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DRAFT POLICY BRIEF ON THE TOPIC
“TAPPING THE POTENTIAL OF VOLUNTEERING”

This document prepared by the secretariat is a first draft of a policy brief on the topic “Tapping the potential of volunteering” as agreed in the Second Meeting of the Working Group on Ageing in November 2009 (paragraph 17 in ECE/WG.1/2009/2).

Tapping the potential of volunteering

Commitment 2 of the UNECE Strategy on Ageing: To ensure full integration and participation of older persons in society.

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Challenging context

The concept of volunteering has many aspects. Across the UNECE region there is no unified definition of volunteering in terms of pay, duration of activity, and content of work. In this context a clear distinction between regular employment and volunteering shall be drawn, which has to be different than the mere fact of remuneration. Benefits for volunteers need to be clearly outlined, e.g. training opportunities, social participation and inclusion, as well as other aspects. Older persons are benefiting from volunteering as providers and recipients. Promoting these activities shall be in the interest of every government. This can be achieved by offering support to organisations and volunteers through the outlined strategies.

Suggested strategies

- Appropriate legal framework
- Support to organisations and volunteers
- Life-long learning
- Awareness-raising activities
- Research on volunteering

Expected result

Volunteering is a desirable form of social participation for people who are not otherwise able or willing to be active in gainful employment or who engage into it in addition to gainful employment.

Introduction

To the concept of volunteering

Volunteering is an important means for citizens to make meaningful contribution to an area of their interest and concern. It promotes social inclusion and participation based on the individual's understanding of societal solidarity and appreciation of human life. Furthermore, a diverse civil society, which relies to a great extent on volunteer contributions, is a key element of every democratic society.

For a useful concept of volunteer work and its distinction from remunerated work, it appears important first of all to discuss the concept of work as such. Most people work to secure their financial subsistence. In an ideal case, it would be also desirable that every kind of work should incorporate meaning for the individual, should be embedded into an ethical framework and make a contribution to the society as a whole.

In general however, paid work takes place under market conditions, which means that a particular work effort is delivered for a specific pay, either according to its value in the labour market or according to the negotiated or regulated pay for this occupation, or time worked (e.g. minimum wage). Paid work is undertaken according to a specific job profile and it often requires a particular education or training. Furthermore, in many member states the age period in which paid work can be done is restricted by a mandatory retirement age. With regard to volunteering of older person it is not desirable that member states promote a mandatory retirement age on the one hand, and promote volunteering of older persons on the other hand, which may induce older persons who are fit enough to work, but forced to retire, to switch to volunteer work.

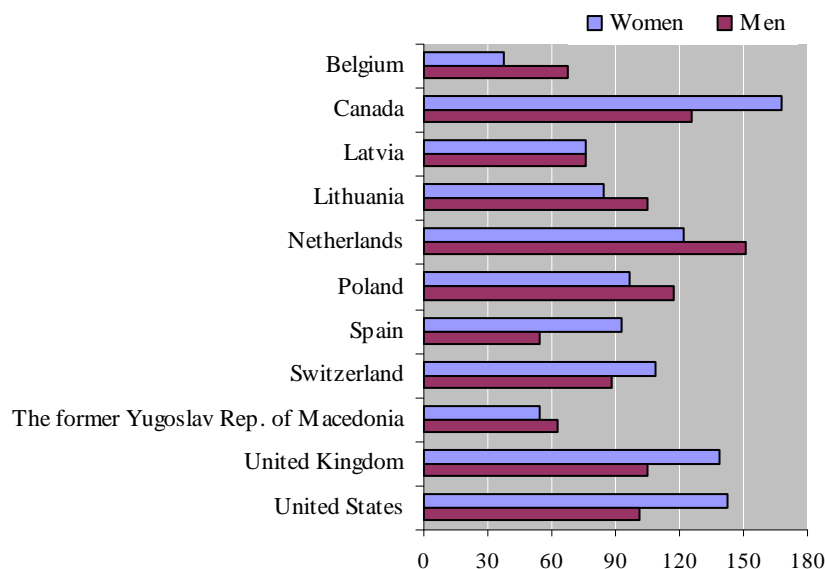
In contrast to paid work, volunteer work offers the opportunity for citizens to make a contribution to a particular area of work independently from the educational background, job profile, or age. As an expression of grassroots democracy, volunteering is a purposeful instrument to enhance social inclusion and participation. Creating opportunities for citizens to express their specific concerns is beneficial for the society as a whole as well as for the individual.

How frequently do people volunteer?

To gauge how widespread volunteering is in general and among older population in particular is not an easy task. Time-use surveys that collect data on how individuals (usually of age 15 and over¹) spend their time often include a question on the volunteer work and help performed outside their household. Data from such time-use surveys conducted in a number of the UNECE countries may provide some indicative statistics.

