

“Volunteer! Make a Difference!”

with the European Year of Volunteering 2011



By Vice-President Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

“Around 100 million people in the European Union (EU) participate in voluntary activities. If they were a country, they would be the biggest Member State of the European Union! These volunteers make a positive difference to the lives of millions of people across the continent. We see the concrete benefits to society as a whole and to volunteers themselves wherever people work together to help each other and support those in need. Whether they’re helping to preserve our environment, campaigning for human rights or helping ensure that everyone enjoys a decent life, volunteers are our day-to-day heroes.

The European Year of Volunteering 2011 gives much-needed visibility to the vital



work done by volunteering organisations and offers opportunities to help volunteers do their job better and get recognition for their tireless work. The timing of the year is no coincidence: there is also an international focus on volunteering in 2011, as the United Nations celebrates the 10th anniversary of their International Year of the Volunteer 2001.

The work of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts fits among the many fine examples of volunteering organizations that have a strong impact on people’s lives in the EU and across the world. I am impressed that a WAGGGS’ youth delegation helped to successfully lobby UN member states to support climate change education for young people at the UN climate change conference (COP16) in Mexico in December 2010.

Volunteering is a creator of human and social capital. It is a pathway to integration and employment, and a key factor for improving social cohesion. It is an essential element of European citizenship. Volunteers contribute to shaping European society. And they are a strong expression of solidarity. This is particularly important in the current economic and social climate. This is why the EU in general and the Commission in particular has a vested interest in the European Year of Volunteering. This is not just “a one year one-off year”. We will use this year as a platform for broadening and deepening the outreach, content and quality of volunteering.”

HOW THE EU WILL USE THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING

The EU will use the Year to work towards four main objectives:

- Create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU
- Empower volunteer organizations and improve the quality of volunteering
- Reward and recognise volunteering activities
- Raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering

European Union activities for the European Year of Volunteering

Throughout the European Year of Volunteering 2011, hundreds of activities and projects will be highlighted and promoted. At the EU level, these include:

- EYV2011 Tour: Volunteers will tour EU countries over a one-year period, showcasing their work and engaging with policy makers and the public
- EYV Relay: 27 “Relay” volunteer reporters will follow the work of 54 volunteering organizations and produce audio, video and written reports. At the end of the Year, the combined reports will be compiled to form a documentary about the European Year and its tour.
- Four thematic conferences to highlight key issues related to volunteering: 8 January in Budapest: Recognition of Volunteering; May/June: Celebrating volunteers and their valuable contribution; October: Empowering volunteering organizations; December: Closing conference on future challenges.

For more information, visit www.europa.eu/volunteering/