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1 Introduction

The decision in favour of the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) underscores that volunteering is also an issue at the EU level. This paper provides an overview of who in the EU deals with volunteering (chapter 2) and which programmes and thematic discussions there are on this subject (chapter 3 and 4). Finally, the paper concludes with a glance at the European Year 2011 (chapter 5). At the beginning, the authors present definitions of volunteering and offer an overview of the divergent volunteering rates.

1.1 Definition of volunteering

What does volunteering actually mean? Watering the neighbour's flowers when he or she is on holiday, membership in a rabbit breeding association, being an unpaid children's football coach? What about participating in a demonstration, caring for your own parents or donating money to a charity?

All these activities are proof that someone is voluntarily active. The question of whether volunteering is the right term ultimately depends on the definition that is used. There is no uniform definition, however. Furthermore, in the German-speaking regions several different terms are used for volunteering. For example, there is (Braun 2002: 54):

- Bürgerschaftliches Engagement (civic participation / civic engagement)
- Freiwilliges Engagement (voluntary participation / voluntary engagement)
- Zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement (engagement of civil society / civil participation)
- Zivilengagement (civil participation / civil engagement)
- Ehrenamt (honorary position)
- Freiwilligenarbeit (volunteer work)

Each term is connected with a certain (philosophical / from social science deriving) school of thought and thus also with certain connotations (Anheier / Toepler 2003: 21-23). A better option is to use characteristic features for a definition, as the Committee of Inquiry "Future of Civic Engagement" of the German Bundestag (German Parliament) did (Enquete-Kommission „Zukunft des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements“ des Deutschen Bundestages 2002: 86¹):

"Civic engagement in this sense is:

- voluntary,
- not focused on material profit,
- oriented on the common good,
- takes place in public or in the public sphere and
- is usually performed collectively/ cooperatively."

At the European level, the Council decision on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) offers the most recent definition of volunteering. The document uses the terms civic participation, volunteering and voluntary activities. (European Council 2009 / 2010: Preamble section 5; bold font for emphasis added to original version)²: “Having due regard to the particularities of the situation in each Member State and all forms of volunteering, 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. They are also a vehicle for individuals and associations to address **human, social, intergenerational or environmental needs and concerns, and are often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative.** Voluntary activities do not replace professional, paid employment opportunities but add value to society.”

An unusual aspect of this definition is dividing volunteer work into formal, non-formal and informal categories. The current literature usually contrasts formal volunteering on the one hand to non-formal or informal volunteering on the other. Formal volunteering is the generic term for voluntary activities that take place in organised structures, e.g. the assumption of a volunteer position (such as lay judges) or participating as a youth group leader in a sport association. The terms non-formal or informal volunteering are usually used as synonyms. They relate to “unorganised” forms of volunteering such as e.g. helping neighbours (BMFSFJ 2009: 8). The text of the Council’s Decision does not make it clear how these three forms are differentiated from each other. The list of activity areas shows only some examples, thus, for instance, the cultural area is missing.

In the daily discussion, a precise clarification of the definition is not always necessary, since terms such as civic participation and voluntary work can be understood in a very broad manner. In the concrete case, it is however necessary to ask whether assisting neighbours or political activities are included. This is even more relevant when a discussion takes place in the European / international context, since every country has its own volunteering tradition. There are, for instance, significant differences between the forms of volunteering and what is understood as volunteering in general.

For post-Socialist member states in Central and Eastern Europe, it is necessary to consider that after the political changes, associations and organisations for participating and volunteering had to be newly founded. Furthermore, a new understanding of volunteering

¹ Braun 2002 and the 2002 Committee of Inquiry of the German Bundestag “Future of Civic Participation” offer a summary of various terms and definitions: 57f. and 73ff.

² The study “Volunteering in the European Union” offers an overview of other internationally used definitions (GHK 2010: 49f.).

had to develop since civic participation such as membership in youth organisations or involvement in political celebrations was often not really voluntary but an expected duty. (Zimmer / Priller 2004, GHK 2010: 48).

Another difference in the understanding of volunteering is the question of whether or not informal volunteering such as helping a neighbour counts. In Austria, this is the case; in Switzerland, donating money or resources also counts (BMFSFJ 2009). The term volunteering in the Netherlands includes political participation, voluntary work, helping small children and caring for dependants (Vogelwiesche / Sporket 2008: 11). Informal volunteering in Germany usually does not count as civic engagement, and in France, this is also not included in the term volunteering (BMFSFJ 2009).