¹ In some countries the age of surveyed population may be defined differently and have both lower and upper limits: for instance, for the harmonized European time-use survey the system offers a default, common population delimitation, of 20-74 years, but countries are free to adapt it.

Chart 1. Volunteer work and help
*Minutes per week (on average per individual)**



Source: UNECE Statistical Database (www.unece.org/stats/data)

Note: ‘Volunteer work and help’ represents the average time spent by an individual working for/through an organisation and informal help to other households.

* Data refer to most recent year available from 2003 onwards. Only UNECE countries with available data are shown.

Among the UNECE countries presented in the chart, the average time spent by an individual woman on volunteer work and help varies from nearly three hours a week in Canada to about 40 minutes a week in Belgium. The individual man spent on average from two and half hours in the Netherlands to about 55 minutes a week in Spain. Gender differences in volunteering are apparent in many countries but the direction of the divide is not always the same: in some countries women volunteer more than men, while in others the reverse is true. Only in Latvia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia do we see little or no gender difference in time spent volunteering.

As regards older people’s involvement in voluntary activity, one study² based on data from the ‘Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe’ (SHARE) reveals that senior volunteering presents a clear spatial pattern across Europe. Countries can be divided into three groups: Italy, Greece, and Spain with lower participation rates; Germany, France, Switzerland and Austria with medium activity levels; and the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden with higher participation rates. In addition, SHARE data confirm that activity rates decline sharply when seniors over 75 are considered.

² Erlinghagen, M. & Hank, K. (2005). "Participation of Older Europeans in Volunteer Work," MEA discussion paper series 05071, Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging (MEA), University of Mannheim.

Member states may want to consider how volunteer engagement could be promoted among women and men, of any age, in order to allow them to actively participate in society. The following text may clarify some concepts and suggest some ideas in this matter.

Volunteering of older persons

***Why is volunteering a useful concept to enhance older people's participation in society?*³**

The transition from working life to retirement is a crossroad in life. After the “retirement honeymoon” phase is over, many retirees begin to feel a void in their lives. They miss the different aspects of work life: the relationships with their colleagues, the challenges of their work, the milieu (social dynamics, office humour), the professional identities that defined who they were and the respect they have gained from it. In order to fill this void, retirees might look for new opportunities that fill their life and give it a new purpose.

This sense of void is aggravated by thoughts of the inevitable aging process - growing old and frail and becoming of no use to society. If this void is not filled, this no longer will be just a personal problem. It will become a concern for society, because this individual may come to rely on the community to take care of his different needs. How does the retiree fill the void and live a healthy, long and satisfying life, in other words successfully age? How can we encourage a process of successful aging that would benefit both the retiree and society? ‘Successful aging’ describes a state of little or no age related decline in the physiological and cognitive abilities. Successful aging is made up of three components: “low probability of disease and disease-related disability, high cognitive and physical functional capacity, and active engagement with life”.⁴ Before people retired they were fulfilling active engagement mainly in their professional life. After retirement the alternative for active engagement⁵ can be found in volunteering, an important tool for social inclusion in old age⁶.

“Older persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities”.⁷ Volunteering can be either formal or informal. Formal volunteering covers all types of activities organised by an organisation, while informal volunteering refers to giving unpaid help as an individual to someone who is not a family member. In the framework of a volunteering programme it needs to be ensured that older persons are not

³ Yad Sarah. (2010). “Volunteering: a Key ingredient for Successful Ageing”, p. 2. See UNECE Good Practice Database: http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Policy_briefs/GoodPractices.html

⁴ Rowe, J.W., Kahn, R.L. (1997). “Successful ageing”. *Gerontologist* 37 (4): p. 433.

⁵ The UNECE Policy brief on Ageing No. 4 is specifically dedicated to the topic of older people's participation in society and can provide more general information.

⁶ Eurofound. (2010). “Measures for social inclusion of the elderly: The case of volunteering”. Working paper, p.3.

⁷ UN Principles for Older Persons. (1991). No. 8.

forced into retirement, when they actually are still fit and willing to continue regular work, in order to continue the same activity under different conditions.

Areas of work

Volunteers work in a variety of areas, such as education, culture and art, health and social services, sport and leisure, child care, counseling, mentoring, support for prisoners and victims, advocacy, campaigning, animal and environmental protection, management, disaster control and other emergency services.⁸ Volunteering takes place within the non-profit as well as the private sector. As volunteering mainly serves the purpose to enhance social participation, the non-profit sector should be the prioritized area of work. However, if the private sector offers opportunities for volunteering, the context as well as the conditions under which volunteer work takes place need to be clearly framed, so that it does not entail any exploitative elements.

Lire et faire lire: reading programme in France

Lire et faire lire (Read and let read) is a programme designed to spread the pleasure of reading as well as intergenerational solidarity, and is aimed at children in primary schools and in other educational structures (recreational centers, day-nurseries, libraries).

