



POSITION PAPER ON VOLUNTEERING

Summary

Sport is the biggest sector in volunteering in Europe, and sports organisations rely on volunteers. The European Union should develop European cooperation to promote volunteering through recommendations, relevant EU programmes and enabling visa practices. The development and recognition of the skills and competences of volunteers should be supported. The EU should also aim at decreasing administrative burdens of volunteers and voluntary sports organisations, minimising the unintended harmful consequences that European legislation can have on volunteering, and ensuring the sustainable financing of non-profit voluntary sports organisations.

In 2009, the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation ENGSO¹ implemented an EU-wide citizens' project EU:SPORT:FUTURE, which gathered the input of more than 1000 Europeans and led to recommendations to European decision-makers on volunteering². Taking into consideration the above concerns from EU citizens as well as from ENGSO members, and underlining the need to recognise the specific aspects related to volunteering in the European Union, ENGSO would like to highlight some key aspects regarding sport and volunteering.

Introduction

Sport is the biggest sector in volunteering in Europe, with as much as 35 million Europeans giving their time voluntarily to running sporting activities. About 60% of Europeans play sports and around 60 million are members in sports clubs. Sports clubs rely on volunteers with as much as 90% of clubs in some European countries counting on volunteers.³

People volunteer in many different roles in sports: On the one hand as coaches, leaders and administrators, which are tasks that often require very detailed expertise. Sometimes recognised qualifications are required for someone to become a volunteer. On the other hand, volunteers are the people putting up posters for local sports tournaments which is a task for which only basic skills are required.

The European Union has repeatedly recognised the importance of sport and its links with volunteering. The Lisbon Treaty (article 165) specifically states that the European Union shall take account of sports' structures based on voluntary activity while promoting European sporting issues. The Commission's White Paper on Sport from 2007 identifies volunteering as an important aspect of the societal role of sport. According to the White Paper, volunteering in sport organisations reinforces active citizenship and provides many occasions for non-formal education, which need to be recognised. It can also help people in getting involved in the society and in steering them away from delinquency.

¹ ENGSO is the European umbrella body for National Sport Confederations and National Olympic Committees and thus represents the movement in its broadest sense – from children and youth sport to sport-for-all activities up to elite sports. See also: www.engso.eu

² <http://www.engso.eu/clanek.php?id=5&tab=activities>

³ Special Eurobarometer 334 Sport and Physical Activity (2010); European Commission Study on volunteering (2010)



Obstacles and solutions for better volunteering

European cooperation to promote volunteering

Volunteers in sport work in many fields that are of utmost importance to the functioning of the society, such as social inclusion. Therefore, the recognition of the work of volunteers and voluntary sports organisations should be improved. Moreover, voluntary structures and traditions are not equally developed everywhere in Europe, and there is a recruiting potential of millions of citizens, especially in countries where people volunteer less than the average of the 27 Members States⁴.

In order to ensure the development of the volunteering sector in Europe, the European Union should:

- Draft and implement recommendations to promote volunteering in cooperation with volunteer organisations, especially the EYV2011 Alliance, and Member States.
- Make use of European instruments to nurture and promote a culture of volunteering in Europe, such as the future EU Sport Programme, the Youth in Action Programme, and the Europe for Citizens Programme.
- Work towards increasing volunteering especially in the Member States which are below the EU average.
- Support the exchange of best practice in the field of volunteering and sport.
- Ensure that people travelling to and within the European Union for volunteering will be able to do so, for example by establishing enabling visa practices for volunteers coming from third countries.

Developing and recognising the skills and competences of volunteers

Support to projects and other actions support not only the actual activities taking place in this framework, but also the volunteers which organise and run these activities. Research from the Netherlands shows that projects in which project activities are combined with the strengthening of volunteers' skills and competences are much more likely to have a long term effect than projects where only the activities are funded. Furthermore, recognising the skills learned through voluntary activity can be a factor for motivating people to become volunteers.

In order to ensure the development and recognition of the skills and competences of volunteers, the European Union should:

- Make available funding and resources for improving the skills and competences of the volunteers who organise and implement actions funded by the EU.
- Support training programmes for volunteers to ensure that the skills and qualifications of volunteers match the requirements of their voluntary position.

