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P7_TA(2013)0549

Volunteering and voluntary activity in Europe**European Parliament resolution of 10 December 2013 on volunteering and voluntary activity in Europe (2013/2064(INI))**

(2016/C 468/11)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Articles 165, 166 and 214 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the definition of volunteer work proposed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work (2011),
- having regard to Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass),
- having regard to Decision No 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the Youth in Action programme for the period 2007 to 2013 ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Decision No 1904/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 establishing for the period 2007 to 2013 the programme 'Europe for Citizens' to promote active European citizenship ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to Council Decision 2010/37/EC of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to the Council resolution of 27 November 2007 on voluntary activities of young people (14427/1/2007),
- having regard to the resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 16 May 2007, on implementing the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people ⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union ⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to Recommendation 2006/961/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility ⁽⁸⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 30.⁽²⁾ OJ L 327, 24.11.2006, p. 45.⁽³⁾ OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 32.⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 17, 22.1.2010, p. 43.⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 168, 20.7.2006, p. 1.⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 241, 20.9.2008, p. 1.⁽⁷⁾ OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 8.⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 5.

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- having regard to its declaration of 10 March 2011 on establishing European statutes for mutual societies, associations and foundations ⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 3 October 2011 on the role of voluntary activities in social policy (14552/2011),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 29 November 2011 on the role of voluntary activities in sport in promoting active citizenship ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the Commission's EU citizenship report 2010 of 27 October 2010 entitled 'Dismantling the obstacles to EU citizens' rights' (COM(2010)0603),
- having regard to the communication of 5 September 2007 from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society' (COM(2007)0498),
- having regard to the communication of 27 April 2009 from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'An EU Strategy for Youth: Investing and Empowering — A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities' (COM(2009)0200),
- having regard to the communication of 3 March 2010 from the Commission entitled 'Europe 2020 — A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to the communication of 15 September 2010 from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'Youth on the Move — An initiative to unleash the potential of young people to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union' (COM(2010)0477),
- having regard to the communication of 20 September 2011 from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU' (COM(2011)0568),
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus for All' — The Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport (COM(2011)0788),
- having regard to the report of 19 December 2012 from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2011 European Year of Volunteering (COM(2012)0781),
- having regard to the opinion of 28 March 2012 of the European Economic and Social Committee on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the EU' ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 June 2012 on recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning,
- having regard to the Commission report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2011 European Year of Volunteering (EYV 2011);

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 199 E, 7.7.2012, p. 187

⁽²⁾ OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 24.

⁽³⁾ CESE 824/2012.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 332 E, 15.11.2013, p. 14.

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- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A7-0348/2013),
- A. whereas EYV 2011 was a success, had relevant objectives and helped to raise awareness of the issue;
- B. whereas creating an environment in which volunteering can thrive and is accessible to everyone is a lengthy process in which all stakeholders need to be involved;
- C. whereas volunteering is a key facet of active citizenship and democracy, as well as of personal development, embodying European values such as solidarity and non-discrimination, and whereas it also helps to boost participatory democracy and promote human rights inside and outside the EU;
- D. having regard to the importance which is attached to volunteering in the debate on public policies;
- E. whereas engagement in voluntary activity can be an important way of gaining skills needed in the labour market as well as a means of attaining prominent social positions in the community;
- F. whereas volunteers are, to a large degree, the lifeblood of sport;
- G. whereas volunteering is a key factor for individual and collective emancipation, solidarity and social cohesion;
- H. whereas volunteering plays a key role in creating social capital and boosting development, as well as in promoting economic and social cohesion, thus helping to further the aims of the Europe 2020 strategy;
- I. whereas the Council conclusions of October 2011 on the role of voluntary activities in social policy underline the importance of voluntary activities for addressing gender inequalities;
- J. whereas bureaucratic barriers at national level continue to restrict opportunities to engage in volunteering, which is still not legally recognised to a sufficient degree in some Member States;
- K. whereas, owing to different traditions and cultural practices, major disparities exist between Member States as regards the laws applying to volunteering, the rights that volunteers have and the way in which volunteering is organised;
- L. whereas the severe economic crisis, austerity measures and tax pressures are jeopardising the financial stability of many NGOs, sports bodies and voluntary organisations, which are nonetheless continuing to do what they can to enhance inclusion and social wellbeing in these difficult times;
- M. whereas in order to safeguard the achievements of EYV 2011, European volunteering policy — to which a piecemeal approach is currently being taken at EU level, with responsibility being scattered across a range of services — needs to be properly structured and coordinated;
1. Notes the figures given for the EYV 2011 communication campaign in the annexes to the Commission report, and deplores the fact that poor results were achieved because of a lack of financial resources;
 2. Recognises and supports the various forms of volunteering practised in the Member States through national organisations and networks of associations operating at local level; calls, in this respect, for a multicultural approach from the Member States, and calls on the Commission to undertake a detailed analysis of national volunteering practices and traditions with a view to fostering a common European approach;
 3. Notes that the further consolidation of a common European approach to volunteering will create more opportunities for young people's mobility and employability by allowing them to acquire valuable skills;