The programme, founded in 1999 and promoted by the national association of the same name, was inspired by a similar activity that has been organised in Brest since 1985. The departments of Lire et faire lire are organised by coordinators of two national associative networks: Ligue de l'Enseignement and UNAF (Union Nationale des Associations Familiales). A large committee of writers has supported Lire et faire lire since its creation.

Upon request from directors of educational institutions, volunteers older than 50 years offer part of their free time to children to spur their taste for reading and promote their interest in literature. Out-loud reading sessions are organised in small groups, once or twice per week. The volunteers, after a month of trial, commit until the end of the scholastic year. In 2008-2009, 5,530 educational institutions welcomed 11,901 senior volunteers interacting with more than 250,000 children. Lire et faire lire was also launched in Switzerland in 2001 and in Quebec in 2002.

Source: Lire et faire lire. <http://www.lireetfairelire.org/LFL/> (last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Supporting volunteers

To encourage volunteers, member states may want to consider how they can effectively support volunteering by offering a legal and social framework in terms of financial security and social security. “The establishment of a legal framework for undertaking voluntary work would represent considerable opportunities for developing the voluntary sector. The law should ensure that volunteering is protected and promoted and that the

⁸ European Volunteer Centre. (2006). “Manifesto for Volunteering in Europe”, p. 4.

legal requirements do not discourage volunteering. There is a need to be very clear about the purpose of the legislation and the policy aims it tries to pursue, which need to be developed in partnership with voluntary organisations”.⁹

Financial Security

In general, it can be assumed that older volunteers have previous (pensions, savings) or parallel (salary) sources of income. However, it should be taken “into account that volunteering incurs costs and that ideally all citizens, independent of their financial resources, should be in a position to volunteer if they so desire”.¹⁰ Even if the main source of income is in principle secured, some form of compensation for expenses occurring in the context of the volunteer work may be considered, such as reimbursement of expenses (e.g. for equipment, materials), meal tickets or token payments.¹¹

The Reserve Grandparent Scheme in Denmark

Since parents in Denmark can only take one paid day off work when their child falls ill, the ‘Reserve Grandparent Scheme’ was created: retired older people can act as substitute grandparents and take care of sick children while the parents go back to work.

In total the Danish Ministry of Social Welfare allocated 650,000 Euros (State budget 2008) for financial support. Both local municipalities and NGOs can apply for funding. ‘Reserve Grandparent Scheme’ initiatives are supported in seven locations across Denmark. Four projects are run by local municipalities and three projects by NGOs. One of these, in the municipality of Gladsaxe, is managed by the local non-profit association “Gladsaxe Reserve Grandparents”. The association recruits grandparents by advertising in local newspapers and distributing folders to organisations for elderly people and public institutions such as childcare institutions, doctors and libraries.

To be selected as reserve grandparents, volunteers must meet strict selection criteria. Reserve grandparents are typically: retired, 60 or more years old, in good physical condition and live in the same neighbourhood as the families for whom they offer their service. They undergo a check of their physical condition and criminal record; the association staff, prior to selection, makes a home visit. Volunteers are also required to pass training courses in first aid and childhood illnesses. The scheme believes firmly in respecting the volunteers’ schedules: grandparents only volunteer on the days on which they can guarantee their availability.

The grandparents receive a small monetary token from parents (€4.25 per hour, tax free).

Sources: European Union – European Alliance For Families. Good Practices.

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/families/index.cfm?langId=en&id=5&pr_i_id=131

The Reserve Grandparent Programme in Denmark – Synthesis Report:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/families/admintool/userfiles/file/Ottosen%20Report%20Final.pdf Gladsaxe Reserve Grandparents Presentation:

⁹ GHK. (2010). “Volunteering in the European Union. Final Report”, p. 17.

¹⁰ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) Societies, Inter-Parliamentary Union, United Nations Volunteers. (2004). “Volunteerism and Legislation: a Guidance Note”, p. 19.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 13, 19, 21.

Social Security

Volunteers have the right to work in a safe, secure and healthy environment. Member states may want to encourage organisations to ensure that these conditions are met. It is important that insurance coverage is provided, against the risks of accidents and illness related to the activity, as well as civil liability, in the case the volunteer should cause any damage or injury in good faith.¹² “Labour laws should provide for the transfer of liability of volunteers to the private or public entities for which they work, as is the case for paid employees. When transferring liability from volunteers to non-profit volunteer-involving organisations, the law should encourage or prescribe the subscription of liability insurance policies to cover the risks”.¹³

HumanaS network in Serbia

The HumanaS initiative was launched in 2004. Its main goals are to bring older people’s issues into the policy mainstream and to improve the financial and health security of older people. This initiative campaigns to raise awareness of the National Strategy on Ageing and to enhance older people’s understanding of their rights, to introduce social pensions and to facilitate access to free medication for older people.

