



FAMILY PLATFORM



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- 8) Institute of International and Social Studies, Tallinn University
- 9) London School of Economics
- 10) Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), Brussels
- 11) Forum Delle Associazioni Familiari, Italy
- 12) MMMEurope (Mouvement Mondial des Mères-Europe), Brussels

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EDITORIAL

This fourth and last volume of the FAMILYPLATFORM Online Journal is dedicated to “volunteering and family”. Not only has the European Commission announced 2011 as being the European Year of Volunteering, but the United Nations has also marked 2011 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the “International Year of Volunteers” in order to find new areas where volunteering can make a difference.

As representatives of mothers across Europe and the world, Mouvement Mondial des Mères (MMM) has operated since 1948 thanks to unpaid volunteers, like thousands of other non-governmental organisations in Europe and across the globe. From a recent survey of mothers launched by MMM across Europe¹, more than half (or 56 per cent) of the 11,000 respondents reported that they volunteer (mainly for non-profit associations, schools and faith-based institutions). There seems to be a strong correlation between the number of children, the age and at a lesser degree the time use of mothers:

- The more children mothers have, the more they volunteer (39% of mothers with one child, 48% with two children, 59% of mothers with three children, 72% of mothers with four children, 77% of mothers with five children).
- The older they are, the more they volunteer (44% for 26-40, 66% for 41-55 and 76% for 56-70).
- Retired (75%) and stay-at-home mothers (69%) are more likely to volunteer. Those least likely are those on maternity or parental leave (41%).

Can we deny how mothers (and fathers) play an important role for their children in modelling the example of helping and volunteering? In a talk given in April 2007, an MMM affiliate in Lebanon recalled how mothers living in refugee centres during the recent armed conflict there dealt with everyday power conflicts to maintain peace and security: *“Mothers model the example of service in the family...Just after the cease-fire, my daughter came with me to the South. Following that event, my daughter said in a TV interview: ‘When I was very small, I observed that even if we lacked nearly everything, we always had enough to share with the neighbours’”*.

The objective of this volume is not only to pay tribute to the nearly 100 million Europeans who volunteer their time and talent to a cause and to families who instil values of volunteering in their children, but also to give voice to six contributors (from different professional backgrounds and different countries) who have accepted the invitation to write an article on this important topic. These authors walk us through different definitions and concepts of volunteering, and shed light on the national differences and public policies (or lack thereof) in the European Union Member States. Two articles are

¹ Report “What Matters to Mothers in Europe” from “Survey of Mothers in Europe 2010” available for download on <http://www.mmmmeurope.org> from 3 May 2011.

dedicated to explaining the origins, aims, programmes, activities and future of the 2011 European Year of Volunteering from two different perspectives, the European Commission and Civil Society. Another author provides a research perspective on how demographic change impacts on volunteer work, and another article focuses on how families educate to take voluntary action in Italy. Finally, we have the pleasure of including an article on volunteering in the US. All these articles demonstrate that families are a main source of voluntary help and assistance, and how volunteering has an impact on the lives of families in Europe. These articles also illuminate the need to strengthen institutional frameworks that support volunteerism, and highlight essential research gaps and questions.

To close with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's message on Dec 5, 2010: *"Let us honour volunteering as an expression of our common humanity and a way to promote mutual respect, solidarity and reciprocity. It is a powerful means of mobilising all segments of society as active partners in building a better world."*

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Anne-Claire de Liedekerke



Anne-Claire de Liedekerke, has been president of MMM Europe for nearly three years. Its mission is to represent the voice of mothers to European institutions and to raise awareness of the importance of mothers' role in the social, cultural, and economic development of our societies. She is an art historian and a mother of three grown-up children. Her family has lived in many different parts of the world, which has given her the opportunity to gain experience as a volunteer, with professional commitments. She also launched the yearly guide "Expats in Brussels", of which she was until recently co-editor.



Joan Stevens

Joan Stevens has been Secretary General of MMM Europe for over four years. She has lived in Europe for 17 years and is the mother of five children and the grandmother of 16 children. Joan is a professional music teacher, and also served as chairman of a Foster Care Citizen Review Board. She has long experience with volunteer organisations and causes.

Julie de Bergeyck



Julie de Bergeyck joined the MMM team to work on FAMILYPLATFORM as Project Manager. She is a mother of three and has a background in communications. She worked in the Internet advertising business in Brussels and in the US where she spent eight years in a leading advertising agency, before working at Microsoft in Brussels. She recently took a three-year break to raise her third child and volunteered for different local organisations.

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VOLUNTEERING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE EU MEMBER STATES

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The coach of the boys' football team in the local sports club, the women visiting patients in the hospital, or the pensioner who explains the history of a city's church to visitors – all have something in common: they are volunteers. We find them everywhere: in London and Lisbon, in Athens and Amsterdam. The European Year of Volunteering for the Promotion of Active Citizenship 2011 brings these volunteers into the limelight. According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, 30 per cent of all Europeans declare that they volunteer in an organisation or are participating actively in an organisation (European Commission, 2010: 171). A closer look at the data classified by country reveals great differences: in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark more than 50 per cent declare that they are engaged in volunteer activities; in contrast, less than 20 per cent of the Portuguese and the Bulgarians identified themselves as volunteers.

But national differences go beyond 'raw numbers' of volunteers: in the European Union, different traditions and different definitions of volunteering can be identified. As a result we find different approaches in national policies on volunteering. Furthermore, this article highlights the relationship between volunteering and families. But before taking a closer look at these aspects, we have to clarify what we mean by "volunteering".

1. Different definitions and understandings of volunteering

This question is easier to ask than to answer. Apart from the English word 'volunteering', other languages use different terms for voluntary activities with different connotations. The Germans speak of *ehrenamtliches Engagement*, this describes for instance volunteering as the chairperson of the local sports club or being a member of the city council. Another common German term is *bürgerschaftliches Engagement* (civic engagement) which highlights the idea of volunteers as active citizens but refers at the same time to all kinds of voluntary activities. In French, two different terms are known: *bénévolat* and *volontariat*. In France, *volontariat* refers to voluntary services; *bénévolat* describes individual voluntary activities for the benefit of the society (and not for family and friends) (GHK, 2010a: 2). In Belgium, both terms are synonymous, but the 2005 law on volunteering uses only the word *volontariat* (GHK, 2010b: 1f.).

Besides the use of the different terms with their special connotations, one must consider the different kinds of activities that can be subsumed under 'volunteering': is donating money volunteering? What about watering the plants of your holidaying neighbour or shopping for your grandmother? Does being a member of an association qualify you as a volunteer? Does volunteering only take place in the framework of an organisation or project

(i.e. formal voluntary activities) or do spontaneous or unorganised voluntary activities (i.e. informal or non-formal voluntary activities) count as well?

Neither academics nor practitioners have one clear-cut answer: a variety of definitions exist, suited to different (national) contexts and purposes. The Study on Volunteering in the European Union (GHK, 2010: 49ff.) provides a good overview of the different definitions used by international organisations and in the different European Member States². A current definition of volunteering can be found in the Decision of the European Council Decision on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship 2011³:

‘(...) the term ‘voluntary activities’ refers to all types of voluntary activity, whether formal, non-formal or informal which are undertaken of a person’s own free will, choice and motivation, and is without concern for financial gain. They benefit the individual volunteer, communities and society as a whole’⁴.

To agree on one concrete definition might not be necessary for every discussion, as the term ‘voluntary activities’ can refer to a broad range of activities. National differences have to be taken into account, however, especially in an international or European context. In Germany and France for example, informal volunteering is not included in the general understanding of volunteering. In contrast, in Austria informal volunteering, for example neighbourly help, is perceived as volunteering. The Swiss additionally include monetary and non-monetary donations in their concept of voluntary activities (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2009). The term volunteering in the Netherlands also refers to political participation and caring for young children and (elderly) relatives (Vogelwiesche/Sporket, 2008: 11).

Special circumstances have to be considered for the post-communist EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe. New voluntary associations had to be founded after democratisation. The citizens of these countries had to develop a new attitude towards volunteering because during Communist rule membership in youth organisations or participation in political festivities or demonstrations was mandatory rather than really voluntary (Zimmer/Priller, 2004; GHK, 2010: 48).

2. How many volunteers are there and what do they do?

The Study on Volunteering in the EU (GHK, 2010) pooled national studies on volunteering to analyse how many people volunteer in the EU. However, due

² The European Commission commissioned this study, which provides a good overview of the situation of volunteering in the European Union. It consists of country reports for every EU member state, a comparative summary of all results, and special reports on volunteering in the field of sport in the European Union. The study is available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news/news1015_en.htm

³ Council of the European Union 2009 (=2010/37/EC): Preamble

⁴ The decision does not make clear why both non-formal or informal voluntary activities are mentioned or what the difference is between these two terms. It is more common to use non-formal and informal voluntary activities as synonyms.

to different methods and definitions of volunteering applied in the national surveys it is not possible to arrive at a precise number. The authors of the study concluded that 92 to 94 million adults in the EU are volunteers. That means that 22-23 per cent of all EU citizens aged over 15 are involved in voluntary work⁵.

According to the Study on Volunteering in the EU, countries with a very high level of volunteering are Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. In contrast, less than 10 per cent of adults volunteer in Bulgaria, Greece and Lithuania (GHK, 2010: 5ff.)⁶. In order to assess these different levels of volunteering it should be taken into account that in some countries, such as Greece, it is more common to dedicate one's free time to helping families or friends rather than to be a formal volunteer within an organisation. But most surveys on volunteering focus on formal volunteering in the framework of an organisation or a project (Angermann/ Sittermann, 2010: 10).

The most common fields European volunteers are engaged in are "sport/recreation/leisure", "culture and arts", "education and research", "social activities/social services", and "health". Again there are national differences, for example in Lithuania over half of the voluntary organisations (55 per cent) are active in the social service and healthcare sector. In Bulgaria, Ireland, Spain and Portugal, social services also account for the majority of volunteers. Sport is the sector with most volunteers in Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Latvia (GHK, 2010: 280ff.). What do volunteers do? The study identified six main fields of activity: "administrative and supporting tasks", "helping or working directly with people", "preparing and supporting voluntary activities", "managerial and coordination tasks", "campaigning and lobbying" and "organisation of events" (GHK 2010: 89).

