

European Parliament resolution of 22 April 2008 on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion (2007/2149(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion ([COM\(2007\)0273](#)),
 - 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 citizenship⁽¹⁾,
 - 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 2013⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013)⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2006/702/EC of 6 October 2006 on Community strategic guidelines on cohesion⁽⁴⁾,
 - having regard to Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 13 November 2006, on implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship⁽⁵⁾,
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission entitled Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society ([COM\(2007\)0498](#)),
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission entitled The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity ([COM\(2006\)0571](#)),
 - having regard to Recommendation 2001/613/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers⁽⁶⁾,
 - having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2007 on corporate social responsibility: a new partnership⁽⁷⁾,
 - having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the contribution of volunteering to economic and social cohesion⁽⁸⁾,
 - having regard to the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact⁽⁹⁾,
 - having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the role of voluntary organizations – a contribution to a European society⁽¹⁰⁾,
 - having regard to Articles 158 and 159 of the EC Treaty,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development ([A6-0070/2008](#)),
- A. whereas it is reliably estimated that in excess of 100 million EU citizens volunteer⁽¹¹⁾,
- B. whereas the initial findings upon implementation of the UN Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions (NPIs) are that the economic contribution of NPIs is on average 5% of GDP and that, even conservatively estimated, volunteer time accounts for more than one quarter of this figure⁽¹²⁾,
- C. whereas volunteering is a major force nurturing civil society and strengthening solidarity – one of the core values of the EU – as well as an essential component in supporting community development programmes, in particular in those Member States that are now emerging from a post-communist transitional period,
- D. whereas a recent study of organisations involving volunteers across Europe demonstrated a high level of added value:

for every EUR 1 organisations spent on supporting volunteers, they received an average return worth between EUR 3 and EUR 8⁽¹³⁾,

E. whereas the very significant contribution of volunteering to building up social capital needs to be fully recognised,

F. whereas sustainable funding, especially funding for administrative purposes, is of fundamental importance to voluntary organisations and to voluntary work in general,

G. whereas the recent report from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions identified social capital as a key element in developing policies to foster rural economic development⁽¹⁴⁾,

H. whereas a recent study into a successful Urban programme in Aarhus made the central point that local citizens and voluntary effort were crucial to the successful implementation of the programme⁽¹⁵⁾,

I. whereas volunteering not only has a measurable economic value but may also lead to significant savings for public services; whereas, in this context, it is important to ensure that voluntary activity is additional to public services and not a replacement of them,

J. whereas volunteering contributes to the personal and social development of the volunteer and has a positive impact within the community, for example, on interpersonal relationships,

K. whereas volunteers play an important role in achieving the Lisbon Strategy goal of socio-economic cohesion by contributing to financial inclusion, for example, by establishing credit unions which are regulated and not for profit financial cooperatives, run and governed by volunteers,

L. whereas the corporate social responsibility of companies is both an important business driver and represents an essential element of the European social model,

M. whereas there is a link between volunteering and sustainable development,

N. whereas it is important to promote and support best practices in volunteer management amongst organisations involving volunteers,

O. whereas volunteering leads to the direct involvement of citizens in local development, and thus can play an important role in the fostering of civil society and democracy,

P. whereas in the abovementioned Council resolution on active citizenship the Council encourages greater participation on the part of young people in civic life, participatory structures and voluntary work,

Q. whereas demographic change in Europe means that there is now a large number of older potential volunteers,

R. whereas volunteering can have a positive effect on people's health⁽¹⁶⁾; whereas this health benefit can be enjoyed by people of all ages and can help prevent physical and mental illness,

S. whereas volunteering has a role to play in underpinning local development initiatives and in facilitating the successful implementation of a number of Community-funded initiatives, such as the LEADER Programme, INTERREG and the PEACE Programme,

1. Encourages Member States and regional and local authorities to recognise the value of volunteering in promoting social and economic cohesion; furthermore, encourages them to work in partnership with voluntary organisations and to follow meaningful consultation with the voluntary sector to develop plans and strategies to recognise, value, support, facilitate and encourage volunteering; also urges the Member States to create a stable and institutional framework for the participation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in public debates;

2. Calls on the relevant Commission experts to make a clearer distinction between voluntary organisations and NGOs, whose activities are not organised on the same voluntary bases, and calls for a comprehensive pan-European investigation into the nature, level and internal mechanisms of social participation, including voluntary participation and funding for this purpose;

3. Calls on Member States and regional and local authorities to make real efforts to help voluntary organisations to access

sufficient and sustainable funding for both administrative purposes and projects, without excessive form-filling, red-tape or bureaucracy, while maintaining the necessary controls on the spending of public money;

