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Volunteering in the Member States of the European Union - Evaluation and Summary of Current Studies

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1 Introduction

The publication of the study “Volunteering in the European Union” (GHK 2010a) has prompted this paper, which summarises the results of the aforementioned study and the results of other important studies that address volunteering. The study “Volunteering in the European Union,” which was published in February 2010 by the European Commission, offers a good overview of the volunteering situation in all member states of the European Union. From the wealth of information that this study provides, some of the relevant subjects were selected, combined and separately analysed for this paper.

The following will be illustrated in more detail in this paper:

- volunteer promotion programmes and strategies in the EU member states
- volunteering measurements in the EU member states
- general challenges for volunteering in the EU

Unless mentioned otherwise, the information was taken and compiled from the respective country reports and the final report of the aforementioned study and supplemented by the authors’ own research and additional literature.

For the classification of the study, it should be noted that this study primarily refers to already existing studies and data, and only some new interviews were conducted. The study “Volunteering in the European Union” is primarily to be understood as taking stock of the situation. Since the used studies apply different definitions and data collection methods, there are great differences, particularly in the presentation of the volunteer rate in individual countries.

The study clarifies existing national differences in the area of volunteering that are primarily due to the different **understandings of volunteering** (differences in definitions, attitude towards volunteering) and the question of the **state’s role** (strong legal framework, government reluctance, or partnership between non-governmental organisations (NRO) and the state). The paper, however, also identifies common subjects that are a concern for all member states. These include in particular the (lack of) **appropriate recognition** of volunteer services and the **ensuring of financing for non-governmental organisations**.

2 Volunteer promotion programmes and strategies in the EU member states

Whether and to what extent volunteering is on the political agenda of member states can be seen in the national volunteer promotion programmes and strategies of each country. A few states have concrete volunteering strategies (sometimes including determined goals), while most member states try to support the volunteer sector via various volunteer programmes. In states without a clear volunteering strategy, the handling of volunteering is often divided among many policy areas, and therefore concrete political goals are often not to be made and only to be found implicitly.¹

Due to the diverse forms and complexity of the volunteer sector, there is no uniform approach for the regulation of volunteering. There are member states with a legal framework tailored specifically for volunteering, states without a specific legal framework and member states in which a legal framework is currently being developed. The legal framework for volunteering does not say whether or not the subject is on the political agenda in member states. **France**² and **Sweden** consciously do not adopt a separate regulation of volunteering as we find it in other countries.

One of the EU member states that does have an explicit national volunteering policy is e.g. **Germany**. On 6 October 2010, the Federal Cabinet adopted a national volunteer strategy, which is the basis for the promotion of volunteering and the further development of volunteer policies in Germany.³ In **Estonia**, the local government and the regional administrative division within the Ministry of the Interior are the main institutions responsible for the national strategy for the further development of volunteering. In **France**, in the division of the high commissioner for youth, the policies affecting volunteering are developed, coordinated and evaluated.⁴ In **Belgium**, Flanders has a campaign plan for the rejuvenation of the relationship between the Flemish government and the volunteer organisations. **Poland** does not have a national strategy specifically for volunteering, but it has a “Strategy of support for the development of civil society 2007-2013.”⁵

1 National strategies can be introduced more easily in member states where only one ministry is responsible for volunteering or at least where there is a coordinating ministry (GHK 2010b).

2 Volunteering in France is governed among others by general laws such as the Association Act. This law involves a type of self-regulation between volunteers and associations (<http://www.francebenevolat.org/uploads/documents/GRH.pdf>).

3 The National Volunteer Strategy pursues strategic goals such as the improvement in the general conditions and coordination between political levels and a better integration of foundations/companies and greater recognition of volunteers (http://www.b-b-e.de/fileadmin/inhalte/aktuelles/2010/10/Nationale%20Engagementstrategie_10-10-06.pdf).

