 391 final]  
[http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/doc/wp\\_on\\_sport\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/doc/wp_on_sport_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> European Commission (2001). European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth [COM(2001) 681 final] <http://www.cev.be/data/File/COM2001.681WhPpEUYouth.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> So far, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP) is the largest systematic effort ever undertaken to analyze into the structure, financing, and impact of the nonprofit activity, including volunteering, throughout the world.

<sup>19</sup> Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies (2004). Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project - Volunteering and giving as a share of GDP by Country – Reference Years 1995-2002.

[http://www.ccsc.jhu.edu/pdfs/CNP/CNP\\_comptable5\\_dec05.pdf](http://www.ccsc.jhu.edu/pdfs/CNP/CNP_comptable5_dec05.pdf) and  
<http://www.ccsc.jhu.edu/index.php?section=content&view=16&sub=91&tri=92>

<sup>20</sup> Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies (2004). Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project - Civil Society Workforce as % of Economically Active Population, by Country - Reference Years 1995-2000.  
[http://www.ccsc.jhu.edu/pdfs/CNP/CNP\\_figure01.pdf](http://www.ccsc.jhu.edu/pdfs/CNP/CNP_figure01.pdf) and

volunteering which is reliable and comparable across Member States, is to identify a common approach to definitions, data collection, key concepts and variables. To improve knowledge and understanding of volunteering at both national and EU level, to give credit and respect to the millions of hours of volunteer work and to move forward towards precise statistical data on volunteering, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and JHU joined forces to launch the JHU/ILO Volunteer Measurement Project, aiming at the adoption of “Manual on the measurement of Volunteer Work”, a methodology guide to support countries in generating systematic and comparable data on volunteer work. The final draft of the Manual<sup>21</sup> was approved by the ILO in October of 2010, and JHU is now incorporating the final revisions in preparation for the Manual publication in early 2011.

**Universal values:** Volunteering also contributes in spreading values such as acceptance, non-violence, mutual respect, peace building and it is crucial, for instance, in addressing the Millennium Development Goals<sup>22</sup>. Volunteers provide assistance to refugees, engage in development policies and they are involved in programmes fostering migrants’ integration<sup>23</sup> (legal counselling, labour orientation, humanitarian assistance).

Even though it is difficult to provide precise information on the areas in which volunteers are active, simply because countries use different terminology for the sectors in consideration (for instance, education and training and cultural activities can be grouped together or are separate categories), most volunteers are involved in a sports club or club for outdoor activities (13%), then in education, arts, music or cultural association (8%), and in religious organisation or churches (6%)<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, there are other sectors of involvement, which can result in large scale or small scale volunteers’ participation according to their groupings or specific focus, among which themes such as elderly care, migrants assistance, LGBT rights or environmental protection.

### 3. THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION AND EYV 2011

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It should be clear by now that the European values at the heart of volunteering, whereby people engage in voluntary activities sharing some common principles, are for the benefit of the European society. Before jumping into any European dimension, a few more words need to be said on the Member States level. To which extent is volunteering on countries’ political agenda? With no surprise, situations are quite diverse. In Finland and Sweden, a multi-agency committee or similar parties’ agreements (between government, voluntary organisations within the social sector and association of local authorities and regions) have been set-up, with the aim of removing barriers to volunteer activity and creating legal frameworks. Five European countries, amongst which are Austria and Spain, endorsed a national strategy for volunteering including a Volunteering Manifest and a National Plan for Volunteering. In many other Member States, laws regulating volunteering are implicit within different policy areas, most commonly under youth policies. In this context, the International Year of Volunteering 2001 allowed to increase the political interest in several countries, boosting the development of the voluntary sector in Hungary, the initiation of specific programmes such as the Step Two programme in the Netherlands, and the creation of the institutional framework in Luxembourg<sup>25</sup>.