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4. Welcomes the fact that some Member States have adopted or revised laws in this area with a view to creating a favourable environment for volunteering, and recommends other Member States to do likewise, with a focus on strengthening volunteers' rights using the European Charter for the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers;
5. Encourages Member States to continue creating an enabling environment for volunteering, especially by means of a legal framework where one is still lacking;
6. Notes that some Member States have implemented the guidelines set out in the ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work, and encourages the others to follow suit so that a body of comparable data providing a clear picture of the valuable contribution such work makes to society may be compiled;
7. Calls for a European statute for voluntary organisations to be adopted in order to help ensure that they are given proper legal and institutional recognition;
8. Stresses the need to promote volunteering, especially among schoolchildren, students and other young people, in order to broaden the horizons of solidarity and support for it;
9. Points out that the large number of European Skills Passports created online over recent months illustrates the success of this 'electronic portfolio', which provides a comprehensive picture of individuals' skills, including those acquired during volunteering work, so that they may be officially recognised for both employment and learning purposes;
10. Draws attention to the fact that skills and abilities acquired during volunteer work, which may be counted as non-formal and informal learning and work experience, are a plus point on CVs and in working life;
11. Believes that the proposed 'Europass Experience' document would allow volunteers to describe and record skills developed during volunteer work that may not lead to certification, and encourages the Commission, in the light of the Council's recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, to launch that document as soon as possible;
12. Notes the importance of the skills and abilities mentioned above for motivating young people to volunteer and for generating social capital and boosting societal development;
13. Suggests that attention be paid to the issue of gender parity within the voluntary sector, and especially to the pronounced discrepancy that exists among voluntary leaders, with men being over-represented in managerial positions;
14. Believes that the skills acquired by young people during volunteer work should be included in the European Skills Passport and Europass, so that formal and non-formal learning are treated in the same way;
15. Emphasises that volunteering offers young people who have broken off their schooling an inclusive environment and inclusive activities;
16. Reiterates its support for the Commission's European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps initiative, which is intended to help the EU respond swiftly and in a coordinated manner to humanitarian crises and serious natural disasters by providing support for the training, mobilisation and coordination of volunteers for EU humanitarian aid operations;
17. Points out that volunteering, which is becoming increasingly common among both young and elderly people, promotes intercultural learning as well as a sense of European identity and intergenerational solidarity, and fosters active ageing and lifelong civic participation;
18. Points out that volunteering enables both young people and older people to make a contribution to society and earn recognition and esteem in return, and that this improves their quality of life, wellbeing and general state of health;