⁴ Special Eurobarometer 334 Sport and Physical Activity (2010)



- Continue developing easy-to-use tools and the recognition thereof for recognising the learning outcomes achieved when volunteering.

Ensuring the sustainable financing of non-profit voluntary organisations

Sport is recognised as having a specific nature within the European legal framework; this is specifically stated in the Lisbon Treaty article 165. For example, allowing reduced VAT rates to be applied to the use of sports facilities or VAT exemptions for non-profit sports organisations are important examples of the specific nature of sport on grassroots level⁵. National and local sports structures can only exist due to the special status of non-profit sports organisations with regard to taxation and also often from revenues guaranteed by state owned or licensed lotteries.

In order to ensure the sustainable financing of non-profit voluntary sports organisations, the European Union should:

- In line with the Commission's White Paper on Sport (2007) and the wish to ensure the sustainable financing of non-profit sports structures based on volunteering which was expressed in the Commission's Communication on Sport (2011), the Commission should continue defending VAT exemptions and tax breaks for sport in order to support these structures and to avoid unnecessary administrative burden for volunteers.
- Allow and encourage Member States to create additional tax incentives to promote volunteering in sport, such as exemptions for allowances for volunteers or deduction of voluntary work from income taxes.
- Secure the current system of public financing of non-profit volunteer-based sport through contributions from state-run lotteries and state-licensed gambling bodies.

Red card to red tape

One of biggest barriers to volunteering identified during the EU:SPORT:FUTURE project was considered to be the bureaucracy and legislation which burden volunteers. Taxation rules, excessive insurance schemes required by the authorities, working time rules, and data-protection rules which incur costs and require running complicated registers are examples of rules that can lead to excessive administrative burdens and to difficulties for non-profit volunteer-based organisations in raising enough funds to run their activities. Any additional administrative burden will decrease the involvement and motivation of volunteers.

Furthermore, when public funding is made available for voluntary organisations, it is often allocated through an application procedure as a result of which the support goes to organisations which can complete application forms the best, not organisations who need the money the most.

⁵ See also ENGSO Position Paper "Safe and improve tax breaks for sport organizations" (2011) http://www.engso.eu/admin/upload/ENGSO_Position_Paper_VAT_directive.pdf



In order to ensure the functioning of voluntary sports organisations, the European Union should:

- Assess the impact of all planned European legislation on volunteering, and conscientiously avoid unintended harmful consequences to non-profit voluntary sport organisations, especially when preparing the renewed VAT system.
- Reduce bureaucratic burden and red tape as much as possible and encourage Member States to do so in order not to impede volunteers in their work, for example when implementing EU programmes.
- Regarding the current revision of the working time directive, the Commission should ensure that daily and weekly limits to working time as well as sufficient rest periods from work will also be maintained in the future. Leisure time is a vital precondition for engaging in voluntary activities in the first place.
- Ensure that volunteer time contributions are accepted as contributions in kind in EU programmes.
- Take action to establish a statute of a European Association.
- Support the initiative to establish a Charter on the Rights of the Volunteer.

Conclusion

With sport being the biggest sector of volunteering in Europe, ENGSO stresses the importance of ensuring and improving the status of volunteers and voluntary sports organisations in Europe as well as on national level. We want to contribute to this effort through our projects, actions and by motivating young people to join us through ENGSO Youth⁶, the Youth Committee of ENGSO.

One of the objectives of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, as identified by the European Union itself, is to create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU. Therefore, it is essential that the EU actually makes good use of EYV2011 and shows its support to volunteers and voluntary organisations in sports and other fields instead of taking away from the voluntary sector, as it now risks doing through legislative actions which impact volunteering, such as removing the possibility for VAT exemptions.

When thinking about all the ways that volunteers contribute to European societies, ENGSO would like to highlight that the essence and intrinsic value of volunteering and the motives of volunteers should not be forgotten. Volunteering is, in general, not done because people want qualifications or material rewards, but because they want to make a contribution to society, because they want to help other people, because they want to belong to a group, or for various other reasons. Volunteering cannot and must not replace employment or formal education; it must remain an optional, attractive option for all.

Adopted by the ENGSO Executive Committee on 8 July 2011

⁶ www.youth-sport.net