1.2 How much volunteering is there in Europe? An overview of volunteering studies

The differences in the understanding of volunteering are also reflected in the studies that examine how many citizens can be described as volunteers. Different results regarding the volunteering figures – whether in national studies or in international comparative studies – are due to the different concepts of volunteering. Consequently, it has to be clarified whether formal and informal volunteering was included or only formal volunteering. Another question is whether membership in an association is considered volunteering or whether the assumption of concrete responsibilities in an organisation is necessary for the activity to qualify as civic participation. In the evaluation of the volunteer rate, i.e. the number of people volunteering as a percentage of a country's entire population or a group of the population, it is always important to consider the cultural background. If volunteering for the family takes priority in a country, this would explain, for example, why these people have less time for formal volunteering in organisations.

The current figures on citizens' volunteering behaviour demonstrate national differences. Accordingly, the "European Social Reality" survey (Eurobarometer) (European Commission 2007a), published in February 2007, came to the conclusion that Austria (60%), the Netherlands (55%) and Sweden (53%) are the countries where most people volunteer. The Lithuanians (11%) and Portuguese (12%) volunteer the least. The study SHARE (Survey on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe), which among others examines the volunteering behaviour of people over the age of 50 (Hank / Erlinghagen 2005), stresses that there are national differences in the volunteering figures.

In a comparison of the two studies, it is important to remember that the Eurobarometer survey includes active membership in an organisation, while the SHARE study explicitly does

not ask about membership, but rather only includes voluntary activities in the month before the survey. Furthermore, the age of the respondents differs: people above the age of 15 were questioned in the Eurobarometer survey, while SHARE concentrated on people over 50.

A comparison of volunteering figures from current studies (selection of some countries)		
	Eurobarometer 2007 The question about active membership in organisations and volunteer work was answered with Yes: (Age of the respondents: 15 and older)	Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) 2005 The question about volunteer work in the month before the survey was answered with Yes: (Age of the respondents: 50 and older)
Germany (volunteer rate in the German volunteer survey 2004 for comparison: 36%)	52 %	9-14 % ³
Italy	34 %	4-11 %
Lithuania	11 %	Not recorded
Netherlands	55 %	8-26 %
Spain	18 %	2-3 % ³
Average of the surveyed countries (arithmetic average)	34 % (EU25)	20 % (11 surveyed countries in Europe)

These differences in the existing studies with regard to the procedure and the underlying definitions make it more difficult to draw a uniform and empirically precise picture of the volunteering behaviour of Europeans, according to a conclusion of the current EU-commissioned study "Volunteering in the European Union" (GHK 2010: 42). In a summary of the available European and national studies, this examination comes to the conclusion that only Sweden and the Netherlands are described in all the studies as member states with a very high volunteer rate (above 40%). The analysed studies are also in agreement that Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain are member states with a relatively low volunteer rate (less than 20 % are volunteering).

On the basis of the available studies, the study "Volunteering in the European Union" mentions a volunteer rate for all of Europe amounting to 22 to 23% of everyone over 15 years of age. However, this is not a statistically precise figure, but rather on account of the data situation, the best possible indication of the European volunteer rate (GHK 2010: 57). A collective general trend in Europe is however that the number of volunteers has risen in the last ten years (GHK 2010: 66).

³ The inclusion of a range is due to the fact that the volunteering figures were broken down according to age groups (50-64; 65-74; 75+) and these vary depending on the age group.

2 EU actors dealing with volunteering

In the European Union, various actors are dealing with volunteering. In the following, all relevant actors responsible for volunteering and their competences in this field are listed.

