


Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2011/2293(INI)	Procedure completed
Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU		
Subject		
4.10.16 Social and community life, associations, foundations		
4.45.02 Cultural programmes and actions, assistance		
4.70.05 Regional cooperation, cross-border cooperation		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	CULT Culture and Education		04/10/2011
		PPE SCURRIA Marco	
		Shadow rapporteur	
		S&D ROTH NEVEĎALOVÁ Katarína	
		ALDE AYLWARD Liam	
		Verts/ALE BENARAB-ATTOU Malika	
		ECR MIGALSKI Marek Henryk	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	DEVE Development		
		The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	EMPL Employment and Social Affairs		27/10/2011
		ALDE HARKIN Marian	
	LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs		
		The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
European Commission	Commission DG Communication	Commissioner REDING Viviane	

Key events			
20/09/2011	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2011)0568	Summary
17/11/2011	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
26/04/2012	Vote in committee		
14/05/2012	Committee report tabled for plenary	A7-0166/2012	Summary
11/06/2012	Debate in Parliament		

12/06/2012	Results of vote in Parliament		
12/06/2012	Decision by Parliament	T7-0236/2012	Summary
12/06/2012	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2011/2293(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 159
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/7/07725

Documentation gateway					
Non-legislative basic document		COM(2011)0568	20/09/2011	EC	Summary
Committee draft report		PE480.846	07/02/2012	EP	
Committee opinion	EMPL	PE478.721	01/03/2012	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE480.847	14/03/2012	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A7-0166/2012	14/05/2012	EP	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T7-0236/2012	12/06/2012	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2012)626	30/10/2012	EC	

Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU

PURPOSE: Communication on EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross- border Voluntary Activities in the EU

BACKGROUND: Volunteering contributes to the Europe 2020 growth strategy, in particular to the EUs employment rate target of 75% by 2020, by helping people learn new skills and adapt to changes in the labour market. A study found that the voluntary sector could contribute up to 5% of Gross Domestic Product.

The year 2011 has been designated as the [European Year of Voluntary Activities](#) promoting Active Citizenship. The European Year gives the Commission the opportunity to take stock of volunteering in the EU and its contribution to society. It also allows the Commission to evaluate what the EU and Member States can do to facilitate and promote volunteering, notably in cross-border situations.

CONTENT: this Communication discusses the benefits of volunteering. It notes that volunteering is an important creator of human and social capital, a pathway to integration and employment and a key factor for improving social cohesion. It is a highly visible expression of European citizenship, as volunteers contribute to shaping society and helping people in need. Its potential can be further developed within the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth. Volunteers are an important resource in our economy and society, but must not be considered as an alternative to a regular workforce. By promoting cross-border volunteering in cooperation with Member States and through EU funding programmes, the EU contributes to the mobility and inter-cultural learning of its citizens and reinforces their European identity.

The Communication also sets out the challenges. On the basis of a study of eight industrialised countries by the Johns Hopkins University and the experience of the European Year 2011 so far, the potential obstacles to volunteering, in particular across borders, were identified as follows:

- lack of a clear legal framework in :almost one in five Member States;
- lack of national strategies for promoting voluntary activities regarding training, holiday benefits, social security, entitlement to unemployment benefits for cross-border volunteering activities, accommodation and reimbursements of out-of-pocket expenses;
- financial constraints, with organisations based on voluntary activity often facing a lack of sustainable funding;
- mismatch between supply and demand: the increasing trend towards professionalising the voluntary sector causes a certain

mismatch between the needs of volunteering organisations and the aspirations of new volunteers. Volunteers are available for short-term projects while organisations need people to make long-term commitments;

- skills that are gained through volunteering activities are not always sufficiently recognised or given credit;
- Member States apply different tax treatments to volunteers' income/allowances and to the reimbursement of the expenses. Consequently, volunteers may encounter tax obstacles when operating across borders;
- insufficient data: better comparable data on volunteering in the Member States can help identify best practices and improve policy making.

Whilst Member States made some progress on these issues in 2006 when they committed to cooperating on overcoming obstacles that impede mobility, there is still work to do. Particular attention needs to be paid to the promotion of an environment for volunteering activities providing equal opportunities with regard to access and participation of all individuals.

The Communication discusses EU funding opportunities for volunteering, and the social dimension, including volunteering as an expression of European citizenship as well as the benefits in terms of education and sporting activities and humanitarian aid.