3. Volunteering by and for families

The activities of many volunteers revolve around families and children. Research on volunteering has rarely paid special attention to families who benefit from the voluntary work of others but at the same time are active as volunteers themselves. A German report published in 2009 looked more closely at volunteering by and for families. The authors analysed different studies and data available for the situation in Germany (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009).

According to their data, 40 per cent of all volunteer work is dedicated to families or children and young people. Most volunteers working with children and families are active in the sports sector. Here, every other volunteer from the sports sector declared that he or she is engaged in working with families and young people. Other sectors in Germany characterised by volunteers working for families are "church/religion" (33.4 per cent of all volunteers in this field), "recreation and leisure" (29 per cent, e.g. accompanying children and

⁵ The discrepancy in relation to the Eurobarometer survey mentioned above can possibly be explained by the fact that the Eurobarometer study question asked about both volunteering and participation in an organisation. It would be desirable to conduct a comprehensive study on volunteering in the EU to finally have exact data on the level of volunteering in the EU.

⁶ For a full overview of the situation in all EU countries, see GHK (2010).

youth travel tours) and “culture and music” (20.8 per cent, e.g. conducting a youth choir) (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009: 100).

Besides benefiting from formal volunteering within organisation, families also benefit from informal volunteering. The extent of this support has not yet been quantified, according to the authors of the study. However, unpaid support by family members, neighbours and friends is a relevant resource for families, especially in terms of child-minding. Data from 2005 suggests that 13 per cent of working mothers and fathers rely on relatives, friends, and neighbours to mind their children. The results of the German Volunteer Survey (2005) demonstrate the extent of family networks: 78 per cent of all households with children aged up to seven can count on the support of relatives, 52 per cent on the support of friends, and 34 per cent on the support of neighbours. (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009: 110).

Naturally, families contribute to these informal networks as well. But besides this informal engagement, they are also volunteers in more formal settings. In fact, figures from Germany show that the level of volunteering among adults living with children is significantly higher than the average level of volunteering, though this does not apply to single parents (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009: 102). The voluntary activities of these parents are to a high degree linked to their own children: three-quarters of all volunteering women state that their volunteering is directly connected to their own children (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009: 103). Their activities revolve around child care facilities, their children’s schools or leisure time activities, such as sports clubs. Parents volunteer as members of the parents’ council, or they organise festivities or contribute their handcraft skills (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009: 118). In Germany, more women than men volunteer in the fields relevant for families and children (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009: 144).

As volunteers, parents can become role models for their children. Though not yet well researched, the few existing sources on this suggest that children imitate their parents’ attitude towards volunteering and eventually become volunteers themselves (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2009: 102).

4. Public policies on volunteering

Different national traditions are reflected in the way public policies on volunteering have developed. Volunteering is an established, though not always prominent field of policy in many countries. Spain and Belgium have, for example, laws that define volunteering; France, Sweden and England, on the other hand, intentionally have no special legal framework for volunteering. Responsibility for volunteering lies not just at the national level but at sub-national level as well, in Germany, Belgium and Spain, where all autonomous regions have their own laws on volunteering. In the United Kingdom, the governments of Wales and Scotland are in charge of volunteering, but there is no policy for the whole of the UK (Angermann/Sittermann, 2010; GHK, 2010:

10). In England, the responsibility for volunteering lies with the Office for Civil Society (part of the British Cabinet Office). England is an interesting example for public policy on volunteering, as the change of government in 2010 led to a change in the policy on volunteering. Whereas the former Labour government focused on the promotion of volunteering by engaging with existing large voluntary organisations, the new coalition government emphasises the promotion of grassroots movements at local level. Their stated aim is to enable communities to initiate their own volunteer groups and projects. Another new programme in England is the National Citizen Service, which will start in summer 2011. This will be a (non-mandatory) voluntary service for 16-year-olds, who will use their summer holidays to develop a social project in their local community and put it into practice (Sittermann, 2011).

Some countries in the European Union have developed special strategies for their policies on volunteering. In Germany for instance, the government adopted a national strategy on volunteering in October 2010, which is the basis for the further development of the national policy on volunteering (Angermann/Sittermann, 2010: 2). In Spain, the Fourth State Plan on Volunteering was to be implemented in 2010. The Spanish state's plans bring together different actors such as policy makers, representatives of voluntary organisations and experts on volunteering who work for the further promotion of volunteering (Sittermann, 2011).

The aim of public policies on volunteering is in general the promotion and facilitation of volunteering. One issue for volunteering policy is to make sure that volunteers have health, accident and liability insurance. Despite national differences on volunteering, one aspect is of relevance to all countries: acknowledgment and recognition of volunteers and their work. One common means of doing this is issuing volunteers with bonus cards which give them certain benefits, such as free access to museums. Additionally, several awards have been created to acknowledge voluntary activities. Examples are the Europe for Citizens Programme Golden Star Awards or the British Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. These awards place volunteers in the limelight, but general acknowledgement of voluntary work should exist beyond these brief moments and beyond the European Year of Volunteering 2011. This cannot be achieved by public policies alone, but requires an effort from everyone: when was the last time you thanked a volunteer - maybe the volunteer who issues the books in your local library or the voluntary firemen and women in your home town?

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VOLUNTEERS IN THE EU SPOTLIGHT: THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING 2011

John MacDonald & Sara Lesina – European Commission

The year 2011 has been designated the European Year of Volunteering (EYV) to highlight the contribution made by volunteers from all walks of life to our economy and society. Volunteering has moved into the limelight in recent years, and the EYV will be an occasion to celebrate the importance of volunteering in creating a more democratic, caring and responsible society. To highlight volunteers' work and to encourage others to join in and address the challenges they face, the 2011 European Year of Volunteering was conceived with four main objectives in mind.

1) To foster an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU. The Year will help bring to light existing legal, administrative or other obstacles to volunteering in the Member States. By fostering an exchange of good practice between the Member States, the Year will help to implement appropriate measures to remove the barriers that are identified.

2) To empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering. The European Year will provide input for further policy development on volunteering issues within Member States, and will initiate a dialogue between the EU Member States and Europe's developing world partners on volunteering issues. The aim is to encourage co-operation, exchange and synergies between volunteer organisations and other sectors, such as the government and corporate sectors, at European, national and regional levels.

3) To reward and recognise volunteering activities. The Year will improve the validation and recognition of skills and competences that can be gained through volunteering.

4) To raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering. The Year will ensure that there is heightened awareness both within Europe and in partner countries of the value of volunteering and its contribution to the economy, society and the individual.

1. Background: Volunteering and EU policies, programmes and activities

There have been a number of political developments in the area of volunteering since 1997, when an intergovernmental conference adopted 'Declaration 38 on Volunteering'⁷. The Declaration, which was attached to the final act of the Treaty of Amsterdam, recognised the importance of the contribution of voluntary activities to developing social solidarity. The

⁷ Declaration 38 on voluntary service activities,
<http://eurlex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/11997D/htm/11997D.html>

Declaration stated that a European dimension of voluntary organisations would be encouraged, with a particular emphasis on the exchange of information and experiences.

Following Declaration 38, other EU-level documents emphasised the role of volunteering and committed to supporting volunteers across Europe. With the 'Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, volunteers, and teachers'⁸, the European Parliament intended to give more opportunities for studying, training and volunteering across Europe by dealing with barriers to mobility. The European Parliament also encouraged Member States to ensure that the specific nature of voluntary activity is taken into account in national legal and administrative measures, to promote recognition of voluntary activities through certificates, and to take measures to ensure that recognised voluntary activities are not treated as formal employment.

Over the last few years, the issue of the *social and economic value* of volunteering became a central focus of EU-level documents. In March 2008, the European Parliament adopted a report on the 'Role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion'⁹ which encouraged Member States and regional and local authorities to recognise the value of volunteering in promoting social and economic cohesion. In this document the European Parliament called on Member States to produce regular satellite accounts¹⁰ as a complement to their usual National Accounts so that the value of Volunteering and Not-for-Profit Institutions (NPIs) could be measured.

In July 2008 the European Parliament adopted a written Declaration calling for a *European Year of Volunteering in 2011*¹¹. The proposal for a Council Decision on the European Year (2011) was subsequently adopted on 3 June 2009¹², with the formal legislative base for the Year adopted by the Council on 27 November 2009¹³. Launching the European Year, the European Commission intended to raise awareness of volunteer engagement in Europe and to enhance volunteer activities.

⁸ Recommendation 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 (2001/613/EC)

⁹ European Parliament resolution of 22 April 2008 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//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2008-0070+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

¹⁰ Satellite accounts provide a framework linked to the central accounts and which enables attention to be focussed on a certain field or aspect of economic and social life in the context of national accounts; common examples are satellite accounts for the environment, or tourism, or unpaid household work.

¹¹ Written Declaration 0030/2008 of 15 July 2008.

¹² Brussels, 3.6.2009 COM(2009) 254 final 2009/0072 (CNS) Proposal for a COUNCIL DECISION on the European Year of Volunteering (2011)
 {SEC(2009)725} http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc828_en.pdf

¹³ Council Decision 2010/37/EC on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011).
<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:017:0043:0049:EN:PDF>

2. Doing better by doing good: the added value of volunteering

Almost 100 million Europeans engage in voluntary activities and through them make a difference to our society. Volunteering plays an important role in sectors as varied and diverse as education, youth, culture, sport, environment, health, social care, consumer protection, humanitarian aid, development policy, research, equal opportunities and external relations. Volunteering matters because volunteers translate fundamental European values on promoting social cohesion, solidarity, and active participation into action every day.

Volunteering contributes to building a European identity that is rooted in these values. Volunteers gain mutual understanding of people; it is indispensable in a wide range of EU policy areas, such as social inclusion, lifelong learning opportunities for all, policies affecting young people, inter-generational dialogue, active ageing, integration of migrants, intercultural dialogue, civil protection, humanitarian aid, sustainable development and environmental protection, human rights, social service delivery, increasing employability, the promotion of an active European citizenship, fighting the "digital gap", and as an expression of corporate social responsibility.

Volunteering is economically important too: the voluntary sector is estimated to contribute up to 5 per cent of GDP to some Member States' economies. So, the European Year of Volunteering should be a celebration of the valuable contribution that these millions of citizens make every day to our economy and society. Volunteering is freely given, but it is not cost free – it needs and deserves targeted support from all stakeholders: volunteering organisations, government at all levels, businesses, and an enabling policy environment and volunteering infrastructure.

