



**EUROPEAN CHARTER ON
THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOLUNTEERS**

PREAMBLE

We believe that volunteering and active citizenship are a rights not a privileges. We are deeply convinced that every person has the right to volunteer anywhere in the world. In order to foster a culture of participation, personal and responsible development as well as active citizenship in Europe and the world, volunteers need to be given the access and the encouragement to exercise volunteering activities, but first and foremost – volunteers need the rights that match their needs and fit their duties. Volunteering needs an empowering and enabling environment. We are convinced that the full and effective implementation of the presented charter will improve the conditions for volunteers and volunteering.

A rights-based approach towards volunteering integrates the norms, principles, standards and goals of volunteering, acknowledging the specific context and different forms of volunteering as the point of departure. It establishes volunteers as active rights-holders and creates corresponding duties for responsibility-holders. Furthermore a rights based approach aims to empower and enable the rights holder to claim their rights. The foundation for a rights based approach to volunteering in Europe has been laid, as reflected in key United Nations, Council of Europe and European Union documents and instruments on the matter.¹

Similarly, the EYV2011 Alliance, around 40 European Networks active in volunteering, states that “Even though there is a vast array of notions, definitions and traditions concerning volunteering (...) volunteering is a key expression of active citizenship and deserves - as a complement to political participation - better recognition, promotion and facilitation,”²

Over 100 million people in Europe are volunteers³, 3 out of every 10 Europeans claim to be active in a voluntary capacity and nearly 80% of European citizens feel that voluntary activities are an important part of democratic life in Europe.⁴ Hence an investment in Volunteering is an investment in society’s social cohesion.

Therefore the value of volunteering needs full recognition as creator of a sense of European identity and active citizenship, contribution to public good, human and social capital. Further it is a source of economic growth, a pathway to integration and employment, a positive outcome in itself and a mechanism for improving cohesion and is reducing economic, social and environmental inequalities.

The charter promotes the role of participatory organizations, which means that volunteers active in the organization have access to decision-making processes and are therefore actively taking part in the organizations life, as the main providers for volunteering. Simultaneously the charter recognises the diversity of volunteering activities, different types of volunteering providers and volunteering without volunteering providers. The

¹ (63/153 (2009) and A/RES/57/106 (2002)); ((2007/2149(INI) and 2005/C 292/03); (European Treaty Series - No. 175)

² www.eyv2011.eu

³ Special Eurobarometer 273

⁴ Eurobarometer, 2007

charter reflects the needs of all volunteers, therefore the rights of active citizens that volunteer outside the framework of volunteering providers are addressed.

The European Charter of the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers creates a common understanding of the definition of volunteers, volunteering activities and volunteering providers from the local to the European level and provides a common set of basic rights for volunteers and volunteering providers. Further the Charter serves as an appeal for designing and updating policies related to volunteering on all levels, refraining from addressing concrete implementation mechanisms or identifying right bearers, but focusing on defining and stating the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Section I Definition

A. Definition of a volunteer

A volunteer is a person that carries out activities at her/his benefiting society, by free will. These activities are undertaken for a non-profit cause, benefiting personal development of the volunteer, who commits her/his time and energy for the general good without financial reward.

B. Definition of volunteering providers

Volunteering providers are organisations and groups that are independent and governing themselves as well as other non-profit entities, such as public authorities. They are active in the public arena and their activity must be aimed, at least in part, at contributing to the public good.⁵

C. Definition of volunteering activity

Volunteering activities are undertaken by a volunteer. The activity is undertaken for a non-profit cause and does not replace paid work and can be done with the framework of a volunteering provider or by own initiative.

Section II 1. Rights of volunteer

Core rights

Article 1

Every person who is doing a volunteering activity is entitled to get the status of a volunteer; no one shall be forced to be registered, but should be entitled to the basic rights.

Article 2

The volunteer is entitled to full protection of her/his human rights, when implementing the volunteering activity.

Article 3

Every person is entitled to equal access to volunteering opportunities and protection against all kind of discrimination such as age, gender, sexual identity, race, colour, language, disability, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status and shall not be discriminated against on bases of their background or conviction.