Policy recommendations to Member States: in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the Commission does not intend to promote one single model of volunteering or to harmonise volunteering cultures at local and regional level. However, the Commission recommends that Member States make better use of the potential of volunteering in the following ways:

- in countries lacking a volunteering framework and where there is a weak tradition or culture of volunteering, setting legal frameworks could give incentives to support the development of volunteering;
- research and data collection on volunteering should be encouraged at the national level. In this context, the use of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work and the United Nations Handbook on Non-Profit organisations is recommended;
- recognition of the competences and skills gained through volunteering as non-formal learning experiences is essential as a motivating factor for the volunteers and one that creates bridges between volunteering and education;
- Member States should remove remaining obstacles which directly or indirectly impede volunteering in general and in particular cross-border volunteering;
- Member States are invited to open national volunteering schemes for across-borders volunteering to contribute to the development of volunteering in the European Union.

Concrete actions to recognise and promote volunteering at EU level: the EU is committed to ensuring a long-term follow-up to the 2011 European Year of Volunteering and to continuing the dialogue with the relevant stakeholders in the different policy areas related to volunteering. The Communication makes the following points:

- the Commission will propose the creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps in 2012;
- EU funding programmes in different policy areas will further target volunteers and promote cross-border volunteering;
- the Commission will make it easier for EU citizens and stakeholders to get an overview of different funding programmes that can be used by volunteers and for voluntary activities;
- the Commission is willing to further explore possibilities to strengthen the link between volunteering and health/welfare, in particular with regard to the ageing society;
- on the basis of Member States' reports on the implementation of the Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers in 2012, the Commission will make proposals for further development;
- the Commission may introduce proposals that specifically cater for volunteering in the EU's employment strategy, in its fight against poverty and social exclusion and in the context of the Commission's ["New Skills for New Jobs" initiative](#);
- the Commission is preparing a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning including the recognition of competences acquired through volunteering;
- the future ["European Skills Passport" \(Europass\)](#) will give individuals the possibility of keeping a record of the skills and competences they acquire through volunteering;

Lastly, the Commission will give the forthcoming [European Year of Citizens \(2013\)](#) an appropriate volunteering dimension, promoting notably cross-border volunteering.

Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU

The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Marco SCURRIA (EPP, IT) in response to the Commission communication entitled Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU.

The report recalls that volunteering means activities which are undertaken voluntarily on the basis of a persons own free choice and motivation, and without concern for financial gain. Given that volunteering is an informal learning experience suitable for persons of all ages, Members invite the Member States, who do not have a clear or adequate legal framework for volunteers, to put one in place.

Member States are also called upon to:

- draw up national strategies to promote the growth of volunteering activities, including the recognition of the rights of volunteers,
- ensure quality, protection and equal access for everyone;
- devote more attention to this sector in their future policy-making, programmes and financing;
- pay particular attention to disadvantaged young people and young people with fewer opportunities (especially people with disabilities);

- make volunteering accessible to immigrants and minorities as an essential element in encouraging their integration and social inclusion ;
- ensure that volunteering becomes more widely recognised and less hampered by barriers of all kinds.

Volunteers and the European Neighbourhood Policy: Members note the benefits arising from cooperation between volunteers from the European Union Member States and third countries and point out that such cooperation is particularly important in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. They call on the Council and the Commission to continue to make progress in the negotiations towards easier visa regimes for non-EU citizens wishing to enter the EU for the purpose of volunteering, provided they fulfil the criteria to perform volunteering activities and to implement the provisions of [Council Directive 2004/114/EC](#) on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies. The purpose would be to simplify the procedures for the granting of visas, or to abolish them, for those wishing to undertake voluntary activities as part of the EU neighbourhood policy. Members encourage the Member States to recognise the benefits of participating in cross-border volunteer activities to provide citizens with new skills, contributing to their employability and mobility and strengthening the development of social inclusion, and to support cooperation between organisers of voluntary activities in EU countries in order to promote the mobility of volunteers of all ages across Europe.

Calls on the Commission to improve the facilities of volunteering organisations and volunteer centres for providing information and training and for coordinating activities between volunteers and volunteering organisations;

Enhance the quality of voluntary action: the report highlights the need to ensure that high-quality volunteering is developed, both nationally and at cross-border level, through a structured framework of comprehensive information and appropriate training for volunteers which includes current best practice, the development of hosting capacities for providers and organisations at local and national level, a recognition of the rights of volunteers to reconcile their voluntary work with their personal lives, and by creating the necessary infrastructure at all levels.