3. The volunteering landscape in Europe¹⁴

The European volunteering landscape is extremely varied because of different historical, political and cultural attitudes towards volunteering in each country. The figures below give a more precise idea of the situation of volunteering in the EU.

The total number of EU volunteers is estimated to be around *94 million adults*, which corresponds to 23 per cent of all Europeans over 15 years of age. The statistics do suggest that there are big differences in the level of volunteering between the EU's member countries. Whilst certain EU Member States have longstanding traditions of volunteering and well developed voluntary sectors (such as Ireland, the Netherlands, and the UK), in others the voluntary sector is still emerging or poorly developed (for instance in Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania). National studies on volunteering show that the level of volunteering is: very high in Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, with over 40 per cent of adults in these countries involved in carrying out

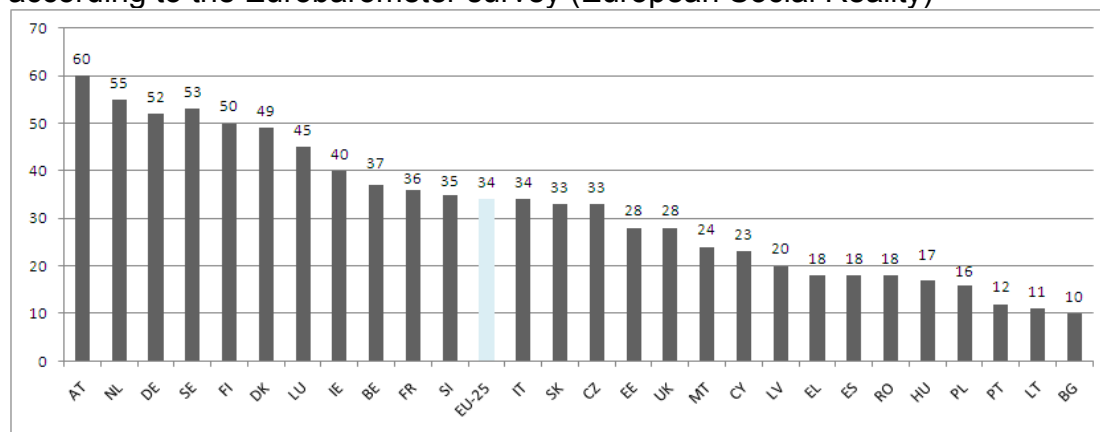
¹⁴ Source: European Commission-DG EAC, 2010. *Volunteering in the European Union*. Final report. London: GHK

voluntary activities; high in Denmark, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg where 30-39 per cent of adults are involved in volunteering; medium-high in Estonia, France and Latvia, where 20-29 per cent of adults are engaged in voluntary activities; relatively low in Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia and Spain, where 10-19 per cent of adults carry out voluntary activities; and low in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Lithuania, where the statistics suggest that less than 10 per cent of adults are involved in voluntary activities.

However, any such apparent differences need to be treated with caution, because there is a lack of internationally comparable data on volunteering. Each country has a different definition of volunteering, and different ways to measure it, so it is extremely difficult to make international comparisons. That said, over the past ten years, there has been a perceptible increase in the number of active volunteers and voluntary organisations in the EU.

Survey data from the EU-wide Eurobarometer survey (see Figure 1 below) carried out in 2006 suggests that the percentage of citizens who declare that they actively participate in - or do voluntary work for - an organisation varied from 60 per cent in Austria (the highest level of participation) to 10 per cent in Bulgaria (the lowest) in 2006. Overall, it would appear that the countries with highest percentages of volunteers are western European countries (and Slovenia) with well developed and established voluntary sectors.

Figure 1: Extent of active participation or voluntary work in the EU (%), 2006, according to the Eurobarometer survey (European Social Reality)



Source: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf and GHK Consulting on the basis of Eurobarometer survey data (2009).

Moreover, in many countries a *gender dimension* is more apparent in specific sectors (e.g. sport, health, social and rescue services) and voluntary roles (e.g. managerial and operational roles) than in overall participation rates in volunteering. In general, most countries tend to have either more male than female volunteers (eleven countries) or an equal level of engagement (nine countries); this slight dominance of male volunteers overall can be explained by the fact the sports sector attracts the highest number of volunteers, and more men than women tend to volunteer in sport. For example, in Denmark there are important statistical variations between the participation of men and women in different areas of the voluntary sector. Men are considerably more

involved in sports clubs and local community activities compared to women. At the same time women are significantly more involved in health and social service-related work than men.

Voluntary activities take place in many *different sectors*. According to the 2010 Eurobarometer survey, in over half of the EU countries most volunteers are active in the field of sports, exercise and outdoor activities (34%). Volunteers in sport represent an important share of total volunteers in Denmark (31.5%), France (25%) and Malta (84%). Other popular areas are social welfare and health (8%), charity and religious organisations (17%), cultural organisations, recreation and leisure, educational organisations, training and research (22%).

As for the landscape of *voluntary organisations*, there have been big increases in the number of voluntary organisations over the past decade: some countries have seen a two- or even fourfold increase in the number of registered voluntary organisations in the last decade, with individual annual increases reaching 15 per cent in some cases. These include countries where organised volunteering is an established tradition (like France and Germany), as well as countries where formal volunteering is a more recent phenomenon (such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Italy, Romania). However, it is important to remember that the level of detail on the number and sector of voluntary organisations depends on whether the country has a registry of voluntary organisations and whether such organisations are either encouraged or obliged to register. Even in countries which have such registries, it is difficult to provide accurate data on the number of active voluntary organisations, because in many cases the registries include both active and inactive organisations.

4. What goes wrong: obstacles and challenges in volunteering

Volunteering mirrors the diversity of European society: young and old, women and men, employees and unemployed, different ethnic groups and beliefs – all are involved in volunteering. However, seven in ten people do not volunteer, and in many cases this is because of real or perceived barriers to volunteering. These barriers take many different forms, such as a lack of information on how to become involved, time pressure, scarce economic resources, and the feeling of not being able to "afford" to volunteer. In some of the former communist countries, there is even a negative image of volunteering stemming from times when volunteering was compulsorily imposed. The challenges for volunteering vary from country to country depending on the national context. However, a number of common challenges across Europe can be highlighted.

There is a *lack of homogeneous data* on - and monitoring of - voluntary activities in EU Member States. As mentioned earlier, internationally comparable information and data relating to volunteering is rare and often unstructured and non-standardised, even at a national level. This clearly represents a major challenge in terms of accurately understanding volunteering within countries, in particular the impact of governmental support

on volunteering in different European countries. This happens because of the absence of internationally comparable statistics and agreed methods of measurement, which could result in an unfair distribution of EU funds if different organisations in different countries measure voluntary contributions in different ways.

It is rare for there to be a *national volunteering strategy*: in total only five Member States have national strategies in place for volunteering – Austria, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Spain. In countries that do not have a national strategy, the policy aims and objectives for volunteering are implicit within a wide range of broad policy discourses.

In many countries, there is a *lack of a dedicated legal framework for volunteering* to cover the rights and obligations of volunteers, such as the social insurance coverage of volunteers, and their training, entitlement to holidays, accommodation or ‘pocket money’. Due to the many laws and regulations that non-profit organisations may have to follow, many NGOs are not aware of certain advantageous provisions. A clearer legal framework would clarify the position of paid and voluntary staff in voluntary organisations.

Moreover, there is an increase in the *professionalisation* of the volunteering sector, which is causing a growing mismatch between the needs of volunteering organisations and the aspirations of volunteers. Younger volunteers, for example, are less willing to commit to longer-term volunteering periods, even though this is increasingly requested by many volunteering organisations. The increasingly professional nature of personnel employed in the not-for-profit sector is also a challenge that voluntary organisations have to address: volunteers find themselves working side-by-side with newly employed paid professionals, recruited on the basis of specific skills.

Coupled with this is the problem of a *lack of recognition of skills and competences* gained through volunteering activities. Several European reports, such as the European Volunteer Centre’s *Manifesto for Volunteering in Europe*¹⁵, have highlighted the lack of national systems promoting recognition in volunteering. Not enough research on the value of volunteering has been collected, and there is therefore insufficient recognition of its importance and insufficient ‘evidence’ on which to base or defend policy. In addition, there is little pan-European use of validation mechanisms for the skills and competences acquired through volunteering. Such mechanisms as do exist tend to be specific to one organisation (e.g. Red Cross) or programme (e.g. the European Voluntary Service), but there are increasing calls for more general validation or recognition mechanisms (such as a ‘volunteer skills passport’).

Sustainable funding is an increasingly pressing problem for volunteering organisations: there has been a big increase in volunteering organisations in recent years, and there is more competition amongst them for a shrinking pot of funds. The current austerity measures adopted by many governments have

¹⁵ See http://www.cev.be/64-cev_manifesto_for_volunteering_in_europe-en.html.

led to significant cutbacks in funding for volunteering NGOs. In addition, over the last few years there has also been a change in the way the public sector disburses public funds – away from grants and subsidies, and towards contracts awarded through public calls for tenders and a competitive bidding process. NGOs report greater difficulties in accessing funding through the latter channel.

5. “Volunteer – Make a difference!” – Touring Europe with a clear message: the EU would not be the same without volunteers

In dedicating the European Year 2011 to volunteering, the European Union is acknowledging the importance of volunteering in creating a more democratic, caring and responsible society. The European Year will raise awareness of the contributions of, and the challenges faced by millions of volunteers across the EU, whose efforts help to create a more democratic, caring and responsible society.

A good way to bring the European Year closer to the general public is through the interactive EYV 2011 'Tour'. The Tour will travel throughout 2011 to visit every Member State's capital city for a period of up to 14 days. It will provide volunteers and volunteering organisations with an opportunity to showcase their achievements, meet one another and discuss key issues for the future of volunteers.

Citizens and volunteers will also be able to find out about aspects of volunteering in other Member States and learn about the European dimension of volunteering. The Tour will provide a platform for understanding the world of volunteering and also add visibility to communication initiatives taken at the national, regional and local levels, attracting the media and public attention to the campaign.