4 <http://www.lacse.fr/dispatch.do>

5 <http://www.pozYTEK.gov.pl/Strategy,of,Support,of,Civil,Society,Development,587.html>

In the **United Kingdom**, volunteering is an established, longstanding subject, which can be shown by the compact between the government and the third sector⁶ as well as by the declaration of the year 2005 to the call for a National Year of the Volunteer 2005. A national strategy is considered important here, while the lack of synergies between volunteer programmes and volunteer policies as well as programmes/policies in other policy fields is criticised. In **Ireland**, the “Task Force on Active Citizenship”, which was set up in 2006, underscores the political importance of volunteering.⁷ **Denmark** may not have a comprehensive volunteering strategy, but since 2001 there has been a charter for interaction between volunteers and associations and the public sector. Furthermore, the 2007 quality reform contains multiple initiatives for the support of volunteering. In **Finland**, a working group was set up to clarify the taxation of volunteer organisations that provide services. And in **Latvia**, discussions took place between the prime minister and non-governmental organisations for the improvement of framework conditions for volunteering (end of 2009). However, the resulting bill was stopped shortly after passage. A working group was set up in order to discuss the future of the bill.

Currently, some EU member states are preparing bills or reviewing their basic legal framework in the run-up to the European Year of Voluntary Activity Promoting Active Citizenship (2011). In **Bulgaria**, the actors have been trying to create the legal framework and policies for volunteering since 2001; the bill currently under discussion was prepared in 2006.⁸ **Slovenia** has been working on a bill for the volunteer sector since 2004, which should be passed in 2010. **Hungary** and **Luxembourg**⁹ have already been reviewing the existing laws from 2005 as well as the laws from 1928 and 2007. Furthermore, **Sweden** is drafting a law that addresses the difficulties occurring when organisations receive their financing from various policy areas (GHK 2010a).

In **Greece**, the lack of a collective procedure has been criticised sharply; for this reason, the institutions mainly responsible have made recommendations for a general legal framework.

In **Cyprus**, **Czech Republic**, **Spain**, **Romania** and **Portugal**, there are no identifiable national volunteering strategies and **Slovakia** also does not have volunteering on the political agenda.

6 The “Compact on relations between Government and Third Sector in England” has been in force since 1998 and is available under: : <http://www.thecompact.org.uk/files/140472/FileName/TheCompact.pdf>, <http://www.thecompact.org.uk/files/140473/FileName/AnintroductiontotheCompact.pdf> It should be noted here that organisations are dissatisfied with the implementation of the compact, the more so since the compact is also not legally binding. The compact was supplemented by the „Compact Code of Good Practice on Volunteering“, the first version of which (2001) was amended in 2005 (http://www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100323).

7 The department of the minister president (Taoiseach) set up the aforementioned taskforce in 2006. In 2007, it completed its work (recommendations to the Irish government) and the related progress report in 2008 (<http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/>, <http://www.activecitizenship.ie/index.asp?locID=3&docID=-1>).

8 A presentation of the amended bill proposal is expected, however (SPES - Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio (2010): Volunteering Across Europe: organisations, promotion, participation – Bulgaria, Slovenia, Germany, Estonia, pp. 7-50).

9 <http://www.benevolat.public.lu/de/legislation/index.html>

In the other EU member states, the subject of volunteering is currently not explicitly on the political agenda. In the **Netherlands**, barriers in the volunteer sector have been continually reduced; in **Lithuania**, volunteering is neither promoted nor hindered, and in **Austria, Malta** and **Italy**, there is no current information on volunteering strategies.

The listing of the respective national volunteer promotion programmes and strategies makes it clear that some EU member states such as **Germany, Estonia, France** and **Belgium** have volunteer strategies and volunteer promotion programmes, whereby these states differ with regard to the degree of the design for their respective national strategies. In **Poland, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland** and **Latvia**, volunteering is being discussed and handled on the political agenda. In the run-up to the European Year 2011, in some member states such as **Slovenia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Sweden** and **Bulgaria** the subject of volunteering is gaining momentum.