Enhance the quality of voluntary action: MEPs ask the Commission to strengthen the capacity of organizations and volunteer centers to provide information and training. The Commission should publish a report identifying barriers to cross-border volunteering, such as age limits in the insurance and, where appropriate, legislative proposals.

To enhance the quality of volunteer work, the report stresses the following:

- the need to ensure that high-quality volunteering is developed, both nationally and at cross-border level, through a structured framework of comprehensive information and appropriate training for volunteers;
- promoting training programmes and develop guides and materials on the management of volunteers and schemes to motivate people to engage in cross-border volunteering activities;
- promoting the use of volunteer time as matching funding for European projects, particularly in cross-border initiatives;
- developing international volunteering initiatives and programmes that extend beyond EU borders and draws attention to the successful examples and practices already implemented in certain Member States for this purpose;
- promoting training programmes and develop guides and materials on the management of volunteers and schemes to motivate people to engage in cross-border volunteering activities;
- improving information networks in order to make everyone aware of volunteering opportunities, tackle barriers to participation, enhance access to volunteering best practice and promote cooperation across borders;
- creating a centralised EU portal, in cooperation with organisations and associations working in this sector and in particular their European networks, to include a best practice volunteer resources bank and a section on cross-border volunteering, with information on the programmes available, their costs and the conditions for participation ;
- encouraging the Member States to adopt the use of the International Labour Organisations (ILO) Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work and the United Nations Handbook on Non-Profit Organisations with a view to making available comparable statistics and data on the subject.

Volunteering and senior citizens: Members note that older people who engage in volunteering find it easier to make the transition from work to retirement. It stresses the importance of providing information, adequate funding and support for senior citizens wishing to volunteer in another EU country. It notes that volunteering contributes to integration, social inclusion and social innovation, and can also contribute to poverty reduction, thus helping to achieve economic and social cohesion. Members point out that volunteering also promotes solidarity between generations by encouraging cooperation between young people and senior citizens, and that it contributes to active ageing. Members call on the Commission and the Member States to give a high profile to volunteering in sport, particularly at the grassroots level, to acknowledge the important role played by volunteer-led sporting organisations in strengthening culture, etc.

Recognition of volunteering: Members support the Commission's proposal to establish a European Skills Passport, so that the skills acquired through volunteering may be officially recognised, both for professional and learning purposes. For Members, this Passport should not be a series of new separate certificates but, rather, a comprehensive document listing all practical experience, training and soft and vocational skills acquired through life-long learning, including those gained through volunteering, if desired by the volunteer. The report suggests therefore including the skills acquired through volunteering in the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) for students.

The Commission is called upon to:

- consider developing a similar calculation and recognition system for skills acquired through volunteering for adults who are not at university;
- make the European Skills Passport a reality as soon as possible;
- address in the European Skills Passport the need for a cohesive and transferable approach to proper screening and vetting of volunteers who work with children and/or vulnerable members of society.

Member States are urged to:

- develop mechanisms for validating non-formal and formal learning outcomes, which will improve the value and transferability of the skills acquired outside formal education, facilitating in particular the acquisition of additional ECTS credits at university thanks to volunteering, and a standardised mechanism for recognising the skills acquired through volunteering in the ECTS;
- explore ways of eliminating the tax obstacles that volunteers encounter when participating in cross-border activities;
- support employee volunteering and employer-supported volunteering also in the context of corporate social responsibility.

The report proposes that a training and qualifications framework for volunteer coaches be established and incorporated into the European Qualifications Framework in order to improve the mobility of volunteer coaches and enhance the transferability of skills and competences

developed through volunteering.

European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps: the report supports the Commission's proposal to create a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, which will increase the participation of volunteers in solidarity actions in the context of the EU's humanitarian aid policy. It calls on the Commission also to take existing structures into consideration and actively to incorporate these from the outset when establishing this voluntary corps and emphasises that the duplication of organisations in the area of civil protection is not desirable and should be avoided.