The European Tour of Volunteering 2011 will feature an 'EU Corner', highlighting the European dimensions of volunteering, stories showcasing the experiences of volunteers, debates with policy makers, volunteers and citizens, meetings with volunteers, entertainment with family activities and intergenerational dialogue. The route started on 3 December 2010 in Brussels and will travel through all 27 EU Member States during 2011.

a. The EYV Relay

The EYV Tour will be accompanied by the EYV 'Relay'. The EYV Relay team is composed of 27 volunteer reporters, whose task is to report on the extraordinary stories of volunteers across the EU. The Relay Reporters, each coming from a different EU country, will depart from their home country to report for two weeks on the volunteers in another EU country. They will capture their experiences in film, sound and written articles.

b. The EYV EU-level thematic conferences

In order to push forward policy debate on volunteering issues at the EU level, the European Commission will organise a series of EU-level thematic conferences during 2011. Four conferences have been planned, each of them focusing on a different theme and target group, such as policy makers, volunteering organisations and the volunteers themselves. The conferences will promote a rich exchange and debate on important issues in volunteering between policy makers, businesses and volunteers, while attracting media interest. The first conference took place in Budapest on 8 January 2011, with the topic *"Recognising the contribution of volunteering to economy, society and the individual – where are we now, and where do we want to go?"*.

Information about the Tour, the Relay and the EYV campaign in general will be provided on the official EYV 2011 website: <http://www.europa.eu/volunteering>. Materials about every step of the campaign will be uploaded. It will contain various sections giving information about the campaign and regular updates of its progress in the course of the year.

6. The year after: what is going to be the legacy of the EYV?

The European Year of Volunteering 2011 is meant to help volunteering organisations and the volunteers themselves. The European Year will provide a much-needed impulse to set in motion the necessary changes, mainly at national level, that will make it easier for volunteering organisations and volunteers to do their work, and to do it better than ever before. Through a number of flagship initiatives, concrete measures will be taken to ensure people are better skilled and better prepared to face the challenges of the new economy. Therefore, the European Year of is not a 'one-off' year: it is the start of a process that will go well beyond 2011.

During the Year, and in the years thereafter, awareness will be raised about where change needs to occur, and these changes will be different in each country. The Year is a platform for broadening and deepening both the outreach and the quality of volunteering. The European Commission is working to ensure that volunteers all over Europe have been enabled - and continue to be so - to meet and learn what is done best in each European country. The awareness campaign of the EYV 2011 will help civil society and governments face these challenges, and start the work for necessary, beneficial change. Countries will examine where it may be necessary to revise laws or enact separate legislation in order to promote volunteering, protect volunteers and remove superfluous legal impediments.

John Macdonald



After brief periods working in the (then) Scottish Office in Edinburgh and in the Cabinet of Sir Leon Brittan QC, Vice-President of the European Commission, John was recruited as an official by the European Commission in 1995. Here he worked in the Directorates-General for Trade, Economic & Financial Affairs, and Education & Culture. More recently, John was the Spokesperson for Education, Training, Culture & Youth with the Slovak Commissioner, Ján Figel'. John began his newest task, as Head of the European Commission's Task Force for the European Year of Volunteering 2011, in February 2010.

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DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON VOLUNTARY WORK

Christiane Dienel – Nexus Institute for Cooperation Management and Interdisciplinary Research

Demographic change is often discussed and presented as though it threatens social cohesion and the stability of the welfare state. How will the present level of welfare be maintained, when fewer children are born to be future contributors to welfare security systems and when longevity gives more years to nearly everybody? Under such circumstances, volunteer activity seems to offer an escape. Why couldn't all these active and healthy senior citizens help care for older members of society, often struggling with dementia? Couldn't civil society thrive, not in spite of, but because of demographic change?

The following article will give some background to this assumption and is mostly based on German data and a study done for the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Dienel, 2010)¹⁶.

European societies are ageing quickly. We will be “fewer, older and more colourful”, but there is no consensus on whether this change will lead to a better society or to more problems. No doubt, dealing with demographic change is an enormous task, because it means providing service for the large number of “baby-boomers” born in the 1950s and 1960s who will retire from 2015 onwards. The base of contributors paying their pensions is narrowing. These processes, however, are developing rather slowly and leave us time to adapt. Regions in former socialist countries will face dramatic changes, though, because the significant fall in the birth rate there since 1989. But already the constant ageing of society diminishes the potential for volunteering, because the generation aged over 60 is less willing or able to participate than the younger members of the population. The graph shows the willingness for voluntary work (light blue) and the rate of actual engagement (dark blue) for the age groups 14-24, 25-59 and 60+ years in Germany.

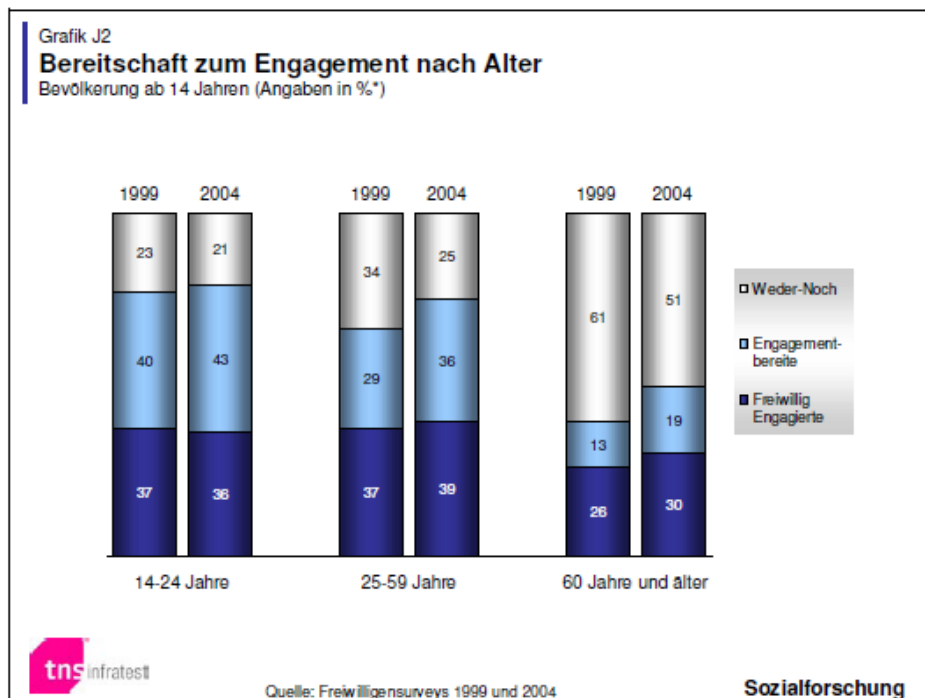
1. Young people and volunteer activity

The participation of young people in voluntary activity seems essential in an ageing society. It is considered useful and instructive, it prevents violence and xenophobia, and develops social skills. This kind of utilitarian argument is not very suitable for convincing young people to invest their time if they don't have fun while doing so. For young people, the key to motivation is not usefulness but the possibility of being independent, of developing their own ways of doing things, and of having an impact on society. Self-determination of young people will not fit very easily into schemes made for them by those concerned about the future of the welfare state. Young people's civil engagement is often irritating and shocking, and seems destructive or disrespectful. It will not just

¹⁶ See <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/kug/07290.pdf>.

fill the gaps left by the welfare state. More than two-thirds of German youth agree with the statement “I believe that politicians don’t take young people seriously” and this feeling will be reinforced if they are only offered pseudo-participation arenas like youth parliaments without a budget.

Figure 1: Voluntary work by age group



Source: Gensicke / Picot / Geiss (2005: 213).

Still, many young people are very active in different forms of voluntary activity or civil associations. Sport is number one, followed by church and social activities. However, fewer young people are able to participate in time-consuming activities that require their presence once a week or more. Educational demands and preparation for professional careers often exert enormous stress, and simply don’t leave enough spare time to invest in regular volunteer activity. Voluntary engagement is strongly correlated with level of education. But those young people who are successful in secondary education and who might be the group most interested in volunteering are also those who share the performance goals of their teachers and parents and will sacrifice other activities, if necessary, to achieve better grades.

In conclusion, it is no longer sufficient to develop attractive forms of volunteering for the participation of young people today. It is also indispensable to balance these offers with school schedules, work market pressure and biographical stresses. Demographic change not only means that there will be fewer children and young people to participate in voluntary activities, but also that those who are there have to face aspirations of parents and society and have less spare time than their mothers and fathers had. A solution would be to integrate voluntary activities into the school syllabus, to give certificates for certain types of engagement and, above all, to leave some free time and space to the younger generation.

2. The middle generation and voluntary work

People aged 30-59 carry not only the largest part of responsibility in politics and business, but are also the most active age group in terms of voluntary activity. Demographic change will have an impact here. First because the status of “full” adulthood is achieved significantly later than in former times. Young people often stay with their parents well into their twenties, or at least remain financially dependent on them. Subsequently, stable partnership, marriage and starting a family will occur later in their biography than before. Up to the age of 30 or 35, people remain in a sort of intermediate phase of their lives, a prolonged youth.

Volunteer activity, though, needs reliable and long-term commitment. Most often, people will only be able to make such a commitment when they have established themselves professionally and started a family. Therefore, the growth of so-called “atypical” employment (short-time employment, part-time employment, internships, freelance work) directly reduces the potential for voluntary work, because it hinders long-term relations, both in family and in civil society. This leads to the hypothesis that project- or subject-related short-term forms of civil engagement may become more popular than traditional long-term commitments.