As volunteering needs support of governments at all levels - European, national and regional, of civil society organisations and of private actors - having 2011 declared the European Year of Volunteering will be a catalyst for the theme and the opportunity to promote, to facilitate, to recognise, to support voluntary activities so to realise their full potential. A European Year of Volunteering will influence the European and national debates. Four main objectives have been defined:

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<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/sna1993/AEG/ECAworkshop/presentations/npi.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> ILO (2010). Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work - Revised Exposure Draft August 2010.

[http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/pdfs/ILO/ILO\\_Manual\\_August\\_2010.pdf](http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/pdfs/ILO/ILO_Manual_August_2010.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> UN millennium development goals <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

<sup>23</sup> European Volunteer Centre (2006). INVOLVE, Involvement of third countries nationals in volunteering as a means of better integration – final project report. <http://www.cev.be/data/File/INVOLVEreportEN.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> European Commission (2007). Special Eurobarometer 273 - European Social Reality Report.

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_273\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> GHK (2010). Study on Volunteering in the European Union.

<http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/eyv2011/doc/Volunteering%20in%20the%20EU%20Final%20Report.pdf>

- 1) To create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU;
- 2) To empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering;
- 3) To reward and recognise volunteering activities; and
- 4) To raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering<sup>26</sup>.

The European Year of Volunteering is expected to acknowledge added value of volunteering, with the aim to highlight the link between a European level and the voluntary engagement in local contexts. All levels - European, national, regional and local - needs to be involved, with particular emphasis on a bottom-up approach. What is important is to stress that the year does neither have the aspiration nor the goal to harmonise policies on volunteering in Europe, but to simply show the different approaches in Member States, trying to give an answer the common challenges across the EU. A step towards this logic is, for instance, the recently published call for proposals for flagship projects in the framework of the European Year of Volunteering 2011<sup>27</sup>.

#### a. What has been addressed so far?

Volunteering does not sound as a brand new tune to the European Union's ears. Many proposals, reports and policy papers have been produced by different Institutions in the past thirty years to address volunteering in all its forms. Dating back to 1983, the political development at the EU level around the theme has a cornerstone in a European Parliament resolution on voluntary work. The document dealt with the nature of voluntary activity, the importance of an adequate infrastructure for volunteering policies to be effective, calling for a "statute for voluntary work" to cover social insurance and expenses reimbursement for volunteers<sup>28</sup>.

Some years having elapsed, 1997 was a crucial year. Firstly, the Commission adopted a Communication on promoting the role of voluntary organisations and foundations in Europe, where the role of voluntary organisations in active citizenship, providing services, representing citizens' interests to public authorities, promoting and safeguarding human rights was recognised<sup>29</sup>. More important was the Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities annexed to the Final Acts of the Amsterdam Treaty, recognising "the important contribution made by voluntary service activities to developing social solidarity". The Declaration also affirmed that a European dimension of voluntary organisations will be encouraged, highlighting in particular the exchange of experiences and information, as well as the involvement, in voluntary work, of the youth and elderly<sup>30</sup>.

Along the years, the theme of volunteering was further included in specific thematic areas. For instance, the Council approved a resolution in 2002 on the added value of voluntary activity for young people in the context of the development of Community Action on Youth<sup>31</sup>, with a focus on the younger generations. It was preceded, in 2001, by a proposal from the Commission<sup>32</sup>, and the adopted recommendation on mobility within the community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers<sup>33</sup>, with focus on

<sup>26</sup> European Year of Volunteering 2011 - The EU has designated 2011 as the "European Year of Volunteering" [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/focus/focus840\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/focus/focus840_en.htm)

<sup>27</sup> European Commission Call for proposals for flagship projects in the framework of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 published 12 November 2010 [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news/news1092\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news/news1092_en.htm)

<sup>28</sup> European Parliament (1984). Resolution on Voluntary work, OJEC C 010, 16 January 1984, p.288-291.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission (1997). Communication from the Commission on promoting the role of voluntary organisations and foundations in Europe [COM(97) 241 final] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1997:0241:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>30</sup> Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties Establishing the European Communities and Related Acts - Official Journal C 340, 10 November 1997 - Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/11997D/hdm/11997D.html#0115010017>