Removing technical barriers: Members urge the national, regional and local authorities and the EU to ensure adequate and stable funding and to simplify administrative procedures, including tax incentives, for the organisations involved in volunteering work, including all the relevant associations and networks, particularly for small associations with limited resources, with a view to enhancing their roles, activities and achievements for the benefit of society. They call, therefore, for the concept of grants to associations to be clarified so that association funding is not confused with state aid, which could hinder competition in the financial sector. The Commission is called upon to propose a mechanism to allow Member States wishing to strengthen civil society to exempt from VAT all or most of the activities and transactions carried out by voluntary non-profit-making organisations. At least the smaller non-profit-making organisations should be covered by such a mechanism.

Member States are called upon to:

- ensure legal certainty for volunteers, not least with regard to insurance issues;
- review their cross-border tax and social security arrangements in connection with cross-border volunteering, so as to ensure that they do not create additional barriers to such activity and that cross-border volunteers are able to receive the social security benefits to which they are entitled under Regulation (EC) No 2004/883;
- ensure that volunteering must not be an alternative to or a substitute for regular, paid work and must not, under any circumstances, constitute a reason for governments failing to fulfil their social obligations;
- promote and implement national schemes for cross-border volunteering in order to contribute to its development across the EU.

European financing for voluntary work: Members call on the Commission to ensure that funding is guaranteed for volunteering projects and for the structures organised by voluntary activities in the EU.

They also call on the Commission to:

- ensure that information on available funding and the relevant programmes is freely available to volunteer-led projects;
- ensure that adequate funding is provided for programmes in various policy areas to support cross-border volunteering activities, for particular attention to be paid to financial support for volunteering infrastructure.

They ask the Commission to allocate adequate resources to the creation of a European Volunteer Centre Development Fund aimed at developing infrastructure to support volunteering.

European Statute: Members call on the Commission to propose a European Statute for Associations to give them the legal framework within which to operate, reduce the administrative costs associated with cross-border volunteering activities and establish voluntary structures at a European level which encourage mobility of volunteers in the EU. They propose that a cross-border network of voluntary organisations in the various Member States should be set up by coordinating the existing voluntary organisations and call for the promotion of volunteer work in EU policies.

Voluntary work and the European Year: Members recommend that the Commission and the Member States maintain a continuity between 2011 and future years by strongly integrating the volunteering dimension, which is an expression of active citizenship that promotes social integration, including that of older citizens, within both the European Year for Active Ageing (2012) and the proposed European Year of Citizens (2013). They call on the Commission to maintain the useful contact points set up both with EYV 2011 Alliance and the successor Volunteer Platform. They call on the Commission to act, where it deems appropriate, on the Policy Agenda on Volunteering in Europe (PAVE), which was drawn up by the volunteering organisations involved in the EYV 2011 Alliance.

Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU

The European Parliament adopted by 603 votes to 23, with 63 abstentions, a resolution in response to the Commission communication entitled *Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU*.

The resolution recalls that volunteering means activities which are undertaken voluntarily on the basis of a person's own free choice and motivation, and without concern for financial gain and for a non-profit cause. Given that volunteering is an informal learning experience suitable for persons of all ages, Members invite the Member States, who do not have a clear or adequate legal framework for volunteers, to put one in place.

Member States are also called upon to:

- draw up national strategies to promote the growth of volunteering activities, including the recognition of the rights of volunteers,
- ensure quality, protection and equal access for everyone;
- devote more attention to this sector in their future policy-making, programmes and financing;
- pay particular attention to disadvantaged young people and young people with fewer opportunities (especially people with disabilities);
- make volunteering accessible to immigrants and minorities as an essential element in encouraging their integration and social inclusion;
- ensure that volunteering becomes more widely recognised and less hampered by barriers of all kinds.

Recalling that volunteering reduces the risk of social exclusion, Parliament considers it essential to attract all social groups to such activities, especially people with disabilities.

Volunteers and the European Neighbourhood Policy: Parliament notes the benefits arising from cooperation between volunteers from the European Union's Member States and third countries and points out that such cooperation is particularly important in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. It calls on the Council and the Commission to continue to make progress in the negotiations towards easier visa regimes for non-EU citizens wishing to enter the EU for the purpose of volunteering, provided they fulfil the criteria to perform volunteering activities and to implement the provisions of [Council Directive 2004/114/EC](#) on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the

purposes of studies. The purpose would be to simplify the procedures for the granting of visas for those wishing to undertake voluntary activities as part of the EU neighbourhood policy (as opposed to abolishing them as suggested by the committee responsible). Parliament encourages the Member States to recognise the benefits of participating in cross-border volunteer activities to provide citizens with new skills.