Secondly, demographic change means that more and more people, if they ever become parents, will do so later in their lives. This reduces the potential for volunteer activity in our society. It has often been shown in empirical research that the birth of children triggers community activities and is perhaps the strongest stimulus for volunteer work. With the birth of a child, the feeling of personal responsibility for the future of society grows, and also the will to shape this future. The following graph shows that childless people are clearly less active as volunteers than people who have responsibility for a family. *[Translation: couples with pre-school and school age children up to 14 years of age; couples with school age children up to 14 years of age; 3-generation families; couples with children over 15; couples with pre-school children; couples without children, aged 50 and over; all those interviewed; single persons under 50, couples under 50 without children].*

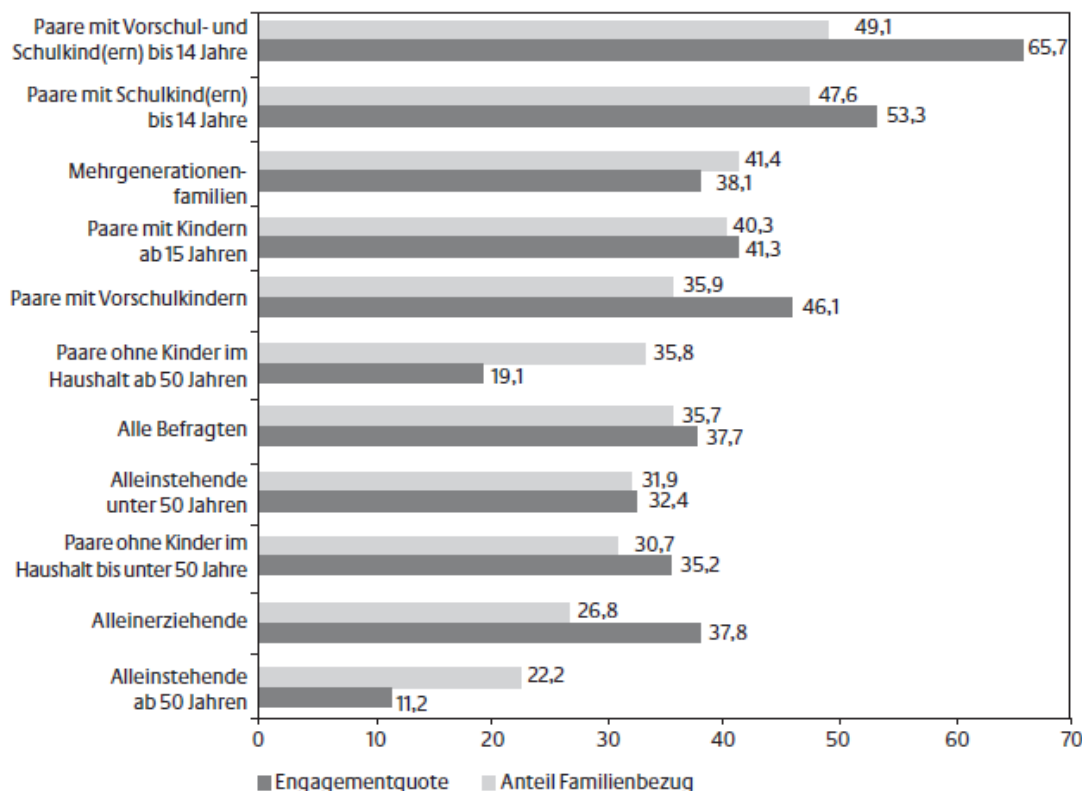
For women, the combination of professional, family and voluntary work forms a considerable challenge and is one of the reasons why they abstain from very time-consuming voluntary responsibilities like local politics.

Probably about 20-25 per cent of women and even more men living in Germany today will remain childless all their lives. Most of them live in cities. Childlessness means that nearly one-third of the adult generation will not automatically have intergenerational relations and links fostering solidarity with young people. This will have different consequences for voluntary work: participation in childcare and school contexts is not relevant for these people, but they might have more time for voluntary work in the evenings and at weekends for trade unions, political parties, and citizens' associations. Furthermore, civil engagement may be an important means of bridging

periods of unemployment, and to gain additional qualifications which may lead to a new job.

Figure 2: Voluntary activity by different social groupings/life situations

Abbildung 3.3-2: Engagement in verschiedenen Lebensformen, in %



Source: Bericht zur Lage und zu den Perspektiven des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements 2009, S.100.

To conclude, growth of childlessness and late transition to parenthood do not automatically lead to more free time for voluntary work. In all probability, these trends will postpone the biographical phase of intense civil involvement to a later stage in life, thus shortening it. Therefore, to foster civil engagement for adults, it is also necessary to study the labour market and to provide well-paid, stable jobs. This stability is necessary for high levels of volunteer work, whereas unemployment diminishes participation rates. For women, good childcare is also a prerequisite for voluntarism, because otherwise there will just be no time and energy left for activity other than job and family.

3. The older generation and voluntary work

The over-sixties are the only age group that is growing at present, and will soon make up for over 50 per cent of the population. At the same time, the number of healthy and active years of life is increasing. In the near future, a large proportion of people aged 60-85 will no longer be involved in professional activities, but will still be highly productive and powerful. In addition, they will have fewer grandchildren to care for.

Many of those currently aged between 50 and 65 had a new type of participation experience around the reform years of 1968; they are better-off than the cohorts before and after them. The women among them have had the opportunity to emancipate themselves from older role models: they have a driving licence, professional qualifications and varied conceptions of a woman's life. Most of all, the new seniors, "digital immigrants" that they are, have access to the new network and interaction tools of the Internet.

We are currently witnessing the emergence of new cultural models for this stage of life. Care for family members, whether the elderly or grandchildren, may still seem dominant in older women's lives, but the outlines of a new picture of old age are already being seen: more leisure-oriented, focused on personal wellbeing, friends, travel, culture and sports. But in times of demographic change, it is a central task of society to develop a third concept, centred on voluntary work in structures outside of family, friendship and neighbourhood. Given that the potential for voluntarism in the younger and the middle age group is actually decreasing, it will be important to activate the potential of voluntary engagement in the third generation. But this will not be an automatic process: the differences between rich and poor, well educated and less well educated seniors are increasing. Voluntary work cannot be seen as an obligation for the elderly, but must remain a free choice alongside other life decisions. The increase in healthy, active years does not automatically mean that seniors in large numbers will stream towards voluntary work agencies.

What we need is rather a different approach. Work is still the main mechanism for integrating people into society. A truly inclusive society cannot tolerate people being excluded from this main integration mechanism just because of their age of retirement. There is an urgent need for other powerful integration mechanisms. Family can be one of these, but is not for everybody. Voluntary work, on the other hand, could be a major way of integrating the elderly (and other excluded groups). It creates participation and gives meaning to life. But this will only happen if we see volunteer work not as a panacea for a shaky welfare state, but as a pillar of social cohesion, as important as public activity and private business.

Christiane Dienel



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FAMILY AND EDUCATION TOWARDS VOLUNTARY ACTION

Francesco Belletti & Lorenza Rebuzzini – Forum delle Associazioni Familiari

Does the family educate people to develop a pro-social attitude, on which voluntary action is based? In what ways does the family pass on this attitude? What are the factors that thwart this educational dynamic? In 2008 CISF (Centro Internazionale Studi Famiglia/International Centre of Studies on Family) and CSV (Centro Servizi Volontariato/Center for Promoting Volunteering) of Bari, Italy, conducted research on Family and Volunteering, in an attempt to shed light on the connection between family and education for volunteer activity (in Italian, *La famiglia nell'educazione al volontariato/Family and Education for Voluntary Action*).

The research was conducted at local level in the Bari District, in southern Italy. Bari (including the Barletta-Andria-Trani District) is the fifth most populated district in Italy, with almost 1,650,000 inhabitants. According to a previous analysis conducted by CSV Bari, there are over 600 voluntary associations in this district: in most cases they are small associations strongly linked to the territory, that is, the municipality, social services or the local church.

One of the most interesting aspects of this research is the local approach. The family, as well as the voluntary action itself, seem to be strongly determined by the social and economic circumstances of the place in which they are situated. This holds true especially in Italy – a very complex and differentiated country. Living in a wealthy and well organised context seems to lead to different opportunities, as opposed to living in a disaggregated or poor territory. The awareness of the importance of the environment clearly emerges in the research. The second interesting aspect of this research consists in giving voice to those who are volunteering and/or are constantly in touch with families and volunteers: social workers, educators, teachers, members of associations and members of the local government and church. Forty-seven people, aged 30-50, were interviewed or took part in focus groups with a semi-structured interview between February and June 2008. This research is accordingly focused on and enhances the experience-based approach.

1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in which the research was conducted is based on the most recent socio-economic literature on wellbeing. Wellbeing is defined as a condition determined by a complex interrelationship between different factors – to cite the most important ones: wealth, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and individual freedom. In this context, the concept of social capital is of strategic importance. While we acknowledge the vast debate on the definition of social capital developed in different disciplines such as

economics, political science and sociology, in research a “simple” and “common” definition has been used: social capital. Social capital is the social relationships and social networks that are not based on economic or political interest, but that have value for the development of society and economy, and affect the productivity of individuals and groups (Putnam, 2000). Family and volunteering action are environments producing relationships and networks not based on economic or political interests: for this reason, they need to be both recognised as “producers of social capital” and, therefore, as producers of social wellbeing. How can society achieve this?

Family and voluntary action share one fundamental aspect required to build social capital: relationships, in the family as well as in the voluntary action, are not based on the economic model of negotiation but offer an alternative model that can be defined as a ‘trustee model’. While the negotiation model is based on maximizing benefit and personal profit, and interaction between individuals is aimed at coming to an agreement, the symbolic codes regulating both family and voluntary actions can be outlined as follows:

- **Gift:** the giving of gifts indicates an interest in the recipient of the gift, and often demonstrates expectation of feedback. At the same time it gives freedom of choice about whether to give feedback or not. The freedom to accept or refuse is instilled in both voluntary action and in family relationships.
- **Reciprocity:** reciprocal actions or relations and mutual exchanges are fundamental social norms and generate innovative human relations. Reciprocity connects past actions with the present, and the present to the future, in its dynamic of receiving and giving back.
- **Trust:** a relationship based on sharing and on satisfied expectations embodies its own reasonableness, even though it may not be perfectly rational. In other words, trust is a reasonable, but not rational, form of behaviour. Nonetheless, economic and social systems are based primarily on trust.

In this framework, families’ responsibility to society is not described as a moral obligation and as something added to family from the outside, but as the natural inner dynamic of family life. Family does pro-social action in just “doing family”, that is the point. This approach does not seek to be non-judgmental: of course there are families unable to take on this kind of responsibility towards children and society. Nonetheless this dynamic of family life has to be kept in mind when the issue of the relationship between family and society, as well as family and voluntary action is approached.

2. Research in the Bari District

Research in the Bari District highlights a multi-faceted situation. The interviewees claim that their family of origin is a place of positive relationships, where they have learnt and experienced solidarity, care, help and attention to others. They say that they try to build the same positive relationships in their current families, but they find it difficult to do so. As a matter of fact, the Bari District, as a territory, has many problems: unemployment, low salaries, lack

of public services (in 2008, the average income in Italy was 18,870 Euros, while in the Bari District, it was 14,830 Euros). Therefore, in the research, family is considered at two different levels:

- *pro-social families*, the families that enhance and promote volunteering (subject of volunteering);
- *vulnerable families*, the families that need to be helped (object of volunteering).