The HumanaS network of organisations is active in the protection of the rights of older persons. The Red Cross of Serbia was a founding member and is currently the chairing member among 15 non-governmental organisations. The network is engaged in advocacy and partnership activities addressing issues of older people. In 2007-2008 it ran an advocacy project in partnership with the Serbian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, with financial support from USAID, to support the implementation of the National Strategy on Ageing. In 2008 and 2009 the network ran an advocacy campaign, raising awareness of discrimination, neglect and abuse of older people, initiated by a public survey, as well as an advocacy campaign on social pensions. The NGO Help the Aged supported some of the HumanaS activities in past years. The advocacy project linked to the National Strategy on Ageing led to the mapping in every Serbian municipality of resources and capacities that are linked to the activities targeting and involving older people. Today more than 90 municipalities have their own plans for activities on ageing issues. The project covering discrimination, neglect and abuse of older people was the first ever in Serbia to collect data systematically on these topics and present them to the public. HumanaS is the only advocacy network of non-governmental organisations in Serbia focusing on older people's issues but also involving older people themselves in the activities. Since 2004 HumanaS network has increased the level of NGO co-operation with government institutions.

At the advocacy level HumanaS network is active in combating poverty (through lobbying for social pensions for older people with no income). Through HumanaS

¹² Ibid. p. 21.

¹³ Ibid., p.13.

network a survey has been conducted to ascertain the number of older people without any income, and the activities are devised and planned on the basis of these data.¹⁴

Source: HumanaS. <http://www.humanas.rs/> (last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Enabling Environment

“Volunteers in this [50+] age group can face a series of barriers that hinder, and sometimes even prevent, their participation in voluntary activity. The most obvious is the application of the statutory retirement age by organisations to older volunteers, in effect closing the gate at the very time would-be volunteers should be free to enter”.¹⁵ Older persons “often encounter discrimination in the form of ‘ageism’¹⁶, and general prejudice on the part of potential user organisations, which limits them to working with other older people or restricting their involvement completely. They are also challenged by restricted access to information about opportunities to volunteer and difficulties of physical access to such opportunities due to economic and other factors”.¹⁷ Governments therefore may want to address these challenges in an appropriate way. Physical limitations related to old age and/or disability should be taken in account, but not seen as an impediment. Measures can be implemented to reduce the discomfort due to impairments as much as possible.

Training of volunteers

Training of volunteers is essential for many activities. Training opportunities include for example: first aid, communication techniques, conflict resolution, ethics, administration and fundraising. “Adult learning¹⁸ programmes may contribute to provide older persons with theoretical and practical information and all the necessary ‘tools’ to carry out their activity in the best possible way.”¹⁹ Education and training opportunities provided can be various: “introductory training, ongoing and advanced training, peer volunteer support, mentoring or ‘buddying’ schemes and specialist training”.²⁰ Training can constitute a further incentive for volunteers to become active. Often older persons are also willing to train and share experience with other older persons, when enabled to do so.

Senior Trainers in Germany

The "Experience for Initiatives" (2002-2006) of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth developed a course for older persons to train them as

¹⁴ See as source: Lydia Kozarcanin. Department for Research and Development. Republic Institute for Social Welfare.

¹⁵ Davis Smith J., Gay P. (2005). “Active Ageing in Active Communities”. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p.3.

¹⁶ Oxford Dictionary defines ageism as: prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person's age. See: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0013230#m_en_gb0013230

¹⁷ UN Volunteers concept paper for the Second World Assembly on Ageing. (2002). “Voluntary action by older people”.

¹⁸ For concepts of lifelong learning and adult learning please consult: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2010). Lifelong Learning. Policy Brief on Ageing No. 5. Geneva: UNECE

¹⁹ Yad Sarah. Op. cit. See: http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Policy_briefs/GoodPractices.html

²⁰ GHK. Op.cit., p. 161.

senior trainers. The aim of the project is to strengthen the role of older people in society, by enabling them to volunteer in their community and by assisting them to find new responsibilities by leading groups or advising others after completion.

The training takes 50 hours in a period of six weeks. The lessons consist of 14 modules which have several objectives such as self-affirmation and reflection of experiences, as well as competencies and role-specific knowledge about society and civil engagement. The training takes place in co-operation with network partners, which are associations, initiatives and groups in the voluntary sector, and in particular agencies for civic involvement such as volunteer centers, seniors' offices, and contact points for self-help. Possible areas of subsequent work are related to social affairs and health, youth and education, leisure and sociability, culture, music, politics, sport and physical activity, schools and environmental protection.

Source: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend: SeniorTrainerIn. Erfahrungswissen für Initiativen.

http://www.bmfsfj.bund.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Weiterbildung-_C3_A4Iterer-Menschen-senior-Trainer,property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,rwb=true.pdf and

<http://www.efi-programm.de/> (last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Also network organisations can help to facilitate an exchange of experiences which may lead to the development of new ideas for projects, where more experienced volunteers can act as mentors.