European Commission

After the European Parliament election in 2009 and the resulting re-organisation of the European Commission, the responsibility for volunteering has been assumed by the Vice-President of the European Commission, Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship (prior to this, the unit “Citizen’s Policy; Europe for Citizens” of the Directorate-General for “Culture and Education” was responsible).⁴

European Parliament

- Volunteering has not been established as a policy field of its own right on the European level. However, since the first initiative of the European Parliament to create a European volunteering strategy (European Parliament 1983⁵), volunteering is at least a side issue in several other policy fields. This primarily includes the areas of youth, sport, senior citizens and education as well as active EU citizenship. Consequently, volunteering is reflected in various policy fields and is therefore a horizontal issue.
- Since 2006, there has been an intergroup on volunteering within the European parliament (legislative period 2004-2010).
- On 09 April 2008, Marian Harkin (MEP) together with other MEPs submitted a written declaration in favour of declaring 2011 the European Year of Volunteering (0030/2008). (MEP Marian Harkin is a member of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee and was elected to be the “European Parliament Draftswoman to an Opinion on the European Year of Volunteering” in December 2009.)⁶
- Likewise, in 2008, the European Parliament issues a statement highlighting volunteering as a contribution to economic and social cohesion (Marian Harkin et. al. 2007/2149 INI).
- On 13 April 2010, the “Volunteering Interest Group” of the European Parliament was officially set up. This group is an informal cross-party committee that was founded

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/reding/citizenship/index_en.htm#

⁵ Resolution on Volunteering(11525/83)

⁶ <http://www.marianharkin.com/index.php?id=48>

at the initiative of Marian Harkin. The interest group monitors the implementation of the European Year 2011 on the part of the European Parliament.

Council of the European Union

- In 2004, the Council determines the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people (13996/04).
- Also in 2004, the Council of the European Union publishes a directive on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purpose of voluntary service (2004/114/EC).
- In 2006, the Council publishes a resolution on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field (2006/C168/01).
- In 2007, the Council determines the implementation of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people (14427/07). (Held 2010)

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

- In 2006, the EESC made a statement on “voluntary activity,” its role in European society and its impact (1575/2006) (Held 2010).
- The EESC awards a “Prize for Organised Civil Society” (for the third time in 2009), with which the EESC honours outstanding examples of civic participation in the European Union. ⁷

⁷ <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.organised-civil-society-prize-2009>.

3 EU programmes on volunteering

There are numerous programmes on volunteering at EU-level. In the following, the most important programmes on the European level are outlined.

Europe for citizens (2007-2013)

The programme Europe for citizens⁸ was established by the decision of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament (in charge of programme guideline: European Commission) (1904/2006/EC) and is divided into four areas that facilitate transnational experiences for citizens:

- Active Citizens (campaign 1) supports activities concerning town twinning and other direct forms of citizen participation
- Active Civil Society in Europe (campaign 2) focuses on civil-society organisations (operating cost subsidies or project support)
- Together for Europe (campaign 3) includes campaigns with great publicity, studies and information instruments
- Active European Remembrance (campaign 4) supports projects for the maintenance of important memorial sites

The Golden Star Award honours town twinning projects and civil society projects as well as memorial projects that were supported by the programme Europe for citizens.

The programme is the successor of the campaign programme for Active European Citizenship 2004-2006 (Held 2010).

⁸ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/about_citizenship_en.php

Youth in Action (2007-2013)

Youth in Action⁹ is an EU programme established by a decision of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (1719/2006/EC) for the funding of (out-of-school) activities for young people in Europe. It is implemented by 33 national agencies in 31 European countries that work together across borders. The programme is divided into five support possibilities:

- Youth for Europe (Action 1) promotes European youth meetings.
- European Voluntary Service (Action 2) enables young people and young adults to volunteer in another country. Afterwards, the youths' volunteer work is certified in their Youthpass and their abilities and skills acquired during the voluntary service are recorded.
- Youth in the World (Action 3) promotes projects with neighbouring partner countries.
- Youth Support Systems (Action 4) supports organisations that do European youth work (e.g. through operating cost subsidies).
- Support for European Co-operation in the Youth Field (Action 5) promotes e.g. transnational youth seminars.

The programme has existed since 1998, however in a modified form (Held 2010).

Programme for Life-long Learning (LLP)

This programme is divided into various sub-programmes that are based on the life and learning situation in question, whereby the action programme GRUNDTVIG¹⁰ is especially interesting:

- GRUNDTVIG is focused on all areas of adult education and promotes exchanges, learning partnerships, volunteer projects of older people, etc.