3. Difficulties

An in-depth analysis has been conducted on the stress factors thwarting the transmission of pro-social behaviours in today's families in the Bari District – even if it seems that the analysis can be applied to the whole Italian territory, as well as to other countries. Interviewees detected three main points of vulnerability:

- **Social isolation.** Social relations are less frequent and strong, and families are left alone. Therefore, the relationship of mutual trust between families has faded. Moreover, family members are under stress due to the many tasks they have to accomplish: care for children, work, care for themselves, care for other people in the family. Individualism is permeating not only social relations between families, but also relationships within the family.
- **Hedonistic and materialistic values** that are at the forefront of our society push people into constantly looking to “have more”, in competition with each other. People need to work to earn more and more, thus having no time left for others. Media, and especially TV, is seen as the big megaphone through which these values are instilled in people.
- **Adults' vulnerability.** Today's adult generation is seen as being very vulnerable, particularly with regard to the ability to build meaningful relationships and educate and define rules for children.

4. Volunteering attitudes: an analysis

Interviewees agree that they have learned their attitude to voluntary action in their families of origin, even though debate is open on the ways in which this attitude is transmitted. Nonetheless, they underlined some factors that help families to be pro-social and to instil attitudes leading to voluntary action:

- **Stable relationships.** Interviewees agree that stable relationships are the basis of pro-social action: a stable relationship means openness to others' needs, capacity for dialogue, respect, commitment, support (all these terms have been extracted from the interviews).
- **Dialogue and Rules.** According to interviewees, dialogue is essential “in transmitting rules and values and instilling trust in your children, in your relatives, in persons near you. With dialogue, rules can be set and values can be transmitted peacefully”, says a woman involved in volunteering.

- **Lifestyles based on different values.** The pro-social family lives and promotes values based on solidarity; these values are promoted through an “alternative” lifestyle that rejects consumerism.
- **Economic security.** Many interviewees stress that economic security, which means a stable job with a decent salary, is necessary. They claim that only when people have developed a good level of self-confidence can they commit to helping others.
- **Stable policies.** One of the most interesting outcomes of the research is that it shows the need for stable political support for volunteering projects. Often a good project is not undertaken, due to political choices and the way funds are allocated: this leads, of course, to the loss of potentially beneficial outcomes.

5. Conclusions

The research carried out in the Bari District has not produced definite conclusions, but opens up new research questions. In other words, we cannot measure “how much” voluntary action a family can generate, but we can conclude that it is necessary to work on the interrelation and the synergy between family and volunteering. Enforcing the alliance between pro-social families and pro-social action can become a realistic approach to social innovation in the Third and Fourth Sectors¹⁷.

Family associations, which have a self-help and pro-social approach, are a reality that can be reinforced and can help in enhancing pro-social action and in transmitting pro-social values, but further investigation is needed. This can be achieved if the logic of empowerment is applied both to pro-social families and vulnerable families: vulnerable families need not be defined by their needs and their lack of capabilities, but rather by their capacity to “start over again”. At the same time, pro-social families need to be supported: many families still feel alone in a society that nowadays seems governed by consumerist and hedonistic values, and they feel challenged in their ability to be real drivers of change.

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¹⁷ “Third Sector” refers to structured volunteering organizations, while “Fourth Sector” refers to the more informal networks of families and family associations, neighbourhood and hep/self-help groups, even though there is still some debate on the definition of the relatively recent Fourth Sector (see a completely different definition on www.fourthsector.net).

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TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN POLICY AGENDA ON VOLUNTEERING: TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES

Edited by Gabriella Civico – Project Manager EYV 2011 Alliance

The European Year of Volunteering (EYV) 2011 Alliance is an informal, open and growing group of 35 European networks active in volunteering. The EYV 2011 Alliance was formed in December 2007 with the purpose of starting a common campaign towards establishing the European Year of Volunteering in 2011. Three years later at the start of EYV 2011 this accomplishment stands as a shining example of what can be achieved when Civil Society works together.

Thanks to the financial support offered by the European Commission in the form of a project grant in the Citizenship Programme, and additional co-funding offered by Robert Bosch Stiftung, Fundacion Telefonica and Alliance Steering Group members, the EYV 2011 Alliance has been able to establish a project work programme supported by two full-time staff in its secretariat at the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) in Brussels. As a critical contact point and driving force for the facilitation of the joint effort to lobby for the Year, it was agreed by EYV 2011 Alliance members that CEV should be the grant holder for the EYV 2011 Alliance Project and also therefore host the Secretariat.

Following the White Paper on Youth, the Member States in 2002 recognised volunteering as a key element of youth policy, and a lot of research, exchanges of experiences and discussions have taken place since then. This work has shown its impact over the years and should be enlarged to all age ranges, since only then can policies which take into account all aspects of all generations of families become a real possibility. Whereas various EU activities, programmes and policies tackle volunteering at a European level, these initiatives have so far not taken into account the variety of volunteering in Europe and its horizontal nature. Actions in the field of volunteering at the EU level are restricted to certain age groups and policy areas, and neglect the horizontal nature of volunteering and the relevance of volunteering in solving a variety of political, social and economic challenges that the EU faces today:

- Volunteers are an example of **active civic participation**. They engage in their communities, without financial motivation, for the benefit of other individuals and society as a whole. Volunteering, as an expression of Active European Citizenship, was recognised by the European institutions in a number of areas, especially through the Europe for Citizens' Programme¹⁸.

¹⁸ See https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Europe_for_Citizens.

- Volunteers **put into practice European values of solidarity and diversity**. They are the expression of the EU slogan 'United in Diversity' as these are people of all ages, women and men, employed and unemployed, people from different ethnic backgrounds and belief groups and, finally, citizens of all nationalities. However, those involved do not necessarily make the link between their engagement and European values. People become involved because they feel that they can make a positive contribution to society and because they benefit themselves. It does not occur to them that all over Europe, people engage in volunteering for the same underlying values and motivations. At a time when the EU lacks a link with its citizens and wants to create more ownership of the European project based on solidarity and mutual understanding, it can no longer afford not to contribute to creating the logical link between voluntary engagement at a local level and implementation of European values.
- The Resolution of the European Parliament [A6-0070/2008]¹⁹ recognises the **contribution that volunteering makes to the economic and social cohesion** of the European Union. The report says that volunteering makes an important contribution to social integration at the local level and that it contributes to partnerships which are key for making full use of the European regional and structural funds.
- Volunteers are the **main agents when it comes to social inclusion**, through their engagement with the socially excluded or those at risk of social exclusion. Volunteering is a tool for the empowerment of all, and especially of those that are socially excluded, because it is a means by which citizens can be and feel useful and re-connect with society. This is highlighted in the Youth Pact²⁰, the White Paper on Youth²¹, and in the Bureau of European Policy Advisers' (BEPA) report "Investing in Youth: From Childhood to Adulthood"²², but it applies equally to all age groups. The World Organization of the Scout Movement²³ and its national organisations have carried out a number of projects across Europe on involving and reaching out to minorities and other disadvantaged children (including children with different religious backgrounds, disabilities, Roma, etc.).
- This applies in particular to the **integration of migrants** into our societies. Integration - as a two-way process of mutual accommodation between migrants and the host society - needs tools and instruments that bring people together and which enable them to work on common projects. The many volunteer initiatives and projects in Europe demonstrate the added value that active participation brings in this

¹⁹ See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2008-0070+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

²⁰ See http://europa.eu/youth/news/index_1794_en.html.

²¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/youth/glossary/word366_en.htm.

²² See http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/publications/docs/Investing_in_Youth_25_April_fin.pdf.

²³ See http://www.scout.org/en/information_events/resource_centre/library/reaching_out.

area. They also demonstrate volunteering as a factor in - and indicator of - the integration of migrants in host communities²⁴. Volunteers are also involved in programmes for the integration of migrants (labour orientation, training, etc.).

- **Social services of general interest** in Europe depend largely on the contribution of volunteers. Actions of voluntary organisations implemented in Member States show that volunteers contribute significantly to the services provided in the **health and social care** sector through visiting services for socially isolated people and day centres for older people, people with Alzheimer's disease and homes for children in need of special care, coaching activities which support and empower people to take charge of their own lives again (for example, so-called friendship courses), organising holidays for people with disabilities and/or chronic disease, assistance to drug users and prisoners, assistance to people living with HIV/Aids (care, hotlines, counselling, information), and assistance to women threatened by domestic and/or gender-related violence.
- Volunteering is a means of encouraging **active ageing**. Volunteers not only provide complementary home care for older people (psycho-social support), and organise recreational and sports activities for seniors, but older people themselves who become volunteers stay healthy and active for longer and have opportunities to share their life experience with younger generations. The recent Flash Eurobarometer 247 survey conducted in September 2008²⁵ shows that 73 per cent of older respondents indicated that they would consider participating in community and volunteer work after retirement. Forty-four per cent of persons also said that they have already planned or plan to get involved in volunteer work. Volunteering offers great potential for the EU when it comes to active ageing and demographic change. This issue was first raised during the conference on Intergenerational Solidarity for Cohesive and Sustainable Societies during the Slovenian Presidency (27-29 April 2008)²⁶ as one of the main topics, and later as one of the main topics of the 2nd European Demography Forum held in Brussels in November 2008²⁷.
- Volunteering plays an important role in **maintaining and restoring family links**. This helps people to find family members they have lost because of wars, conflict and disasters, and supports people who have a missing family member or friend. Volunteers contribute significantly to the enhanced satisfaction of family life and proper work-life balance, as they often engage in areas such as childcare and care of older generations, which are perceived by many Europeans as the main

²⁴ See for example the CEV INVOLVE project, <http://www.involve-europe.eu> (2006).

²⁵ See http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_247_sum_en.pdf.

²⁶ See

http://www.eu2008.si/en/Meetings_Calendar/Dates/April/0427_EPSCO.html?tkSuche=ajax&globalDatum=01.02.&multiDatum=29.05.&veranstaltungsart=&globalPolitikbereich=&visiblePath=/htdocs/fr&.

²⁷ See <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=121>.

difficulties in family life (Flash Eurobarometer 247, 'Difficulties in daily life faced by families').