3 Volunteering measurements and reports in the EU member states

Volunteering is studied both in the member states and with a European comparative perspective.

European comparative studies on volunteering are e.g. the Eurovol study (1995), the European Values Study (2001), the Eurobarometer Social Reality (2007), the European Time Use Survey (2007) and the study “Volunteering in the European Union” (GHK 2010), which underpins this paper.¹⁰

It should be taken into account that both the European comparative studies and national studies do not demonstrate any uniform or precise picture of the actual volunteering behaviour on account of different approaches, i.e. measurement methods and target groups,¹¹ and are therefore only comparable to a limited extent. The examinations, however, provide good indications and starting points for a better assessment of the popularity of volunteering and the number of volunteers in Europe, which has increased overall in the last ten years. In preparation for the European Year 2011, John Hopkins University (Baltimore, USA) on behalf of the International Labour Organisation wants to prepare criteria for the assessment and recording of volunteering in Europe and summarise it in a handbook. It will be used in preparation for a European report on volunteering.¹²

¹⁰ Besides these studies, there are also studies that shed light on the volunteer behaviour of certain age groups such as the SHARE study (Survey on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe; 2004, 2006/2007 and 2008/2009 <http://www.share-project.org/>).

¹¹ Here, for instance, another important issue is the decision about the extent to which only formal or also informal volunteering is included.

¹² <http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/index.php?section=content&view=9&sub=12&tri=127> , <http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/index.php?section=content&view=9&sub=12&tri=106> , http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/pdfs/ILO/ILO_Manual_August_2010.pdf

The types of studies on volunteer behaviour in the respective **member states** can be roughly divided into three categories: Official/state statistics, academic studies and other collected data in the member states.

Official/state statistics of member states

States that carry out regular examinations are e.g. **Germany** (every five years since 1999)¹³ and the **United Kingdom** (England every two years since 2001; and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland also collect data on volunteering). **Austria** published its first volunteering report in 2009.¹⁴ **Ireland** on the other hand has examined volunteering since 2006 within the "National Census" and in the "National and Economic Social Forum." The **Netherlands'** "Central Bureau for Statistics" undertook the "Periodic Life Situation Statistics Survey," and the "Social and Cultural Institute" examines how the Dutch make use of their time. In **Sweden**, the "National Study on Volunteering, Informal Help and Care Giving" was published in 2009. The collection of data should be reformed as part of a new law. The **Czech Republic** and **Hungary** have gathered volunteer figures through their statistical offices, but these vary due to different methodological approaches (Czech Republic) and the different ways of including informal and formal volunteering (Hungary).

Academic studies in the member states

In **Belgium**, there are some studies on volunteering, e.g. from the University of Liège and a survey of Flemish Community. In **Denmark**, the volunteer sector was researched as part of a study of the population. **Poland** does not have any official reporting for the area of volunteering; however regular studies are conducted. In **Finland, France** and **Luxembourg**, researchers are examining volunteering partially on their own basis and partially on the basis of other studies. In **Latvia**, there are hardly any regular and systematic surveys. This was meant to be changed by the foundation of the IUMSILS institution.¹⁵ However, the institution has already been closed again so it is assumed that no more research will take place in the near future.

Other data collection in the member states

13 BMFSFJ - Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (2010): Monitor Voluntary Activities, Issue No. 2 Volunteering in Germany 1999 – 2004 – 2009, Summary of the 3rd Survey on Volunteering.

14 BMASK – Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz (2009): 1. Bericht zum freiwilligen Engagement in Österreich (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (2009): 1. Report on volunteer work in Austria; available in German only)

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15 The secretary's office for special tasks in the Ministry for Social Integration in Latvia (IUMSILS) was closed in 2008. The ministry for children, families and integration matters, which assumed the responsibilities, was also dissolved in 2009. Research with regard to the further handling of volunteering in the ministries (among others, the ministry of education, which is responsible for the implementation of the European Year 2011) has not yet shown any results Issue No. 2 Volunteering in Germany Summary of the 3rd Survey on Volunteering.

