



## **Declaration on the Need of a rights-based approach towards Volunteering**

8 September 2011

### **Introduction**

We, the participants of the stakeholder conference “The Rights of the Volunteer” are convinced, that volunteering is an expression of active citizenship and therefore enriches democracy and contributes to social inclusion.

The Stakeholder Conference takes place during the biggest civil society event in the context of the European Year of Volunteering in 2011, organised by the European Youth Forum – the “Young Volunteers Stand Up! The II Youth Convention on Volunteering”. Recognising the value of volunteering, its contribution to the society, its cohesion and the skills volunteering provides to volunteers, the conference gathers stakeholders relevant in the field of volunteering at all different levels. It creates a Forum that ensures that the voices of volunteers and their organisations are heard in order to commonly discuss the rights based approach on the basis of the Draft European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers.

The Declaration on the rights-based approach towards volunteering was developed on the basis of the input gathered by the stakeholders' representatives at the Conference. This Declaration addresses the value of a rights-based approach to volunteering and focuses on the development of recommendations towards relevant authorities and stakeholders in order to implement the Charter.

### **A rights-based approach**

Volunteering is a right, not a privilege. A rights-based approach towards volunteering must be put in place in order to ensure quality, recognition, protection and equal access for everyone, without any kind of discrimination. Whereas in some countries the absence of a legal framework is an obstacle to volunteers and volunteering providers, volunteers in other countries face limited access to volunteering opportunities as a result of a restrictive legal framework. An enabling environment for volunteers across Europe is needed, accompanied by a supportive infrastructure that recognises the value of their engagement.

While a rights-based approach needs to recognise and foster the diversity of volunteering and national realities, it will empower volunteers and enable them to realise their mission. Furthermore, it will pave the way towards legal ground for distinguishing volunteering from paid and unpaid work.

A legal framework that meets the needs of volunteers and volunteering providers will allow them to claim their rights and avoid the abuse of volunteers. It needs to be inclusive and avoid restrictive elements and therefore should be developed, implemented and evaluated together with all relevant stakeholders.

### **Common challenges to volunteering**

Acknowledging the diversity of volunteering across Europe and in the world, the representatives of stakeholders present at the conference have pointed out the following existing common challenges:

- A lack of common definitions, quality standards and of coherent action taken by stakeholders at their respective levels, as well as the existence of contradicting policies;
- A lack of proper and sustainable funding – both for administrative and activities costs that would ensure the support for the volunteer and volunteering providers at all levels;
- A lack of transparent, accessible and comprehensive supporting structures;
- A lack of tools that would aim at overcoming the obstacles and would ensure equal access to volunteering opportunities;
- A lack of awareness about the social and economic value that volunteering adds to society;
- A lack of recognition of skills gained through volunteering, and of its contribution to personal development;
- A lack of evidence base and evaluation tools and mechanisms.

### **Recommendations**

The Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of the Volunteers entails important elements that will enable relevant actors to address the challenges that volunteers face today, and we recommend that, among others, these actions be taken:

- The Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of the Volunteers should be adopted and used as a starting point to define a common framework, recognised throughout European institutions and countries and supported by a common vision.
- The stakeholders at all levels should raise awareness about volunteering, and the rights and responsibilities linked to it, be it through education, media or other channels.

- Further development of evidence base and evaluation tools and mechanisms should lead to impact assessment of decision making and legal regulations in the volunteering sector at all levels across Europe.
- An improved approach to research and evidence-building in the field of volunteering should be a follow up of this Charter. Such national- and European-level research should be methodologically and statistically relevant and included in existing surveys at all levels. It should address the situation of volunteers, the (socio-economic) value of volunteering, and other areas identified as relevant, and should be comparable across European countries, to enable peer learning and progress measurement.
- The European-level processes should enable different countries to learn from each other, share best practice and promote the value of volunteering, and to do so in a structured manner. Ensuring that there are relevant bodies at their respective levels that will systematically deal with volunteering issues, should be considered as a natural step accompanying the Charter.
- Such European processes should promote the development of quality framework, measures, policies and programmes at the national level, thus progressively bringing countries to similar levels of development in the area.
- The actions at all levels should ensure that administrative and fiscal conditions for volunteers and volunteering providers are enabling, that volunteering is seen as a cross-sector area, and that the legal and political framework are constantly evaluated in view of further improving the situation.

## **Conclusion**

In order to overcome the challenges and realise the recommendations presented in this declaration, the implementation of the Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of the Volunteers and its rights-based approach are needed. This calls for stronger investment in volunteering and a turn towards the active civil society, in view of a long term strategy benefiting all sectors of society.