- Volunteering contributes to **tolerance, peace building, conflict resolution and reconciliation of divided societies**. The CEV project on this topic (VIP/2008²⁸), as well as many other projects and activities of the members of the Alliance, have shown that voluntary activities exercised together by the local inhabitants for the benefit of their communities increase people's tolerance and intercultural skills, reduce racism and prejudice, contribute to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, empower people to be active in the recovery of their communities and connect them with the societies in which they live.
- Voluntary activities are part of **informal and non-formal learning** for people of all ages and at all stages of their lives. Volunteering contributes to personal development and to learning skills and competences, thus **enhancing employability**. Volunteering is accordingly part of the Lisbon strategy towards a more competitive European labour market, providing **life-long learning opportunities** that arise when people volunteer. This was confirmed by the Commission Communication 'Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality'²⁹, Resolution of the Council on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field [2006/C 168/01]³⁰ and a number of the European Youth Forum's reports and projects, etc.
- **The sports** sector involves the largest numbers of volunteers and participants, and this makes it the largest voluntary, non-governmental organisation activity in Europe. Volunteers are the most important and indispensable resource of sports clubs. According to the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO), the "labour force" of sports clubs consists of 86 per cent volunteers and only 14 per cent paid staff. The impact of volunteering in sport on EU policies is manifold, and this was recognised in the White Paper on Sport [COM (2007) 391 final]³¹ and in the Commission Action Plan "Pierre de Coubertin" SEC(2007) 934, Brussels, 11.7.2007³² which calls for promoting volunteering and active citizenship through sport, and recognises that volunteering reinforces active citizenship and provides many opportunities for non-formal education which need to be recognised and enhanced. Sports NGOs and networks such as ENGSO underline that the EU still needs to work on issues such as taxation (maintain a special tax regime for not-for-profit sports organisations, create additional tax incentives for volunteers, i.e. deductibility of tax from donations), education (design European modules to train volunteers), EU funding programmes (make

²⁸ See http://www.cev.be/data/File/VIP_Report_2008.pdf.

²⁹ See <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/MitteilungEng.pdf>.

³⁰ See <http://www.europass-ro.ro/doc/resolution.pdf>.

³¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/doc/wp_on_sport_en.pdf.

³² See http://ec.europa.eu/sport/white-paper/doc/sec934_en.pdf.

programmes more accessible for volunteers), and employment (enhanced recognition of voluntary work in sport), etc.

- Volunteers are the **backbone of Europe's civil protection force**. Red Cross and Johanniter International experiences show that volunteers are indispensable for disaster response and preparation activities, for first aid services, and education, as well as in relief exercises i.e. ambulances, first aid, psycho-social support and emergency responses.
- **Development policies** are practically impossible to implement without the contributions of volunteers. Volunteers engage in humanitarian missions and provide assistance to refugees (which includes humanitarian assistance, reception centres including legal counselling, health services, mental health care, etc.). More than 6,000 volunteers engage every year with United Nations missions alone. Furthermore, Article 188 of the Lisbon Treaty decrees that the EU 'establish a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union' in the shape of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.
- **Corporate (employee) volunteering** schemes are increasingly seen by European companies as a means of connecting to society, investing time and resources in their communities and giving concrete meaning to their CSR policies. Thousands of individuals across Europe are already benefiting from the help and support offered by employee volunteers. The European Parliament Resolution of 13 March 2007 on 'Corporate social responsibility: a new partnership' (2006/2133(INI)) underlines the importance of projects involving employee community engagement and calls on the Commission to fulfil its commitment to developing policies that encourage the staff of EU institutions to undertake voluntary community engagement. In the Communication from the Commission on Implementing the Partnership For Growth and Jobs: Making Europe a Pole of Excellence on Corporate Social Responsibility COM (2006) 136 final³³, the European Commission commits to step up its policy of promoting the voluntary and innovative efforts of companies on corporate social responsibility (CSR). This still seems to be unfulfilled. The business platform ENGAGE, in its publication CSR Laboratories: Bringing the European Alliance on CSR to Life³⁴, demonstrates the effectiveness of employee community engagement in improving the skills essential for employment amongst disadvantaged and socially excluded groups of people within the EU. It urged the European Commission to support and encourage employee volunteering by announcing the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

³³ See <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0136:FIN:en:PDF>.

³⁴ See http://www.pr.org.rs/upload/documents/ENGAGE_per_cent20Skills_per_cent20for_per_cent20Employability_per_cent20Report.pdf.

- **Finally, volunteering is economically important.** The research of the Institute for Volunteering Research, 'Volunteering Works - Volunteering and social policy'³⁵, shows that for every Euro that organisations spend on supporting volunteers, they receive an average return of between three and eight Euros. Moreover, the Comparative Non-Profit Sector project at Johns Hopkins University (USA) revealed that the voluntary sector contributes an estimated 2 to 7 per cent to the GDP of our national economies. In the UK in 2007 volunteering contributed 48 billion pounds sterling to the national economy (according to the Volunteering England's figures). We do not have the necessary data and instruments in place to properly analyse the economic value nor to raise policy-makers' or funders' awareness of the contribution that volunteers make to our economies.

Since 2007 EYV 2011 Alliance members have been working together to lobby for the EYV 2011, working with other stakeholders and policy makers across the EU. The experience of civil society organisations showed that there was a need at all levels - EU, national, regional and local - to increase volunteering and the awareness of the added value it brings to European society, to celebrate volunteering, involve more volunteers, and to improve the policy framework on volunteering including that related to volunteering and families. There is no Europe without volunteers: they contribute both to its growth, and to its social character. EYV 2011 Alliance members thought that EYV 2011 would increase recognition of this and increase the capacity of volunteering organisations to deliver their missions.

The EYV 2011 Alliance Project Work Plan addresses several critical issues, especially those which are to be discussed within the policy dialogue to take place during the Year. These will draw upon the widespread expertise gathered together in the 100 members of the EYV 2011 Alliance Working Groups, many of whom are volunteers themselves.

Working groups have been established on six different themes (Quality of Volunteering, Legal Framework of Volunteering, Volunteering Infrastructure, Recognising Volunteering, the Value of Volunteering & Employee Volunteering). The groups met for the first time on 7 and 8 January 2011 in Budapest. The working group members have been nominated by EYV 2011 Alliance member organisations and will meet at least five times during 2011, including during the Kick-Off Conference (already held in Budapest) and three further Working Group meetings to be held in Brussels in March, May and September 2011. The EYV 2011 Alliance Working Group closing conference in Poland (December 2011) will approve the "EYV 2011 Alliance European Policy Agenda on Volunteering", which will then be presented to policy makers at the general EC EYV 2011 closing conference, to be held in Poland later in December 2011.

³⁵ See <http://www.ivr.org.uk/evidence-bank/evidence-pages/Volunteering+Works+-+Volunteering+and+social+policy>

Working towards the European Policy Agenda on Volunteering the EYV 2011 Alliance will address:

Quality:

- Work towards a common understanding of “quality volunteering”.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the organisers of volunteering in ensuring quality volunteering experiences.
- Identify and disseminate good practice in the field of quality assurance and quality assessment tools used by volunteer organisations.

Legal Framework:

- Map research on the legal status of volunteers in Europe.
- Collect concerns in terms of legal barriers and bottlenecks caused by legal provisions at any level that result in limiting volunteering in Europe.
- Advocate recommendations for improvement of the legal status of volunteers and a clear legal status for volunteers everywhere in Europe.

Volunteering Infrastructure:

- Extract good practice indicators of an enabling volunteering infrastructure at different levels, feeding into a European framework recommendation that allows for the national diversity of volunteering to be respected.
- Identify key legal features for volunteer organisations, so as to provide an enabling infrastructure.

Recognition:

- Map the existing tools for recognition of volunteers - extract good practice examples.
- Map tools of how to recognise the contribution of volunteer organisations.
- Formulate recommendations for better recognition of volunteering in different areas and by different tools.
- Devise a strategy for implementation of the recommendations.

Value:

- Identification of tools and ways to identify, measure and express the value of volunteering.
- Valuing volunteering as an important creator of human and social capital, cohesion and wellbeing, encompassing the provision of services and effective interventions where other policies may fail.
- Valuing the contribution of volunteering in positively shaping the European society.

- Valuing volunteering as an expression of solidarity, a value which is not only in great need in the current economic and social climate, but also one upon which the EU has been built.
- Recognising the contributions of volunteers as match-funding in all European and national project funding.

Employee Volunteering:

- Increase understanding of the concept of Employee Volunteering as a key element of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
- Achieve recognition of Employee Volunteering as a means and key component of putting CSR concept into practice.
- Contribute to making Employee Volunteering accessible for all, in all sectors (private, public and non-profit).

All in all, EYV 2011 will contribute to helping the wider public understand why volunteering is a critical issue across the EU, and this will include how it impacts on families and family life.

Volunteering is freely given, but is certainly not cost-free, and the EYV 2011 Alliance members believe that volunteering and volunteering organisations need and deserve targeted support from all stakeholders – volunteer organisations, government at all levels and businesses. The EYV 2011 Alliance Working groups will spend EYV 2011 working towards this vision of an enabling volunteering environment including a volunteering infrastructure that takes the realities and needs of families across the EU into account. EYV 2011 Alliance members are committed to engaging with the EYV 2011 together with key EU stakeholders, especially the European Commission. They wish to demonstrate and showcase what good policymaker-civil society partnerships can achieve, in particular through presentation of the European Policy Agenda on Volunteering, which will be delivered before the end of 2011.

Gabriella Civico



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VOLUNTEERING AND SERVICE IN THE UNITED STATES

Barb Quaintance – AARP

The United States has a strong tradition of volunteering and service. Of course, families, neighbours and co-workers support one another in times of need. An unprecedented number of Americans, however, also work to help strangers. And today, both kinds of service are stronger than ever.

Many non-profit organisations engage volunteers in service – often to help youth get a good education, assist with economic needs, improve the environment, support health and ageing services, and assist with disaster preparedness/relief. Some of the larger faith-based domestic charities include Catholic Charities USA, Lutheran Social Services, and Volunteers of America. Some of the larger secular volunteer organisations include Red Cross, AARP, Points of Light Institute, HandsOn Network, and United Way.

Even with this strong history, today is a new day for volunteering and service in the United States. More people are volunteering, service is now seen as a solution to key challenges, and individuals and families are enjoying clearer benefits – whether as volunteers, as beneficiaries or both.

Why is service in America on the rise today? National leadership, greater opportunity, and a clearer effort to weave service into our schools, workplaces, and national calendar of holidays and anniversaries are critical factors. Today, volunteer work is seen as a critical strategy to solve some of the toughest challenges experienced by individuals and families. Below, we take a closer look at each of these factors – and the impact on families who serve, as well as families who are served.