<sup>31</sup> Council and Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council (2002). Resolution on the added value of voluntary activity for young people in the context of the development of Community action on youth [2002/C 50/02] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2002:050:0003:0005:EN:PDF>

<sup>32</sup> European Commission (1999). Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers [COM(1999) 708 final] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1999:0708:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>33</sup> Council and European Parliament (2001). Recommendation on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers [2001/613/EC]

people's mobility in the mentioned areas but also on measures specifically targeting the recognition of volunteering. That volunteering is intertwined with other policy themes can be seen through the Commission youth policies (such as the YOUTH Programme and the Youth in Action Programme), the Active European Citizenship (such as the Europe for Citizens Programme), and the Life Long Learning Programme.

However, what is important to outline is a trend for a broader focus on volunteering at EU level, going beyond citizenship and youth affairs, and centred in its social and economic value. In this context, the Parliament adopted in March 2008 a report calling Member States and regional/local authorities to recognise the role of volunteering in the creating of social capital, its economic value, its contribution to economic cohesion (promoting employability and social inclusion) and to social cohesion (across the generations, promoting integration and intercultural dialogue, contribute directly to cultural development)<sup>34</sup>.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) also presented significant contributions to place volunteering high on the agenda under the social and economic value lens. Following the Parliament report, the CoR issued in 2008 an opinion on the contribution of volunteering to economic and social cohesion<sup>35</sup>, highlighting the human resources provided to socio-economic activities, the creation of social capital and a better quality of life which can be an influential factor in investment and job creation. The report also specifically mentions the prevention for volunteering to replace employed staff and encourages Member States to collect accurate statistical information on volunteer involvement at a local and regional level, so to support the development of appropriate initiatives at both levels. On the same line of thought, the EESC expressed its opinion in 2006 on "voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact"<sup>36</sup>, calling to complement the generally used economic quantitative indicators for a country's development (such as financial balance and GDP growth) with alternative indicators measuring contribution of voluntary activity to economic value, social capital and social cohesion. Further opinions were formulated such as the opinion of the EESC on voluntary organisations and foundations in Europe<sup>37</sup> and the CoR opinion on the role of voluntary organisations - a contribution to a European society<sup>38</sup>.

## **b. The role of civil society organisations**

If institutions have been increasingly attentive to the volunteer theme, CSOs and voluntary associations have played a bigger role alongside. They were first in line when it came to address the great political, social and economic potential that resides in making volunteering a key European concern. In February 2008, an alliance of major NGO European networks presented a position paper - Towards a European Year of Volunteering 2011<sup>39</sup> - in the European Parliament at a meeting of the Interest Group on Volunteering, at the presence of MEPs and NGO representatives, as well as representatives of the Slovenian Presidency and the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The paper developed a strategy to have 2011 being declared the European Year of Volunteering (EYV), underlining what these NGOs hoped such a year might achieve.

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<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2001:215:0030:0037:EN:PDF>

<sup>34</sup> European Parliament (2007). Report on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion [2007/2149(INI)]

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2008-0070+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

<sup>35</sup> Committee of the Regions (2008). Opinion on: the contribution of volunteering to Economic and Social Cohesion [2008/C 105/03] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:105:0011:0015:EN:PDF>

<sup>36</sup> European Economic and Social Committee (2006). Opinion on Voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.opinions.10599>

<sup>37</sup> European Economic and Social Committee (1997). Opinion on Voluntary Organisations and Foundations in Europe [SOC/97; COM (97) 241] [http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/ces118-1998\\_ac\\_en.pdf](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/ces118-1998_ac_en.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Committee of the Regions (1998). Opinion on: The role of voluntary organizations - a contribution to a European society [98/C 180/10] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:1998:180:0057:0062:EN:PDF>