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19. Points out that the existence of a broad range of volunteering activities, as well as ease of access to such activities, as regards cost, availability of information and infrastructure, and provision of liability and accident insurance cover, are essential if volunteering is to be promoted among all age groups;
20. Considers that volunteering, as an active method of building civil society, can contribute to the development of intercultural dialogue and play a major role in combating prejudice and racism;
21. Points out that volunteering plays a key role in creating human and social capital and promoting social inclusion; calls on the Commission and the Member States to give due recognition to the vital contribution made by volunteering in the world of sport and, specifically, amateur sport, in which field many sports organisations would not be able to function without the help of volunteers;
22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to give due recognition to the key contribution that volunteering is making at this time of serious economic crisis;
23. Stresses that continuous effort is required to ensure that women have equal access to voluntary activity;
24. Highlights the need to ensure continuity between EYV 2011 and subsequent EYVs, as part of efforts to ensure that volunteering is seen as a valuable means of taking an active part in society, and in this regard encourages the Commission to include volunteering as an important contribution to active citizenship during the European Year of Citizens;
25. Calls on the Member States to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved at national level during EYV 2011;
26. Calls on the Commission to introduce and develop a volunteering policy and to use the open method of coordination in order to foster dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders in the various Member States;
27. Urges the Member States to take the requisite steps to institutionalise volunteering in a manner consistent with their national labour laws;
28. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to set up a single point of contact in the form of a service with responsibility for volunteering policy and for coordination in this area between Commission departments and the various institutions;
29. Stresses the need, in cooperation in particular with European volunteer organisations, associations and networks, to set up a centralised EU portal providing a pan-European platform for coordination in this area, which should include a volunteering best practice database and a section on cross-border volunteering, with information on programmes available, costs and arrangements for taking part, in order to foster the pooling of information;
30. Encourages the Member States to set up national coordination websites and search engines that will allow easy and well-structured access to volunteering opportunities for single individuals and cooperation possibilities for organisations;
31. Encourages Member States to continue to provide a stable and sustainable support framework for both national and cross-border volunteering that supports both volunteers and volunteering organisations; recommends that Member States should keep in place the national coordinating bodies set up in connection with EYV 2011;
32. Calls on the Member States to implement the provisions of Directive 2004/114/EC⁽¹⁾ on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for purposes of study, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service, and to simplify the procedures for the granting of visas, or to abolish them, for those wishing to undertake voluntary activities as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 375, 23.12.2004, p. 12.

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33. Urges national, regional and local authorities to make adequate funding available, streamline administrative procedures and provide tax incentives for volunteers' organisations and networks, in particular small organisations with limited resources; calls, in this connection, for the concept of grants to associations to be clarified so that funding for associations is no longer confused with state aid which could hamper competition in the for-profit sector;
 34. Calls on the Commission to look into the possibility of counting the economic contribution made by voluntary work as matching funding for European projects;
 35. Draws attention to the need for volunteering to be encouraged as part of corporate social responsibility strategies, in keeping with voluntary international standard ISO 26000:2010 on guidance on corporate social responsibility;
 36. Calls on the Commission to see to it that Member States make it compulsory for volunteers to have proper insurance cover, in order to protect their health and safety during volunteer work;
 37. Calls on the Member States that have not yet done so to adopt legislation on volunteering and to facilitate volunteering through the provision of formal, informal and non-formal training to enhance volunteers' skills and empower them in their work;
 38. Calls on the Member States to facilitate volunteering through the provision of formal, informal and non-formal training to enhance volunteers' skills and empower them in their work, their dedication being primarily altruistic and disinterested; encourages them to introduce training courses in volunteering as electives in educational institutions;
 39. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to further promote the European Voluntary Service in universities and other higher education institutions;
 40. Believes that voluntary work, as a method of informal learning, helps to develop skills and professional qualifications which make it easier for volunteers to enter or return to the labour market;
 41. Recommends that the Commission should continue to maintain contacts with the EYV 2011 Alliance successor, the European Alliance for Volunteering, and other volunteer-based organisations and that it should take proper account of the recommendations laid down in the Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (PAVE), as the basis for an action plan for the future;
 42. Calls on the Commission to marshal the necessary resources to set up a European Volunteering Development Fund, in order to ensure that appropriate support infrastructure is put in place;
 43. Emphasises the need to make it easier for NGOs to gain access to European funding, in particular under the ESF, at national and European level;
 44. Calls on the Member States to implement the Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and to ensure, in advance of the target date of 2018, the implementation of formal structures for the validation of the knowledge, skills and competences gained through volunteering leading to a recognised qualification which educational institutions, employers and others should recognise;
 45. Calls on the Commission to recognise volunteer time as eligible in-kind cofinancing for all European grants, and to work with volunteer organisations in order to develop systems for recording and documenting volunteer time on the basis of the many tools and models available;
 46. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
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