1. Presidential Leadership

Presidential leadership in recent years has been critical in strengthening volunteerism in America. Fifty years ago, President Kennedy challenged Americans to serve with his famous quote, “ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country”. Kennedy went on to initiate The Peace Corps programme. Next, President Johnson created Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) and the National Civilian Community Corps. The seeds of organised, widespread volunteerism were planted.

In his 1989 Inaugural Address, President George H.W. Bush described, “a thousand points of light, all the community organisations that are spread like stars throughout the nation, doing good”. He acted to bring this optimistic vision to fruition in signing the first national service act. His efforts also led to the development of the Points of Light Foundation – which ultimately grew into Points of Light Institute, the largest volunteer management and civic engagement organisation in the US.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed legislation to align national service programmes under a new government entity (Corporation for National and Community Service) with the addition of a new programme, AmeriCorps – which enables individuals to serve one year to help strengthen a community. In swearing in the first class of 20,000 AmeriCorps members, Clinton said, “Service is a spark to rekindle the spirit of democracy in an age of uncertainty. When it is all said and done, it comes down to three simple questions: What is right? What is wrong? And what are we going to do about it? Today you are doing what is right – turning your words into deeds”.

Building on the culture of giving and service following September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush expanded and promoted volunteer service by creating USA Freedom Corps, to co-ordinate volunteer efforts and help all Americans find opportunities to serve. He also initiated the President's Volunteer Service Award programme to recognise volunteers who contribute substantial time in service to others.

Upon taking office, President Barack Obama further strengthened the nation's commitment to national, organised service. After calling for legislation to expand the ability of service to solve challenges in communities, he signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which further expands volunteer opportunities and seeks to identify and take to scale volunteer programmes with proven results. Obama also called for a “Craigslist” for service, getting Craig Newmark himself to help build that³⁶. Finally, President Obama continues to set a powerful example for family volunteering as he volunteers several times each year with his own family at schools, food pantries and other sites needing help.

2. More Accessible Volunteer Opportunities

Americans have a hunger for volunteer work. Families have traditionally heard about volunteer opportunities through faith organisations, schools and community groups, but many eager volunteers have had difficulty finding suitable volunteer opportunities. Others may already be engaged, but are eager to do more. Therefore, several groups have been working to make service more accessible.

As part of that, AARP Create The Good is providing a network of opportunities for people to get connected to make a positive impact. Create The Good offers the new online database of opportunities searchable by locality; the ability for anyone to post an opportunity to request more volunteer help, and simple, fun project ideas people can use to develop their own volunteer efforts. These resources also are available at compatriotesvivir.org and similar websites.

The idea is to enable individuals and families to use the database to find local volunteer opportunities that fit their time, skills and passion. Or if they prefer, they can use one of the many available ‘how-to guides’ to design a convenient project that works for everyone in the family. As we say as part of AARP's

³⁶ “Craigslist” is a centralised online network connecting people with jobs, housing, items for sale, etc.

Create The Good initiative, people can make a difference in five minutes, five hours or five days.

One example of such self-initiated service is that of New York resident Olga El Sehamy. Olga recalled that her mother often offered food to street vendors in Mexico, and that her husband lacked housing when he came to the United States. She had a strong desire to give back on a national day of service, but her work schedule precluded volunteering with an organised group. So, she recruited her family to help provide food to people living in the streets and subway stations. She and her husband prepared dozens of meals, and her son and his college friends distributed the food throughout the morning. The college students felt so good about the project that they asked if they could do it again soon – and they did!

This kind of flexible volunteering is increasingly popular. Fifty-seven per cent of Americans over the age of 45 reported that they engaged in service efforts they organised themselves in 2009, up from 34 per cent just six years earlier. Another survey revealed that the number of people who worked with their neighbours to fix a community problem rose from 15.2 million in 2007 to 19.9 million in 2008.

3. The Growing Ethos of Volunteering

Volunteerism has long been a part of American culture. The last decade, however, has embedded it far more deeply into the American psyche.

First, service is on our calendar. We now have two national days of service – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service and 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance. These offer regular and visible chances for families to help others on a possible shared day off. Further, many families are beginning to celebrate Veterans Day by engaging in service with and for veterans. There's also National Volunteer Week in April, which includes a Youth Service challenge. And the fourth Saturday in October is Make A Difference Day.

Second, service is fully integrated into our system of education through student service learning. Through these programmes, students are asked to engage in service projects with their teacher and classmates and also help others in the community outside of school hours – on their own or with family. In practice, many younger students volunteer with family members; as they grow older they begin to volunteer with their peers. Often, students are asked to play a role in selecting the service project and reflecting on what it means to them. These programmes begin as early as kindergarten and run through high school – sometimes as a graduation requirement. Most colleges also offer service learning opportunities.

At their best, student service learning programmes empower students to learn skills, develop leadership, solve problems and help others. Teachers increasingly integrate service with curricula – for example, learning how chemistry might be used to clean up a river. Additionally, these programs aim to develop a love of service, setting the stage for successful family volunteering. A recent focus group conducted among teens and 20-

some things in the state of Maine revealed a lasting positive impression about service. Participants said they volunteer for many reasons, including self-improvement, peer pressure, a desire to give back, because they've been involved from a young age, a desire for new experiences and...for fun!

Third, there has been a boom in volunteering in the workplace. Many employers find they are more likely to attract and retain talented staff if they include effective service opportunities as part of the workplace environment. And many corporations are including engagement and support of service as part of their overall marketing plan, e.g. in advertisements, in stores and at sporting events.

Finally, service is increasingly evident in a growing number of cities. A new "Cities of Service" initiative was introduced in 2008 by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Already it includes over 100 major cities, and it is spreading all across America. Mayors are taking a leadership role, bringing communities together to identify which challenges to address, and deciding how they can leverage assets to achieve strong impacts together. While this initiative is just beginning to come to fruition, there are already innovative and effective efforts underway to support youth in staying in school, to plant and maintain community gardens far and wide, to empower an entire city to learn emergency response skills, and much more.

So, whether in school, at work, on holiday or attending a football game, American families are surrounded by opportunities to help others. As they engage, they benefit from the opportunity and the reward – whether they are in a giving or taking position any given day.

4. More People are Engaged in Service and Benefiting from Volunteerism

Wealthy or not, young or old, single or married, across all cultural and ethnic groups, Americans are stepping forward to make things better for individuals and communities. The growth in volunteering reported in 2009 represented the greatest annual increase since 2003. A government survey capturing a broad definition of service revealed that 58 per cent of Americans helped a neighbour at least once a month in 2009. Even people facing challenges of their own are helping, often verbalising that they know how tough it is to have even less.

Families are very much a part of this trend. Married people, especially married women, have some of the highest rates of volunteering around. And, rates of volunteering are up for all population groups, including children.

What are the effects on families or anyone who volunteers? Numerous research studies have revealed that volunteers tend to be happier and enjoy lower levels of stress, lower incidence of depression and higher self-esteem.

Yet, while volunteerism is booming, it hasn't yet grown to full capacity. Tens of millions of Americans want to volunteer more than they do today. And, of course, millions of families need more help. This conundrum exists because

many interested volunteers don't know how to find their best role – and at the same time, volunteer organisations lack capacity to fully engage all those who want to help more.

Renewed efforts to make volunteering more accessible should give more Americans access to the benefits of “doing good”. And, with that increased capacity to reach out to others, we hope to solve more of the problems we face as a society.

5. Measuring the Impact of Service in Improving our world

It seems fair to assume that increases in volunteerism will directly improve our society. More youth mentors, more people helping prepare for disasters, and more soup kitchen volunteers should mean a better world. But it's also fair to assume that some service programmes are more effective than others.

Today there is a serious effort to identify the service programmes that make the greatest difference. While many programmes already have proven effectiveness, others lack demonstrated results. We think they work well, but we don't know. Organisations interested in improving service are today finding ways to measure the impact of nearly every volunteer effort around (not always easy), identify those that are most effective, and to find the resources to expand the most effective initiatives to a size that enables them to solve key challenges.

For example, what is the best way to help young people? Data demonstrates that mentoring and tutoring programmes are effective, so increasing the number of volunteers in programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Experience Corps, JumpStart or City Year makes sense. But with so many high schools dubbed dropout factories, some communities are testing whether it's also helpful to engage neighbourhood adults in knocking on the doors of students who don't arrive at school each morning.

Or take a look at emergency preparedness: the American Red Cross and other organisations train and deploy volunteers in the event of disaster – to help supplement the good efforts of rescue personnel. These are effective programs, but are there other ways communities should prepare for emergencies? For example, New York City service leaders are inspiring thousands of residents to learn first aid from local firemen, and will measure and test whether this is a valid way to help prepare for emergency situations.

The volunteer component is part of identifying and deploying strategies with the strongest impact. It's critical to identify, recruit and retain the right volunteers for each effort. Depending on the situation, the most effective volunteer might be a highly skilled individual who can contribute at least ten hours per week, or it might be a family who lives in the neighbourhood who can help out ten minutes a day.

In 2011, helping others is increasingly in the mainstream of American life. Families and individuals have more ways - and more effective ways than ever - to volunteer their time to help solve pressing societal challenges. And we're

aware that in “doing good” we’re also improving our own lives: in addition to the warm feeling that comes from helping others, families also can build enjoyable memories together.

Barb Quaintance



Barb Quaintance is the Senior Vice President of the Office of Volunteer and Civic Engagement at AARP. This newly created office will help redefine volunteerism by integrating flexibility with challenging opportunities that fit with the nature of our members' lives, making volunteering easier and more accessible. She is a graduate of University of Southern California and the University of Illinois.

Barb previously served as Senior Vice President of Outreach and Service in Social Impact. She has a rich history of collaborating with volunteers, from programmes to state offices, and was instrumental in creating our annual Day of Service and recently, our successful presence at the ServiceNation volunteer summit in September 2008. Barb established AARP's Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, an early model of what ultimately grew into the State Health Insurance Programs (SHIP). She also played a lead role in AARP's State Capacity initiative, which helped us achieve our goal of having an office in every state and the three territories, and she has held leadership positions in the field and in the National Office.

AARP is a non-profit, nonpartisan organisation with a membership that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole.

For more information see: <http://www.aarp.org/>

Consortium

The FAMILYPLATFORM consortium consists of the following 12 organisations