“Think Future, Volunteer Together”: a project of the European Volunteer Center to promote senior volunteering through international exchanges

“Think Future, Volunteer Together” was a two year project (2007–2009), to promote senior volunteering through international exchange visits of elderly people in five European countries (Italy, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia).²¹

The programme entailed diverse volunteering projects and activities, ranging from cultural to environmental, from social to civic, so that the visiting senior volunteers could get a comprehensive view of the concept and practice of volunteering in the hosting country.

A large number of follow up activities took place: microprojects carried out by returned volunteers, further planning for support to senior volunteering as a tool to promote active ageing, development of practical and policy recommendations, and public presentations. The final project results were presented at the final conference organised by CEV at the

²¹ The project involved five CEV member organisations: SPES – Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio (Italy); C.A.R.D.O. (Slovakia); ÖKA – Önkentes Központ Alapítvány (Hungary); Pro Vobis Centrul National de Voluntariat (Romania); and Slovenska Filantropija (Slovenia). The project was co-funded by the European Commission - Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (DG EMPL) in the framework of the EU ENEA pilot programme, for the mobility of people older than fifty five years. The European Volunteer Center (CEV) was responsible for policy advising, and promotion and dissemination of the project results at EU level.

European Parliament in Brussels on 19th November 2009. The final report, “Promotion of senior volunteering through international exchanges, practical and policy recommendations”, and the Portrait Book, which gathers stories and pictures from 100 senior volunteers involved in the exchanges, were published in November 2009 and distributed at the conference.

Sources: Think Future, Volunteer Together. European Volunteer Center.

[http://www.cev.be/101-think_future_volunteer_together_\(senior_volunteering\)-EN.html](http://www.cev.be/101-think_future_volunteer_together_(senior_volunteering)-EN.html)

“Promotion of senior volunteering through international exchanges. Practical and Policy Recommendations” – Final Report.

http://www.cev.be/data/File/TFVT_final_report_practical_and_policy_recommendations.pdf

(last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Feedback on volunteering

Feedback on volunteer work is an important measure for the volunteer as well as the organisation that gains from this kind of support, in order to realise the best possible benefit for both partners. A clear agreement on the activities, timeframe and responsibility of the volunteer work undertaken is necessary to obtain these benefits. Governments may wish to include a project element where supervisors and volunteers assess the current situation, give each other feedback on effort and results and discuss room for improvement. As a result a collective evaluation report can be prepared.

Volunteering service of all generations in Germany

Whether young or old, everyone can get involved and participate in the volunteering service of all generations. In January 2004, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) convened the commission "Impulses of civil society" in order to launch a programme which is open to people of all ages. The model programme "Intergenerational Volunteer Service" started in September 2005. The aim was to promote and develop the potential of older people through the joint participation of young and elderly. When the pilot programme ended in 2008, 9,000 volunteers had completed voluntary service. Nearly 5,000 of them were still actively engaged at the end of the project. At present, 46 flagship projects are promoted as exemplary initiatives by the Federal Government. There are also several projects funded by the German Federal Länder (Bundesländer) which take into account the opportunities of demographic change and have therefore established voluntary services.

Mobile teams advise and support local authorities and institutions with the introduction or development of volunteering services for all age groups. The Federal Government also financially supports the implementation and dissemination of voluntary services through professional training of volunteers.

The volunteers can get involved for at least eight hours per week for at least six months, in various fields such as health care, education, culture, environment, sports, family assistance, integration of immigrants, and integration of the experience and knowledge of older people.

Source: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend: Freiwilligendienste aller Generation. <http://www.freiwilligendienste-aller-generationen.de/freiwilligendienste-aller-generationen.html> (last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Benefits for the volunteers

Volunteering can be a gratifying and fulfilling experience for older persons. Senior volunteers give much to society through voluntary work, but they also receive some benefits. Considering the ‘emotional’ benefits, older people are induced to go out of the house and meet new people,²² entering new social circles which will replace the ones they have left behind in their workplace.²³ Moreover, they give life a new scope after retirement, put their experience to good use, return some help elsewhere received and feel contented of their accomplishments and their contribution to society. Making a difference is in fact something that most volunteers look for in their volunteer work.²⁴

“Generations Together” in the United Kingdom

“Generations Together” is a £5.5 million programme to boost intergenerational volunteering, running from September 2009 to March 2011. It is a cross-Government programme involving the Department of Health, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Office of the Third Sector. It funds 12 local authorities that are running a number of different activities to recruit older and younger volunteers including mentoring, skills exchanges and healthy eating projects.

The main purposes of the programme are: to generate wider interest in intergenerational work; to increase the number of volunteers involved in intergenerational activity by 20,000 by the end of the programme; to encourage a more strategic and sustainable approach; and to provide robust evidence of the effectiveness of intergenerational initiatives.