Article 4

⁵[COM\(1997\) 241](#) : COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION on PROMOTING THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS IN EUROPE; [

No one shall be restricted by law to participate in a volunteering activity of their choice, considering that the volunteering activity is carried out in respect of Human Rights and contributes to the public good.

Article 5

All volunteers shall be informed about their rights and responsibilities.

Article 6

Every volunteer has the right to social protection during the volunteering in form of health care and liability insurance.

Article 7

Every volunteer has the right to reconcile her/his volunteering activity with her/his private and working life, and to require a certain amount of flexibility during the volunteering activity and is furthermore entitled to refuse task that would go against her/his beliefs and convictions.

Article 8

Every volunteer has the right to volunteer outside of her/his country. Therefore, if needed, a visa free of charge must be obtainable through an open, accessible and transparent procedure which favours volunteer's mobility.

Article 9

Every volunteer is entitled to the reimbursement of expenses occurring in relation to the voluntary activity, respecting the different levels of reimbursement resulting through the diversity of voluntary activities. These reimbursements shall be excluded from any form of taxation.

Right to support from volunteering providers

Article 10

Every volunteer is entitled to be treated according to the existing norms, principles, standards and goals of volunteering policies.

Article 11

Every volunteer is entitled to a coherent task description that allows her/him to implement the volunteering activity with a clear understanding of its aims and objectives. The task description should be, to the furthest extent possible, developed and agreed on together by the volunteering provider and the volunteer and, if needed, should be updated during the volunteering activity. Further it shall be outlining that volunteers and paid staff have complementary roles and the volunteering providers must ensure that good cooperation exists between the two personnel categories.

Article 12

Every volunteer is entitled to support and feedback throughout the volunteering activity. This includes preparation of the activity, personal guidance and assistance during the implementation of the activity, proper evaluation and debriefing following the activity and full support in the realisation of the required follow-up activities.

Article 13

Every volunteer has the right to participate in the decision-making process in regards to the volunteering activity at the most appropriate level and to have access to the organization's decision-making processes. This could be through ownership of the project, co-decision in the process implementation, or full participation and the right to participate in the democratic processes.

Rights to personal development

Article 14

Every volunteer is entitled to the necessary educational/training support in order to implement the volunteering activity to her/his full capacity and best knowledge.

Article 15

Every volunteer has the right to have the skills and competences gained through volunteering activities recognised by formal educational and professional structures and institutions. Volunteer should have the right to develop new skills and competences, and the space to discover, experiment and develop their own learning path.

Article 16

Every volunteer is entitled, if required by the volunteering activity, to flexibility of working time and educational activities in order to undertake volunteering activities. *Should the implementation of volunteering activities require certain flexibility on the part of contractual or educational obligations, the volunteer shall seek agreement from the contractor or educational provider.*

2. Responsibilities of the Volunteer

Article 17

Every volunteer respects the rule of law and non discrimination policy throughout her/his voluntary activity.

Article 18

Every volunteer has the responsibility to respects the integrity and values of the volunteering provider.

Article 19

Every volunteer respects the commitments that are made with the volunteering provider regarding the amount of time and effort that have been commonly agreed to be put in the volunteering activity and the quality that has to be delivered.

Article 20

Every volunteer has the responsibility to participate in trainings offered that are relevant for the volunteer and are related to skills needed in order to carry out the agreed tasks. The training shall be free of charge to the volunteer.

Article 21

Every volunteer respects the confidentiality of (organisational) information, in particular regarding legal affairs and concerning personal data of members, staff and beneficiaries of voluntary activities.

Article 22

Every volunteer understands that volunteering aims towards benefits for a third party or society.

Article 23

Every volunteer cooperates with other volunteers within the organisation, where relevant and contributes to the organization's sustainability through communication with others and a hand-over in the end of her/his mandate.

Section III

1. Rights of volunteering providers

Article 24

Organisations and groups, that are independent, govern themselves as well as other non-profit entities or public authorities that provide volunteering opportunities, are entitled to the status of a volunteering provider.

Article 25

Volunteering providers are entitled to a stable and sustainable support framework and enabling environment, including adequate funding structures that provide accessible, sustainable and flexible financing.