In **Bulgaria**, there has been no systematic gathering of data, but there are two studies by non-profit organisations. **Estonia** published a country-wide survey by the Estonian Youth Institute and a study with a very low number of participants by an NGO. Likewise the few examinations of the **Cyprus** population by the Volunteer Network Project do not provide any reliable data. In **Greece**, there are only estimates by the national volunteer agency; on the other hand, in **Italy**, officially collected figures in other connections form the basis of some studies. **Lithuania** published a report, but otherwise no data has been systematically collected. In **Portugal**, there is hardly any available statistical material on the volunteer behaviour of the Portuguese; there was however an empirical study by the national commission for the European Year 2011. In **Romania**, there are no national statistics; the volunteer figures are collected by the "Barometer of Public Opinion." In **Slovakia**, there were two examinations in the period 2008/2009. **Spain** also provides no national statistics with regard to volunteering. However, the Ministry for Health and Social Policies provides general information. In **Malta**, the collected volunteer figures differ substantially, since volunteer figures are based on estimates.

The listing of the respective national volunteering measurements and reports shows that of the EU member states only the **United Kingdom** and **Germany** have regular, official studies of the voluntary sector. These studies have been conducted for several years. **Austria** will probably begin regular studies with a volunteering report in 2009. Furthermore, **the Netherlands, Sweden** and **Ireland** are also studying volunteering officially and in various ways. Regardless of the distinction between different types of volunteering studies, it can be concluded that the following EU member states possess well developed data collection systems and provide regular statistical volunteering reports: **Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany** and the **United Kingdom**.

4 Collective challenges and recommendations

On the basis of the individual country reports, the authors of the study "Volunteering in the European Union" (GHK 2010a) identified collective challenges for volunteering in Europe and accordingly give recommendations for organisations and political decision makers on the national and European level. The most important points are shown in the following.

Current challenges for organisations

- In most states, the problem is not a fall in the number of volunteers, but rather the **matching of the needs** of volunteers and organisations.

- It is getting more difficult for organisations to find people that are willing to **volunteer for the long term** and/or are ready to assume responsibility in organisations (e.g. becoming a board member).
- **Serious professionalisation vs. integration of volunteers:** The interaction between volunteers and full-time staff must be handled well.

Tasks for public authorities

- **Providing a general legal frame to the right degree:** Some member states do not have any general legal framework, which results in a lack of clarity for organisations (**Greece**). Others have regulations that are too strict, which cannot be implemented in reality (**Romania**) or define volunteering too narrowly so that many volunteers are not included (e.g. **Portugal, Czech Republic**). At the same time, there are countries that do not have a differentiated set of rules (**France, Sweden**). Furthermore, it has to be taken into account that several member states there are constitutional limits state action.
- The subject of **insurance for volunteers** is only present in a few countries.

Tasks for public authorities and organisations

- There should be a better collection of **statistical information on volunteering** since this information represents an important decision support for both policy decision makers and organisations.¹⁶ For organisations, it is an important argument to know the economic value of volunteering.
- **Improving infrastructure:** Cooperation between government and representatives of volunteer organisations is considered as being very important for promoting volunteering. Likewise, a national coordinating institution/organisation for the subject of volunteering is viewed as desirable.
- **Financing volunteering and organisations:** In the organisations, the wish for institutional funding outweighs other issues since pure project funding is not sustainable from the perspective of organisations. Particularly in the new EU member states, it is possible to see that the organisations do not always have the expertise/professionalism to participate in the national and EU tenders. In **Cyprus**,

¹⁶ A question could be e.g.: How does volunteering affect unemployment?

there is a special training course for non-governmental organisations that want to take part in call for tenders.