⁹ <http://www.eu-info.de/foerderprogramme/bildung-jugend/Jugend-in-Aktion/> ;
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/programme/about_youth_en.php

¹⁰ http://www.lebenslanges-lernen.eu/grundtvig_5.html; http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc86_en.htm

4 How is volunteering discussed on the European level?

After the overview of the various EU programmes that deal with volunteering, we will provide a summary of the aspects of volunteering that are addressed on the EU level.

Since when has volunteering been a subject on the European level?

For the first time, volunteering was mentioned on EU level in a resolution of the European Parliament in 1983 (Held 2010: 429). The first action in this policy field was the 1996 introduction of the European Voluntary Service in 1996 (Directorate-General for Education and Culture 2006).

The issue of volunteering

Two aspects of volunteering are particularly important on the European level. On the one hand, volunteering is considered as a possibility to promote life-long learning; on the other hand, an important contribution to the promotion of active citizenship is ascribed to civic participation. These positive aspects of volunteering are reflected in the European Voluntary Service, in the Grundtvig voluntary service for older people and in the programme Europe for citizens. The aspects are also listed by the European Council in the reason it gives for declaring 2011 the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (European Council 2009 /2010: Preamble).

Special target groups in the European promotion of volunteering

Concerning volunteering, young people in particular are addressed on the European level: the European Voluntary Service focuses on 18-30 year olds. People over 50 can then take part in the programme “Senior Volunteering Projects” (subprogramme of the Grundtvig programme for life-long learning). In the preamble of the Council decision for the European Year of Volunteering 2011, reference is made to the differences in the volunteering of men and women, which could be raised and addressed through the European Year 2011. Women, for instance, are particularly underrepresented in leadership positions in the voluntary sector (European Council 2009 / 2010: Preamble Section 16). In this area, the promotion of women can make sense, while in other fields of volunteering; the promotion of men could bring benefits.

Particularly recognised fields for volunteering

European policies identify both certain target groups and specific fields that are particularly distinguished by volunteer work. This applies to the area of **sport** and sport organisations. The structures of sport based on voluntary activities are emphasised in the White Paper on

Sport (European Commission 2007b), and in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Art. 165). Volunteering in sport also represents a focal point of the study of “Volunteering in the European Union” (GHK 2010), which was published in 2010.

Volunteering is also highlighted in multiple documents as a particular feature of **Social Services** (European Commission 2006: 7, European Commission 2007b: Section 2.3).

5 European Year of Volunteering Promoting Active Citizenship (2011)

NGO activities

An alliance of various NGOs (The EYV 2011 Alliance) campaigned to declare the year 2011 the European Year of Volunteering and it will also participate in the planning and execution of the year after the decision for the year 2011. The leading organisation in this alliance was and is the European Volunteer Centre (das Europäisches Freiwilligenzentrum, Centre Européen du Volontariat, CEV). The alliance consists of 20 European umbrella organisations.

The reason for the campaign for the year 2011 was the ten-year anniversary of the Volunteer Year 2001, which was proclaimed by the United Nations, but was also implemented in the EU and member states.

The Alliance for 2011 has a website on the subject and also conducted the official competition for the logo and slogan.

The European Commission selected this logo:



The official slogan for the year is: **Volunteer! Make a Difference!**¹¹

CEV operates as the co-ordinating body for the European Year on the European level.

Responsibilities of the Commission

In the European Commission, Unit A4 of the Directorate-General for Communication is responsible for the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship.¹²

¹¹ <http://www.eyv2011.eu/PublicImageVoting.asp>

Responsibilities on the national level

The EU member states have set up national coordinating bodies that are responsible for the execution of the year. This list is available on the website of the European Commission for the European Year 2011: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/focus/focus840_en.htm

Goals for the European Year 2011

The official goals, which are presented in the Council decision for the European Year 2011 place a focus on the promotion of volunteering:

1. To work towards an enabling environment for volunteering in the EU
2. To empower organisers of voluntary activities to improve the quality of voluntary activities
3. To recognise voluntary activities
4. To Raise Awareness for the value and importance of volunteering

You will find the wording of the Council decision with more information on the goals and the implementation of the year in the original document of the Council decision. (Council decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) (2010/37/EC), published in the Official journal on 22 January 2010.)

¹² http://ec.europa.eu/staffdir/plsql/gsys_fonct.properties?pLang=EN&pSernum=6366&pUnite=47251

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