<sup>39</sup> Towards a European Year of Volunteering 2011 - Position Paper (February 2008) [http://www.cev.be/99-towards\\_a\\_european\\_year\\_of\\_volunteering\\_2011\\_position\\_paper\\_104-EN.html](http://www.cev.be/99-towards_a_european_year_of_volunteering_2011_position_paper_104-EN.html)

What followed next was the Parliament written declaration in September 2008 calling the Commission to announce 2011 as the EYV<sup>40</sup>. 416 MEPs signed it along with several NGOs, namely SOLIDAR, the European Volunteer Centre, Volonteuropa, AGE, the European Youth Forum, the World Scouts Movement, Johanniter International, the Red Cross/European Union Office, the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations, Caritas Europa, ENGAGE, the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation and others. What these organisations have advocated for was: to raise awareness and gain recognition of the value of volunteering; to celebrate volunteers and volunteer organisations; to work towards reducing barriers and discrimination; to have a volunteering infrastructure at all levels and to work towards a European policy agenda. Finally, a Commission official proposal on the EYV 2011 was adopted in June 2009<sup>41</sup>, which was endorsed by the Council later that year<sup>42</sup>.

#### 4. CHALLENGES AHEAD

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After having considered the policies adopted or to be developed to allow volunteering to flourish, it is now time to understand what the challenges are that impede volunteering development, so to provide a series of new possible solutions. As it can be well understood, specific problems for volunteering vary from country to country, according to their laws and to their culture, but some common obstacles can be identified across Europe. Below, we elaborate on some of the main traits recognised, brought forward by SOLIDAR members' experience from the ground.

##### a. Lack of or not fully adequate legal framework on volunteering

The lively debate of a lack of a clear legal framework on volunteering, in certain Member States and especially at the EU level, has been ongoing for years, and seen as a crucial problem for the development of volunteering. This problem concretely translates, for many civil society and volunteer organisations, in disadvantages in terms of taxation, insurance and reimbursement of expenses, with a volunteer sector not legally identified. To the other extreme, there are countries where the volunteer sector is subject to an infinitive number of rules, stemming from different areas, being for instance youth or sport related laws, therefore increasing the legislative burden and creating confusion for organisations.

##### b. Shortage of volunteering infrastructure

It is important to create an infrastructure that would allow "systems, mechanisms and instruments needed to ensure an environment where volunteerism can flourish". This is because volunteerism is a product of its environment, and what often lacks is dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, being those governments, civil society, private businesses and intermediating agencies. For instance, when legal frameworks and public policies facilitate participation and reduce barriers, citizens are encouraged to volunteer.<sup>43</sup> Instead, in certain countries having a national coordinating agency could benefit the vision of volunteering as a legitimate part of the society by the public and the government, increasing access to information and opportunities in some areas, and enhancing monitoring capacity. Yet, views and opinions in Member States may differ when it comes to identifying which systems, mechanisms and instruments exist, and whether the various elements of a volunteering infrastructure are in place.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> European Parliament (2008). Written Declaration on announcing 2011 as the European Year on Volunteering <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+WDECL+P6-DCL-2008-0030+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>

<sup>41</sup> European Commission 92009). Proposal for a council decision on the European Year of Volunteering (2011) [COM(2009) 254 final] [http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc828\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc828_en.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Council (2010). Decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) [2010/37/EC] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:017:0043:0049:EN:PDF>

<sup>43</sup> UN Volunteers (2005). Developing a Volunteer Infrastructure - A guidance note. <http://www.unv.org/en/news-resources/resources/on-volunteerism/doc/developing-a-volunteer-infrastructure-2.html>

<sup>44</sup> CEV (2005). General Assembly Conference "An enabling volunteering infrastructure in Europe: Situation – Trends – Outlook" Malmö, Sweden | 15th-16th October 2009 - Final Report - Conference Conclusions. [http://www.cev.be/data/File/101027\\_GARReportMalmoe\\_INTERNET.pdf](http://www.cev.be/data/File/101027_GARReportMalmoe_INTERNET.pdf)

### **c. Rare recognition of volunteers' skills and experience**

National systems not promoting the recognition of volunteering is another main concern. Firstly, recognising volunteering is crucial as rewarding the participation of volunteers in activities further attracts new volunteers. By validating their experiences, the public perception of volunteering portrayed as a fulfilling and proactive activity increases. As the contribution volunteering can make to people in gaining skills and competences remains often in the area of informal and non-formal learning, the problem becomes the better recognition of informal and non-formal learning themselves. What is missing is then a series of European tools and instruments developed to make skills gained through volunteering visible and have them recognized across different sectors and countries<sup>45</sup>.

