

We, the undersigning organisations:

the European Volunteer Centre (CEV), the European Youth Forum (YFJ), the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO), the World Scouts Movement, the Red Cross/European Union Office, Caritas Europa, Volonteuropa, AGE, Solidar, ENGAGE, Johanniter International, the European Non-Governmental Sports Organization (ENGSO and ENGSO Youth), Youth Action for Peace (YAP)

Call upon the European institutions to declare 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering. We represent thousands of organizations at local, regional, national, European and international level involving millions of volunteers. We are ready and committed to contributing in order to make the European Year of Volunteering 2011 a lasting success.

2011 – The European Year of Volunteering

More than 100 million Europeans engage in voluntary activities, live solidarity and through this make a difference to our society. A Eurobarometer survey in 2006 revealed that 3 out of 10 Europeans claim to be active in a voluntary capacity and that close to 80% of respondents feel that voluntary activities are an important part of democratic life in Europe.¹

There is a vast array of notions, definitions and traditions concerning volunteering. However, what is common throughout Europe is that wherever people engage together in activities to help each other, support those in need, preserve our environment, campaign for human rights, or to initiate actions to help ensure that everyone enjoys a decent life - both society as a whole and the individual volunteers benefit and social cohesion is significantly strengthened.

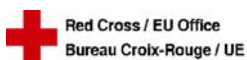
Why volunteering matters:

- Volunteers are the agents of European values and objectives as laid down in the Treaties, in particular in terms of promoting social cohesion, solidarity, and active participation – theirs are the hands that translate these values into action, day after day;
- Volunteering contributes to building a European identity rooted in these values and towards attaining a mutual understanding between people in society and across Europe;
- Volunteering in its horizontal nature is indispensable in a wide range of EU policy areas such as social inclusion, the provision of life-long learning opportunities for all, policies affecting young people, inter-generational dialogue, active aging, integration of migrants, intercultural dialogue, civil protection, humanitarian aid and development, sustainable development and environmental protection, human rights, social service delivery, raising employability, the promotion of an active European citizenship, fighting the “digital gap”, and within corporate social responsibility;
- Volunteering is an economic factor. The voluntary sector contributes an estimated 5% to the GDP of our national economies²;
- Volunteers and their organisations are at the forefront of developing innovative actions to detect, voice and respond to needs arising in society;

There is no Europe without volunteers: they contribute greatly to both social Europe and its growth.

¹ Special Eurobarometer 273 Wave 66.3, February 2007, “European Social Reality”.

² According to a Johns Hopkins University Study
http://www.jhu.edu/ccss/publications/pdf/Measuring_Civil_Society%20and%20Volunteering.pdf





Volunteers mirror the diversity of European society with people of all ages, women and men, employees and unemployed, people from different ethnic backgrounds and belief groups and finally citizens from all nationalities being involved.

However, 7 in 10 people do not volunteer and many people face barriers towards volunteering such as a lack of information on how to become involved; time pressure; scarce economic resources and the feeling of not being able to “afford” to volunteer; a negative image of volunteering stemming from times where volunteering was a rather “compulsory duty”; discrimination; discouraging legal provisions and an absence of a legal status; missing protection against risks involved; visa or other barriers for non EU citizens – to name just a few of these obstacles.

Why a European Year of Volunteering in 2011?

Volunteering is freely given, but not cost free – it needs and deserves targeted support from all stakeholders – volunteer organisations, government at all levels, businesses and an enabling policy environment including a volunteering infrastructure.

2011 will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the UN International Year of Volunteers (IYV): IYV 2001 demonstrated that high-level public attention for volunteers and their contribution to society leads to governments and other stakeholders committing to joint action. Synergies can be sought with the UN’s activities in 2011, to take stock of the progress made so far and to develop a European policy agenda for volunteering “2011 +”.

While the EU has increasingly paid attention to volunteering in all its forms over recent years, we are still far from a comprehensive strategy and action at the European level to promote, recognize, facilitate and support volunteering in order to realize its full potential.

The Council of Youth Ministers and the European Economic and Social Committee have called for a European Year of Volunteering to be organized, a call that we wholeheartedly support in order to:

- **Raise public awareness of the scope, value and impact of volunteering in Europe and to highlight its contribution to our communities – with Europeans but also with governments at all levels and with businesses;**
- **Celebrate volunteers and volunteer organisations for their contribution and to showcase good practices and projects involving volunteers;**
- **Raise awareness among European citizens of the possibilities to volunteer and to motivate people to become involved;**
- **Work towards the reduction of barriers and discrimination that people face when wishing to volunteer, especially migrants and third country nationals and the socially excluded;**
- **Highlight and recognise the value of local volunteer action in building a European identity and work towards a comprehensive EU policy agenda to support, promote and recognize volunteering and its different roles;**
- **Demonstrate and raise awareness about the need for a volunteering infrastructure at local, regional, national and European level including a legal framework that foresees a right to participation in society through volunteering for people in all walks of life.**
- **Encourage Member States to exchange good practice concerning volunteering policies and define common elements of an enabling environment that would allow volunteering to flourish in all European countries.**