Volunteering and participative exchange: Parliament notes that volunteering involves citizens in economically, socially and ecologically sustainable local and cross-border development and can often ensure the swift provision of aid when disasters occur. It also plays a role in fostering solidarity, active citizenship and inter-cultural learning, providing volunteers with the opportunity to learn the language and culture of the country in which they work, thereby strengthening social cohesion and participative democracy. Parliament notes that volunteering increases people's tolerance, creates human and social capital and plays a vital role in the empowerment of socially excluded groups. It emphasises the need to provide access to as wide a range of volunteering opportunities as possible and encourages the Commission to make European programmes more inclusive and open to all age groups.

Enhance the quality of voluntary action: Parliament asks the Commission to strengthen the capacity of organizations and volunteer centers to provide information and training. The Commission should publish a report identifying barriers to cross-border volunteering, such as age limits in the insurance and, where appropriate, legislative proposals.

To enhance the quality of volunteer work, the resolution stresses the following:

- the need to ensure that high-quality volunteering is developed, both nationally and at cross-border level, through a structured framework of comprehensive information and appropriate training for volunteers;
- promoting training programmes and develop guides and materials on the management of volunteers and schemes to motivate people to engage in cross-border volunteering activities;
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Parliament proposes that a centralised EU portal be created, in cooperation with organisations and associations working in this sector and in particular their European networks, to include a best practice volunteer resources bank and a section on cross-border volunteering, with information on the programmes available, their costs and the conditions for participation.

Volunteering and senior citizens: Members note that older people who engage in volunteering find it easier to make the transition from work to retirement. It stresses the importance of providing information, adequate funding and support for senior citizens wishing to volunteer in another EU country. They note that volunteering contributes to integration, social inclusion and social innovation, and can also contribute to poverty reduction, thus helping to achieve economic and social cohesion. Members point out that volunteering also promotes solidarity between generations by encouraging cooperation between young people and senior citizens, and that it contributes to active ageing. Members call on the Commission and the Member States to give a high profile to volunteering in sport, particularly at the grassroots level, to acknowledge the important role played by volunteer-led sporting organisations in strengthening culture, etc.

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Removing technical barriers: Members urge the national, regional and local authorities and the EU to ensure adequate and stable funding and to simplify administrative procedures, including tax incentives, for the organisations involved in volunteering work, including all the relevant associations and networks, particularly for small associations with limited resources, with a view to enhancing their roles, activities and

achievements for the benefit of society. They call, therefore, for the concept of grants to associations to be clarified so that association funding is not confused with state aid, which could hinder competition in the financial sector. The Commission is called upon to propose a mechanism to allow Member States wishing to strengthen civil society to exempt from VAT all or most of the activities and transactions carried out by voluntary non-profit-making organisations. At least the smaller non-profit-making organisations should be covered by such a mechanism.

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- promote and implement national schemes for cross-border volunteering in order to contribute to its development across the EU.

European financing for voluntary work: Parliament calls on the Commission to ensure that funding is guaranteed for volunteering projects and for the structures organised by voluntary activities in the EU.

It also calls on the Commission to:

- ensure that information on available funding and the relevant programmes is freely available to volunteer-led projects;
- ensure that adequate funding is provided for programmes in various policy areas to support cross-border volunteering activities, for particular attention to be paid to financial support for volunteering infrastructure.

Members ask the Commission to allocate adequate resources to the creation of a European Volunteer Centre Development Fund aimed at developing infrastructure to support volunteering.

European Statute: Members call on the Commission to propose a European Statute for Associations to give them the legal framework within which to operate, reduce the administrative costs associated with cross-border volunteering activities and establish voluntary structures at a European level which encourage mobility of volunteers in the EU. They propose that a cross-border network of voluntary organisations in the various Member States should be set up by coordinating the existing voluntary organisations and call for the promotion of volunteer work in EU policies.

Voluntary work and the European Year: Parliament recommends that the Commission and the Member States maintain a continuity between 2011 and future years by strongly integrating the volunteering dimension, which is an expression of active citizenship that promotes social integration, including that of older citizens, within both the European Year for Active Ageing (2012) and the proposed European Year of Citizens (2013).