Intergenerational practice can take many forms. In the case of volunteering, “it can be:

- Older people assisting younger people – through mentoring and skill-sharing;
- Younger people helping older people – through skill-sharing (for example teaching IT skills) and other caring acts (for example gardening, or reading to people with failing eyesight);
- Old and young coming together to improve the community”.

Source: Generations together. Department for children, schools and families.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/Youth/youthmatters/youthtaskforce/generationstogether/generationstogether/> (last accessed on November 10, 2010).

PDF Document: “Generations Together. A demonstrator programme of Intergenerational Practice. Invitation to Bid and Specification”.

²² Davis Smith J., Gay P. Op.cit., p.22.

²³ Yad Sarah. (2010). Op. Cit., p. 2. See: http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Policy_briefs/GoodPractices.html

²⁴ Ibid.

Volunteering is not only a good way to actively engage in life, it also contributes to physical and mental functions, as it promotes physical activity and keeps the mind active.²⁵ More “practical” benefits include: training courses, reimbursement of expenses and financial remunerations.

A model project to safeguard the future of voluntary commitment in Austria

The two-year model project (2008–2010) known as ULF - Unabhängiges Landesfreiwilligenzentrum (Independent State Volunteer Centre) and promoted by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection and the Social Affairs Department of the State of Upper Austria implements measures to create professional structures for the management of volunteers in order to recruit, advise, place and guide volunteers.

The model project aims to establish a culture of solidarity and mutual support, as well as a new culture of active ageing with the focus to enabling older persons to participate in social life. After a two-year pilot phase, the ULF will be implemented in many other Austrian states. To provide thrust to new volunteer projects in Upper Austria, an ideas contest “GEMA-Gemeinsam aktiv” (Let’s get active together) was launched in 2008.

The GEMA model projects in Upper Austria offer retired people opportunities for self-fulfilment and a meaningful life. For instance one project (called “OIDE-project”) places volunteers in socio-pedagogical residential facilities for children and youths, where they have a chance to pass on their experience and knowledge to younger persons. The project enables older people to proactively spend time with children, depending on their own time resources and their other commitments. The support offered to volunteers is in form of company, an exchange of experience, responsibility, supervision and further training.

Source: Unabhängiges Landesfreiwilligenzentrum. Eine Initiative des Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz. www.ulf-ooe.at

Volunteering for older persons

Age-group and gender of volunteers

Older persons are not only providers of volunteer work, they also receive volunteer care and help by volunteers of all generations. These volunteers who work for older persons could be students, workers, unemployed or retired people, of both sexes. Inclusion and integration of all social groups in the volunteering system is desirable in an open and democratic society. It is desirable that men and women, as well for young and old people, are welcomed in organisations in the same manner, equal number and same level of responsibilities according to their skills.²⁶

²⁵ Corporation for National and Community Service. (2007). The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research.

²⁶ For further information on the numbers of men and women that volunteer, as well as on their age distribution, see: GHK. Op.cit., p.72.

Helplines for elderly people: Italy and Ireland

Filo d'Argento (Silver Thread) is an Italian helpline that aims to combat loneliness and social exclusion of older persons; it was created by Auser, a voluntary association promoting active ageing and integration of senior persons in society. From 2002, elderly people in need of help or companionship have been able to call a national toll-free number, accessible every day from 8am to 8pm (24 hours a day in the Lombardy region). 120 local centres work together with the national helpline. The volunteers number around 6000, from all over Italy. Filo d'Argento, like a thread, ties together senior citizens and volunteers: it offers conversation, support, and acts as a watchdog against abuse. Volunteers also help older people to keep living in their homes by creating relationship networks, arranging deliveries of groceries and medicines, providing transport for medical examinations or errands, and giving out information on services and activities in the area they live in.

In 2006 Filo d'Argento was among the winners of the SOLIDAR's Silver Rose Awards.

Modelled on the Italian project 'Filo D'Argento', the Irish Senior Helpline is a confidential listening service for older people by older people, for the price of a local call anywhere in Ireland. The service provides opportunities for older people to talk to someone of their own age group. Calls arise from loneliness and isolation, family problems, health issues, abuse and neglect, bereavement or information-seeking. Today the national service is provided by trained volunteers in 14 centres nationwide. Volunteers undergo a training programme that includes listening skills, helping callers explore options, and offering helpful and appropriate information.

Sources: For Italian project: Filo d'Argento – Auser. <http://www.auser.it/filodargento/filodargento.htm> and <http://www1.auser.it/EN/> (last accessed on November 10, 2010).