Article 26

Volunteering providers are entitled to participate in political decision-making processes at all levels in the area of volunteering, representing the interest and needs of volunteers. Considering the expertise of volunteering providers, as actors that are the closest to the volunteer, they must be consulted on matters in decision-making processes regarding the volunteering sector at all levels.

Article 27

Non profit Volunteering providers should not be taxed on their income.

Article 28

Volunteering providers shall select volunteers according to their mission and vision and to specific skills, if certain volunteering activities require them.

2. Responsibilities of volunteering providers

Core responsibilities

Article 29

Volunteering providers commit to a volunteering policy that respects the rights of the volunteer.

Article 30

Volunteering providers are acquainted with the valid legal framework on volunteering and verify legal aspects concerning the implementation of the volunteering activity.

Article 31

Volunteering providers shall ensure the minimisation of risks and provide clear guidance for the volunteer. In this context the provider commits itself to creating the safest possible environment for the volunteer and provide full information linked to the possible risks related to the volunteering activity.

Article 32

Volunteering providers shall offer equal and transparent access to information concerning volunteering opportunities, as well as the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Article 33

Volunteering providers shall put into effect inclusive and equal recruitment processes for volunteering activities and identify barriers in order to engage diverse groups.

Article 34

Volunteering providers shall ensure an infrastructure for insurance provision that covers social protection in form of health care and liability insurance for the volunteer during the volunteering activity.

Article 35

Volunteering providers shall promote volunteering and its benefits for the society and for the individual.

Responsibilities to support volunteers

Article 36

Volunteering providers reimburse expenses occurring in relation to the volunteering activity for the volunteer.

Article 37

Volunteering providers give a clear task description for the work that the volunteer should carry out. The content of the task description should be, to furthest extent possible, developed and agreed on together by the volunteering provider and volunteer and, if needed, should be updated during the volunteering activity .

Article 38

Volunteering providers commit themselves to develop and implement quality standards that ensure preparation and briefing, offer personal guidance, assistance and monitoring throughout the entire process, clear evaluation mechanisms and full support in the realisation of the required follow up activities; ideally the volunteer provider aims to have a quality assurance system.

Article 39

Volunteering providers offer the necessary tools and access to existing and foreseen resources to volunteers in order to allow them to implement the agreed activities.

Article 40

Volunteering providers ensure efficient handover and reporting structures for volunteers in order to guarantee sustainability of volunteering activities.

Article 41

Volunteering providers ensure the right to participate in the decision-making process for volunteers in regards to the volunteering activity at the most appropriate level, may it be through ownership of the project, co-decision in the process implementation or full participation and the right to participate in the democratic structures of the volunteering provider through voting. The volunteering provider should open the access for volunteers in order to participate in the organization's life and decision-making processes. Furthermore, providers shall ensure that volunteers have the autonomy to develop their own initiatives.

Article 42

Volunteering providers shall ensure that the that the necessary support for specific target groups such as people with disabilities, minors or elderly people are provided.

Responsibilities to support the personal development of the volunteer

Article 43

Volunteering providers ensure necessary educational support for volunteers throughout the process. Moreover, the volunteering providers shall ensure that the volunteer is given the possibility to develop new skills and competences and provided with the tools to consciously reflect on the learning processes.

Article 44

Volunteering providers ensure that tools for recognition of the competences and skills acquired during the volunteering activity are put in place, in cooperation with formal educational and professional structures and institutions.

Article 45

Volunteering providers ensure the privacy of the volunteer in personal and working life, and protect their data.

Section IV

Follow up

The presented charter needs to be transposed by European, National and Local authorities and all other relevant stakeholders as an appeal for designing and updating policies related to volunteering. In order to respect, protect and full fill the rights of volunteers, a legal framework for volunteering that includes the rights and responsibilities of volunteers, volunteer providers and defines the roles of authorities at all levels is needed.

In order to implement this Charter and the legal framework all over Europe, , public authorities must put in place appropriate laws, policies, programmes and measures in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. The constant involvement and consultation of core actors in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of volunteering policies must be ensured, in order to create a sense of ownership and to promote active citizenship. The establishment of such stakeholder forums at the national and European level requires proper and sustainable funding.