### **d. Change in funding mechanisms**

The main source of funding for the third sector in Europe is (still) public money<sup>46</sup>. One main reason that keeps the non-profit sector dependent on the government is the limited possibilities for civil society and volunteer organisations to raise their own revenues. Yet, there is a growing tendency for an increased proportion of financial resources channelled through the private sector, while EU membership opened up opportunities to receive funds and more transnational co-operation for hundreds of NGOs across Europe. The economic crisis has the clear effect of reducing both funds received through donations and from governments (due to budget cuts). What needs to be addressed here is the changing relationship between public authorities and organisations, as an increasing number of voluntary associations are being contracted to provide public services. This has an impact on the mechanism for the transfer of resources between the two entities, where from the grant aid culture there is a shift towards a financial relationship built on contractual arrangements around service delivery. Increasingly, subsidies are replaced by contracts, awarded through calls for projects and call for tenders. As a consequence, organisations face increased competition among themselves and with other businesses in the sector. This also implies that in order to be able to respond to calls for tender or similar procedures, organisations need to possess solid financial and legal basis. One last aspect to outline is a tendency to decentralise the distribution and management of funds, with responsibilities ultimately lying on municipalities and on actors at social and local level.

### **e. Mismatch between volunteers' demand and supply**

There is a general trend of increasing the numbers of volunteers across all countries, with a sharp increase (e.g. Spain, Austria) or a more modest one (e.g. Finland, Germany), also depending on the levels already obtained, even though the feeling in many organisations is often that the opposite is true. The problem lies, however, in the nature of voluntary engagement, where a mismatch between demand and supply is identifiable. The challenges consist in amalgamating the aspirations of new volunteers and the need of the organisation, or in other words finding people with the adequate competences. This is linked to the increasing diversity of volunteers and to the new areas where volunteering is reaching out, which require more specialisation and more capabilities. In addition to a shift towards well-defined tasks and objectives (and short-term projects), evidence from the ground supplied by SOLIDAR members describe increasing difficulties in finding long-term commitment/involvement of volunteers<sup>47</sup>. Last but not least, volunteering has often taken place within the structures of the association (management, administration, etc.), while latest evidence show voluntary engagement in activities taking place outside the usual organisational structures, as in case of unexpected (rather small) emergencies.

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<sup>45</sup> European Volunteer Centre (2007). MOVE Conference on "Mutual recognition skills and competences gained through volunteering: Towards a European debate" 23-24 May 2007 Final Report <http://www.cev.be/data/File/CEV-MOVEconferenceReport.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Statistical data made available from European Volunteer Centre in 2005

<sup>47</sup> André Hudepohl, Humanitas (2010). Volunteering. Internal Briefing, Humanitas

#### **f. Increased complexity of interventional situations**

The situations in which volunteers find themselves in require more and more professionalism. Indeed, this means volunteers will be confronted with increasingly demanding tasks, specific skills and competences. More complex management duties have come up as volunteers are engaged in more difficult contexts themselves and with vulnerable/disadvantaged persons, partially at the fringe of society or of the labour market, or with particular social problems. For instance, what is needed is increased support around preventive or follow-up activities in different fields of social care delivered by organisations (chain of care and counselling services). The support tasks needed also by volunteers have therefore become more complex and difficult, and also more diverse. The risk is then a shift from professional care towards care involving volunteers, with pressure to professionalise volunteer work and to crowd out waged work.