

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

PREAMBLE

We, the supporters of this Charter, believe that access to volunteering and active citizenship opportunities are rights not 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 to as well as the encouragement to engage in volunteering activities. However, first and foremost – volunteers need to be empowered with 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 rights and responsibilities in this Charter will improve the conditions for volunteers and volunteering.

A rights-based approach towards volunteering and the norms, principles, standards and goals of volunteering, acknowledges 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, has stated 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 creating 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. Volunteering also reduces economic, social and environmental inequalities.

The Charter promotes the role of participatory organisations, which means that volunteers must have access to the decision-making processes of the organisation and are therefore

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

actively part of the organisation's life, as the main providers for volunteering. Simultaneously the charter recognises the diversity of volunteering activities, different types of volunteering providers and volunteering that happens without volunteering providers. The charter reflects the needs of all volunteers, therefore the rights of active citizens that volunteer outside the framework of volunteering providers are also 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 who carries out activities benefiting society, by free will. These activities are undertaken for a non-profit cause, benefiting the personal development of the volunteer, who commits their time and energy for the general good without financial reward.

B. Definition of volunteering providers

Volunteering providers are non-profit organisations and groups that are independent and self-governing 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 good⁵.

C. Definition of volunteering activity

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

Section II 1. Rights of volunteer

Core rights

Article 1

Everyone who is doing a volunteering activity is entitled to have the status of "volunteer", and, if they wish, they should be entitled to these basic rights.

Article 2

The volunteers are entitled to full protection of their human rights⁶, when carrying out the volunteering activity.

Article 3

Every person is entitled to equal access to volunteering opportunities⁷ and protection against all kinds of discrimination such as on the grounds of 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 basis of their background or beliefs.

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

⁶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights

⁷ Please see Article 28

Article 4

No one shall be restricted by law from participating in a volunteering activity of their choice, as long as 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 activity in form of health care and liability insurance.

Article 7

Every volunteer has the right to reconcile their volunteering activity with their private and working life, and thus can achieve a certain amount of flexibility during the volunteering activity. Every volunteer is furthermore entitled to refuse tasks that would go against their beliefs and/or convictions.

Article 8

Every volunteer has the right to volunteer outside of their country of residence or birth. Therefore, if needed, a visa, free of charge must be obtainable through an open, accessible and transparent procedure which favours volunteer mobility.

Right to support from volunteering providers

Article 9

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

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 them 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 between the volunteering provider and the volunteer and, if needed, should be updated during the volunteering activity. Furthermore, it should be defined that volunteers and paid staff have complementary roles and the volunteering providers must ensure that good cooperation exists between these 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 regarding the volunteering activity at the most appropriate level. In addition, each volunteer should have access to the organisations democratic decision making processes. Each volunteer should have some ownership of the project through co-decision in the process implementation and the right to participate in the democratic processes related to the project.

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 contribution, skills and competences gained through volunteering activities recognised by formal educational and professional structures and institutions. Volunteers 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 rules of law and non-discrimination throughout their voluntary activity.

Article 18

Every volunteer has the responsibility to respect the integrity, mission, objectives 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 the common good or society.

Article 23

Every volunteer cooperates with other volunteers within the organisation, where relevant and contributes to the organisation's sustainability through communication with others and a hand-over at the end of their engagement.

Section III

1. Rights of volunteering providers

Article 24

Non-profit 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 the actors that are the closest to the volunteer, they must be consulted on matters regarding policy or law on the volunteering sector at all levels.

Article 27

Volunteering providers should not be taxed on their income.

Article 28

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

2. Responsibilities of volunteering providers

Core responsibilities

Article 29

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

Article 30

Volunteering providers shall be acquainted with the valid legal framework for 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 to providing 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 to the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Article 33

Volunteering providers shall put into effect inclusive and equal recruitment processes for volunteering activities. They shall identify barriers and develop measure to overcome them, 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 shall reimburse expenses occurring in relation to the volunteering activity for the volunteer.

Article 37

Volunteering providers shall give a clear task description for the activity 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 the volunteer and, if needed, should be updated during the volunteering activity.

Article 38

Volunteering providers commit themselves to developing and implementing 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 should aim to have a quality assurance system.

Article 39

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

Article 41

Volunteering providers shall ensure the right to participate in the decision-making process for volunteers in regards to the volunteering activity at the most appropriate level. Volunteering providers should ensure volunteers feel ownership of the project through co-decision in the process implementation and the right to participate in the democratic processes related to the project. The volunteering provider should ensure access for volunteers in order to participate in the organisation's life and decision-making processes. Furthermore, providers shall ensure that volunteers have the autonomy to develop their own initiatives as long as they contribute to the organisation's cause.

Article 42

Volunteering providers shall ensure that the necessary support for specific target groups of potential volunteers, such as people with disabilities or mental health problems, minors or older people are provided for those who want to volunteer.

Responsibilities to support the personal development of the volunteer

Article 43

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

Article 44

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

Article 45

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

Section IV

Follow up

This Charter serves as an appeal to European, National and Local Authorities and all other relevant stakeholders for designing and updating policies related to volunteering. In order to respect, protect and full fill the rights of volunteers, a legal framework is needed for volunteering, which includes the rights and responsibilities of volunteers, volunteer providers and defines the roles of authorities at all levels.

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.