For Irish project: Senior Help Line. <http://www.seniorhelpline.ie/> (last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Areas of work

Volunteer services for older persons may take place in hospitals and nursing homes, and may range from assisting or entertaining patients to providing transportation to ill people in need. Volunteers may participate in older persons' everyday life by running errands, delivering groceries and drugs to their home, or providing other types of assistance at home. Furthermore, volunteers may help out in community and day centres that welcome older persons, by spending time together, doing recreational or learning activities (computer skills, foreign languages, arts). Special events are organised on relevant dates (e.g. October 1st, UN International Day of Older Persons), aimed at senior citizens to get them involved or at the society in general to raise awareness of age-related issues.²⁷

²⁷ For the International Day of Older Persons, see: <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/olderpersons/>

Yad Sarah in Israel

Yad Sarah is the one of the largest voluntary organisations in Israel. It provides a spectrum of free or nominal cost services designed to make life easier for people with special needs and their families. The main goal is to keep these people in their homes and enable them to be treated and rehabilitated among their families, since home care in the regular environment of the family is most conducive to healthy recuperation, both physically and emotionally.

The organisation has a broad infrastructure providing a wide range of services, including transportation and day care centres for the disabled; drop-in centres and minimum-charge dental clinics for the elderly; personal computerised emergency alarms monitored 24 hours a day; and demonstration centres which help disabled people to choose the assistive devices most suited to their needs. Yad Sarah provides homebound people with a wide range of volunteer-run creative, recreational and rehabilitative activities, at their homes.

The most popular service provided by the organisation is the "Lending Centre", a service that exists in every one of the 103 branches of the organisation. This service provides medical and rehabilitative equipment to people with special needs, as well as new mothers, infants, and recently discharged hospital patients.

Yad Sarah's services are run and managed by more than 6,000 volunteers, and save the Israeli economy about \$400 million a year just by avoiding unnecessary days of hospitalisation.

The central office in the Jerusalem headquarters coordinates all volunteer matters. New volunteers undergo special training for the job. There is professional supervision and guidance, and over time the volunteer is given more specialised training and upgrading. There are also special social and cultural activities for volunteers. The volunteer-staffed organisation serves over 380,000 Israelis yearly – one out of every two Israeli families has been helped by Yad Sarah at least once in their lifetime. The organisation has been the recipient of several awards and honours, including the President's Award for Volunteering in 1982 and the Kaplan Prize for Efficiency in 1990. In 1994, 18 years after it was founded, Yad Sarah received the highest award given by the State of Israel for "a significant contribution to the society and the State", the Israel Prize. In 2005, Yad Sarah was recognized as an advisory body to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. Yad Sarah has been associated with the DPI/UN since 2003.

Yad Sarah's annual budget is about 23,000,000 USD, 92% of which are covered by donations.

Source: Yad Sarah. <http://www.yadsarah.org/index.asp?id=198> (last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Supporting volunteers

As volunteers are coming from a variety of backgrounds it is important to provide some degree of financial and social security. In contrast to volunteer work provided by older

persons who rely to a great extent on their pensions and savings, younger persons do not necessarily have this financial backup. Providing any kind of financial security would help volunteers to perform their work in a more stable framework. Social security in this context also includes the promotion of preventive health care measures or training. Especially for volunteers working with ill people, a specific health insurance can be considered, to protect them from getting ill as well.

Core functions supporting local voluntary work and family care in the Netherlands

The aim of the project, running from 2009 to 2012, is to raise the number of volunteers in the Netherlands and to (at least) maintain the number of family carers. Since the implementation of the Social Support Act in the Netherlands in 2007, municipalities have had the legal obligation to support family carers and volunteers. To help municipalities, so-called “core functions for voluntary work and family care” have been developed. These core functions are drafted in close co-operation between the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities, the Association of Dutch Voluntary Effort Organizations and Mezzo, the National Association for Carers and Voluntary helpers.

Although municipalities, on account of the Social Support Act, are primarily responsible for the social support that they provide and autonomous in the way it is implemented, the core functions are to be considered as guidelines. They offer municipalities support with policy formulation. Key priorities for municipalities are to induce individuals to participate actively in society and to better co-ordinate their own services. In 2009 a detailed operation started with € 3,500,000 of government funding, focused on advising municipalities about the local development and implementation of these core functions.

Sources: Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

<http://english.minvws.nl/en/themes/social-support-act/> and <http://www.prestatieveld4.nl>
(last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Training of volunteers

Training aimed at volunteers working for older persons should especially focus on assistance techniques, first aid, age-related diseases (prevention and treatment), and listening skills. Also some training or guidance in the area of care, e.g. palliative care, may help the assisting person to perform their task in a professional manner. All the training methods suggested in the section on training for senior volunteers are valid in this context as well, always following the life-long learning approach: a well-designed training course to enable volunteers to offer the best possible service, a settling-in period, refresher courses and the creation of networks to share experience.

The National Gerontological Association ‘Second Breath’ in Moldova

Second Breath (Respirația a Doua), the National Gerontological Association, is an NGO active in promoting a rights-based agenda for older people in Moldova. The Association is a HelpAge International affiliate and main partner for projects organised in Moldova.