4. Urges Member States and regional and local authorities to support the creation of volunteer emergency services in every locality in order to ensure a rapid response to natural disasters and accidents;
5. Draws the Commission's attention to the fact that the partnership principle enshrined in both the Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013) and the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion is not always adhered to at national level⁽⁴⁷⁾ and therefore urges the Commission to take the appropriate administrative and institutional steps to ensure that its own policies, procedures and protocols are actually observed and enforced during Structural Fund consultations, negotiations and subsequent operations;
6. Recommends that all Member States produce regular NPI "satellite accounts" and calls for the inclusion of volunteer work in these satellite accounts so that policy makers can take account of NPIs in their policy formulation; calls on the Commission to consider how volunteering might be included as a special category in the statistical accounts of EUROSTAT;
7. Strongly supports the view that volunteering and voluntary activity should not take the place of paid work;
8. Calls on the Commission to work towards putting in place a system for all Community funds whereby volunteer activity can be recognised as a contribution to co-financed projects and to devise mechanisms whereby voluntary work can be suitably costed; welcomes efforts by some Directorates-General of the Commission to adopt a more flexible approach to the acceptance of voluntary work as a contribution matching Community funding in joint-funded projects;
9. Calls on the Commission to promote opportunities for older volunteers and to develop a Seniors in Action Programme for the increasing number of very experienced senior citizens who are willing to volunteer that might run in parallel with and complement the abovementioned Youth in Action Programme and furthermore to promote specific programmes for intergenerational volunteering and for mentoring;
10. Encourages Member States to promote and to facilitate volunteering within all communities, both real and virtual, such as family volunteering or volunteering in marginalised groups or groups that might not traditionally volunteer and to stress the great importance of organising voluntary work so as to ensure that it is compatible with family and professional life;
11. Encourages companies and other private-sector operators, as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy, to financially support initiatives promoting and enhancing volunteering and urges Member States, in the context of corporate volunteering, to provide incentives for the private sector to fund and support the voluntary sector, thus helping to ensure the transfer of corporate skills and know-how from the private to the public sector and also improving quality of life at local level by encouraging self help in the resolution of local problems;
12. Calls on the Commission to increase the recognition of volunteering as an appropriate activity through which to acquire competences and skills through YOUTHPASS with a linkage to EUROPASS, while ensuring that volunteering is not seen as an alternative to formal training but a complement to it; furthermore calls for national and local measures to increase the mobility of volunteers;
13. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to investigate the delay in the adoption of the proposed European Charter on Volunteering which should define the role of voluntary organisations and lay down their rights and responsibilities; recommends annual peer-reviews to assess voluntary work undertaken by Member States and within specific sectors and organisations;
14. Recommends that the Commission and the Member States establish a European database providing basic data on volunteer organisations as well as details of best practises, something which would provide helpful guidelines for improving volunteering systems;
15. Calls on the relevant authorities to ensure that volunteers are adequately covered by accident insurance and personal liability insurance in respect of their voluntary activities and that any agreed outlay by volunteers in respect of their voluntary activities is also covered;
16. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and regional and local authorities to promote volunteering through education at all levels, creating opportunities for voluntary activity at an early stage in the education system so that it is seen as normal contribution to community life and to continue to promote such activity as students grow older, to facilitate "services learning" where students work with voluntary or community groups in partnership as part of their diploma or degree course, to encourage links between the voluntary sector and the education sector at all levels and to promote

volunteering and recognise learning in volunteering as part of life long learning;

17. Calls on the Commission, in view of the review scheduled for 2010 of the VAT provisions relating to public bodies and social exemptions, to consider together with the Member States the strong social arguments for introducing VAT exemptions for voluntary organisations registered in the Member States on purchases intended for the accomplishment of their objectives, and also to consider the arguments for exemption, in specific cases, from payment of VAT on goods and services that are donated to voluntary organisations;

18. Calls on Member States, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, to establish a sustainable volunteering infrastructure to deal with issues such as core funding for voluntary organisations;

19. Recommends that 2011 be declared the European Year of Volunteering;

20. Recognises the diversity of volunteering in the Member States but nevertheless encourages Member States and regional and local authorities, whenever possible, to learn from one another through the exchange of best practices;

21. Calls on the Commission to introduce support schemes to set up more efficient systems of cooperation and networking between voluntary organisations and to strengthen international volunteer exchange schemes which could in certain cases contribute to achieving Millennium Development Goals; particularly calls for the establishment of programmes to assist in restimulating voluntary activities in Member States where voluntary activity has come to be associated with actions of a compulsory nature;

22. Recommends the promotion of cross-border voluntary projects;

23. Calls on the Commission to be sympathetic to the situation of volunteers in all areas of policy and legislation;

24. Calls on relevant local and regional stakeholders, voluntary organisations and the media to provide adequate information to citizens about opportunities to volunteer, accompanied by suitable training, with special emphasis on vulnerable and marginalised groups within society and the needs of remote and inaccessible regions;

25. Urges the Commission, alongside Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, to put in place a Plan V for Valuing, Validating and ensuring the Visibility of Volunteers;

26. Calls on the Commission to review its visa policy for third-country participants in recognised EU volunteer programmes with a view to introducing a more liberal visa regime in particular as regards volunteers from countries neighbouring the EU;

27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

(1) OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 32.

(2) OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 30.

(3) OJ L 55, 25.2.2006, p 20.

(4) OJ L 291, 21.10.2006, p 11.

(5) OJ C 297, 7.12.2006, p. 6.

(6) OJ L 215, 9.8.2001, p. 30.

(7) OJ C 301 E, 13.12.2007, p. 45.

(8) OJ C 105, 25.4.2008, p. 11.

(9) OJ C 325, 30.12.2006, p 46.

(10) OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 57.

(11) Eurobarometer Report. Social Reality Stocktaking , February 2007.

(12) Johns Hopkins University Report Measuring Civil Society and Volunteering , September, 2007. www.jhu.edu/ccss

(13) Volunteering works , Institute for volunteering research and volunteering, England, September 2007.

(14) See Mandl, I., Oberholzner, T., & Dörflinger, C. European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/18/en/1/ef0718en.pdf>

(15) Vestergaard Poulsen, L. From Deprived Neighbourhood to Sustainable Community English Summary. The Urban II Programme in Aarhus 2002-2007.

(16) See The Health Benefits of Volunteering – A Review of Recent Research (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007)

(17) See Civil Society as a Partner in European Union Structural Funds. European Citizen Action Service, November, 2004.