- The study shows that particularly in the countries of **Central and Eastern Europe**, there are **prejudices with regard to voluntary work**. Volunteering is often viewed as the equivalent of obligatory activities in the socialist regime.
- **Lack of recognition for the services of volunteers:** The study classifies the recognition of volunteer work as an important task both for the state and for organisations. This involves **an appropriate appreciation** for volunteer work, on the one hand. On the other, it involves recognition and **certification** of the knowledge and experience obtained through volunteering (**non-formal learning**). In some countries (**Spain, Bulgaria, Hungary, France, Malta**), students can receive credit points for volunteer work.
- **Volunteer management** as a subject for governments and organisations: In some studies, there are special programmes that support organisations in “managing/mentoring” volunteers professionally (e.g. **Finland, Ireland**).

5 Summary of the results

The study “Volunteering in the European Union” (GHK 2010a) shows that there are **different volunteering traditions** in Europe and thus that there are also differently developed volunteer sectors. This is reflected in the figures on the participation of volunteers: very high participation in the **Netherlands, Austria, Sweden** and the **United Kingdom** (over 40% of the adult population volunteers), high participation in **Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg** and **Germany** (30-39%), average participation in **Estonia, France** and **Latvia** (20-29%), relatively low participation in **Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain** and the **Czech Republic** and **Slovakia** (10-19%), followed by low participation in **Bulgaria, Greece, Italy** and **Lithuania** (below 10%) (GHK 2010b: 2). The different traditions are to be considered in the assessment of the respective national situations. **Sweden** and **France** e.g. consciously forgo a legal framework for volunteering.

In most of the **countries of Central and Eastern Europe**, volunteering “was put on hold” in the post-war years from the Second World War up to the beginning of the 90s or rather the volunteering during this time was mostly done - obligatorily – for party or state purposes. Since many organisations at the beginning of the 1990s had to be newly founded, **civil societies** are sometimes still in the development process.

In some member states such as **Greece**, another attitude towards volunteering dominates. Here, assistance is based more on the circle of family, friends and acquaintances, which explains the low volunteering figures.

It is not necessarily possible to draw conclusions and connections between the specific legal frameworks and a greater number of volunteers. In **Hungary** and **Cyprus**, there are special legal frameworks, but the participation of volunteers does not fall among the highest volunteer rates in Europe.

Mostly, voluntary activities on a local level, particularly in member states with federal systems or strong or autonomous regions, are very important. These include **Belgium, Italy, Spain** and the **United Kingdom**.

The study does not provide any information on the financing models of non-governmental organisations that work with volunteers. However, this is important for an assessment of the respective national situations. For instance, parts of the income tax can be donated directly in **Hungary** and **Spain**.

In some states, the ministries are responsible for those organisations/volunteers that are active in the ministry's area of responsibility. For these non-governmental organisations, sector-specific regulations can be adopted as, for instance, in **Belgium** (Flanders).

The study "Volunteering in the European Union" offers a good overview of the current situation of volunteering in the EU member states and represents the first step towards an overall assessment of the area. For the latter, however, it is necessary to consider volunteering not totally in isolation from the situation of the third sector of a country and its financing and structure.

Especially in the run-up to the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011), it is clear how important the comparability of volunteering within the European Union is. To achieve this comparability and to prepare a European volunteering report, the draft of a handbook for the assessment and recording of volunteering in Europe was published in August 2010.¹⁷

In the member states of the European Union, there are some differences that concern e.g. the understanding of volunteering and the role of the state. However, there are also similar challenges such as the recognition of volunteer work. For this reason, the European Year 2011 set the goal of not only honouring volunteers, but also creating an advantageous general framework for volunteering in the EU and sensitizing people for the value and the significance of volunteering as an expression of active participation.¹⁸

¹⁷ http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/pdfs/ILO/ILO_Manual_August_2010.pdf

¹⁸ <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/862&format=HTML&aged=0&language=DE&guiLanguage=en>

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