Second Breath pursues the following goals, all aimed at older people: development of community-based services; publication and dissemination of related educational material; co-ordination of and collaboration with NGOs and governmental organizations; development of palliative care services and training programmes.

In 2003-2004, Second Breath and HelpAge International (HAI) worked together on the project “Reintegration of Older People into Moldovan society” with the financial support of the European Commission’s TACIS-IBPP (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States - Institution Building Partnership Programme) and Development Co-operation Ireland. The goal of the project was to promote the social reintegration of vulnerable older people by developing older people’s support groups and building NGO capacity to sustain them, in different regions of Northern Moldova. The activities resulted in a Final Conference in Chisinau and a Good Practice Manual.

As an extension of this project in Northern Moldova, the project “Social reintegration of vulnerable and marginalised older people in rural communities of Southern Moldova” was launched in 2005. Seven Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Initiative Groups (IG) were selected to work in the project as implementing partners, with the active support of the lead Southern partner, Rural Social Initiative. Second Breath provided advisory support, undertaking to organise the participation of five Northern organisations as mentors.

Sources: National Gerontological Association Second Breath.
<http://www.respi.org/index.html> (last accessed on November 10, 2010)

Benefits for the volunteers

As ‘emotional’ benefits, volunteers gain a better understanding of older persons’ issues, achieve personal development, feel contented of accomplishments and contribution to society and employ their free time in a useful way. But also very concrete benefits may show the appreciation of the tasks performed on a volunteer basis. The benefits may include: reimbursement of expenses, token payments, training courses, field experience and enhanced employability in the job market²⁸. Moreover, volunteers could receive accreditation and certification (nature and length of activity)²⁹ and a letter of recommendation.

Recommendations

Volunteering is a desirable form of social participation for people who are not otherwise able or willing to be active in gainful employment or to engage in it in addition to gainful employment. Member states may like to support volunteering activities by ensuring an enabling environment for volunteers and their organisations. The following recommendations may help member states to promote volunteering in their country.

²⁸ GHK. Op.cit., p.32.

²⁹ IFRC Societies, Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN Volunteers. Op. cit., p.21.

Appropriate legal framework

In creating or reforming the legal framework, a close consultation with the stakeholders is strongly recommended.³⁰ In fact, in order to achieve an effective implementation, it is essential to “ensure a participatory drafting process and maintain good relations and open communication between government and civil society”.³¹ A legal framework may entail elements such as the legal distinction between non-profit, state and private organisations, but also legal provisions that guarantee tax incentives and fundraising opportunities for organisations that work on a non-profit basis with the help of volunteers.

Support to organisations and volunteers

Governments may want to consider the most appropriate and most effective way to support organisations that rely on voluntary contributions, other than aspects concerning the legal framework. This support could take place through the development of programmes or projects, through sharing concepts on training and evaluation, through awareness-raising activities as well as through research on the economic impact of volunteering.

Adult learning

A clear framework for a training scheme of the respective volunteer is essential. Member states are invited to “support certification schemes for volunteers aimed at recognizing the development of competencies through volunteering in the educational systems.”³² Furthermore member states may wish to facilitate adult learning programmes and provide instruments to share information and good practice, with the purpose to inform and further qualify interested volunteers.

Awareness-raising activities

Awareness-raising campaigns, aimed at the whole society, could be launched, to underline the extraordinary contribution brought by volunteers. A positive image of volunteerism needs to be actively promoted, for example by organising events or fairs. Moreover, to encourage senior citizens to take up volunteering, the benefits of volunteering to the individual as well as to the entire society need to be emphasised.

Research

Member states may want to improve their research effort in the volunteering sector, encouraging data collection, analysis and then dissemination of results through websites and publications. Techniques for measuring the economic value of volunteering deserve a particular focus.³³

³⁰ IFRC Societies, Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN Volunteers. Op. cit., pp.9-10.

³¹ UN Volunteers. (2009). “Laws and Policies Affecting Volunteerism Since 2001”, p.16.

³² European Volunteer Centre (CEV). Op. cit., p. 8.

³³ GHK. Op. cit., p. 260.

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Checklist: Tapping the potential of volunteering		
Goals	Policy Areas	Key Policy Elements
Ensure an enabling environment	Appropriate legal framework	Eliminate obstacles to the participation of senior volunteers
		Close consultation with stakeholders
		Legal distinction between non-profit, governmental and private sector
		Tax incentives
		Fundraising opportunities
Concrete support to organisations and volunteers	Life-long learning	Training
		Mentoring
		Networks of organisations to share experience
	Awareness-raising	Promoting a positive image of volunteering
		Campaigns, annual events aimed at the whole society
		Specific recruitment campaigns towards senior citizens
	Research	Data collection
		Data analysis
		Dissemination of results
		Measuring the economic value of volunteering