



Policy **brief**

Tapping the potential of volunteering

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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, or content of work. In this context a clear distinction between regular employment and volunteering must be drawn, which must go beyond the mere presence or absence 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 benefit from volunteering both as providers and as recipients. Promoting these activities is therefore in the interest of every government. Such promotion can be achieved by offering support to organizations and volunteers through the strategies outlined in this policy brief.

Suggested strategies

- Appropriate legal framework
- Support to organizations and volunteers
- Lifelong 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, and for people who engage in volunteering in addition to gainful employment.

Good practice examples

- Lire et faire lire: reading programme in France
- The Reserve Grandparent Scheme in Denmark
- HumanaS network in Serbia
- Senior Trainers in Germany
- ‘Think Future, Volunteer Together’: a project of the European Volunteer Centre to promote senior volunteering through international exchanges
- Volunteering service of all generations in Germany
- ‘Generations together’ in the United Kingdom
- A model project to safeguard the future of voluntary commitment in Austria
- Helplines for elderly people: Italy and Ireland
- Yad Sarah in Israel
- Core functions supporting local voluntary work and family care in the Netherlands
- The National Gerontological Association ‘Second Breath’ in Moldova

Introduction

The concept of volunteering

Volunteering is an important means for citizens to make a meaningful contribution to an area of their interest or 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.

In order to develop a useful definition of volunteer work, as distinct from remunerated work, it is important first of all to discuss the concept of work. Most people work to secure their financial subsistence. In an ideal case, it would also be desirable that every kind of work should incorporate meaning for the individual, should be embedded into an ethical framework and should 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 range during which paid work may be done is restricted by a mandatory retirement age. With regard to volunteering of older persons, it is not desirable that member States promote a mandatory retirement age on the one hand, yet promote volunteering of older persons on the other hand, since this 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 their 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.

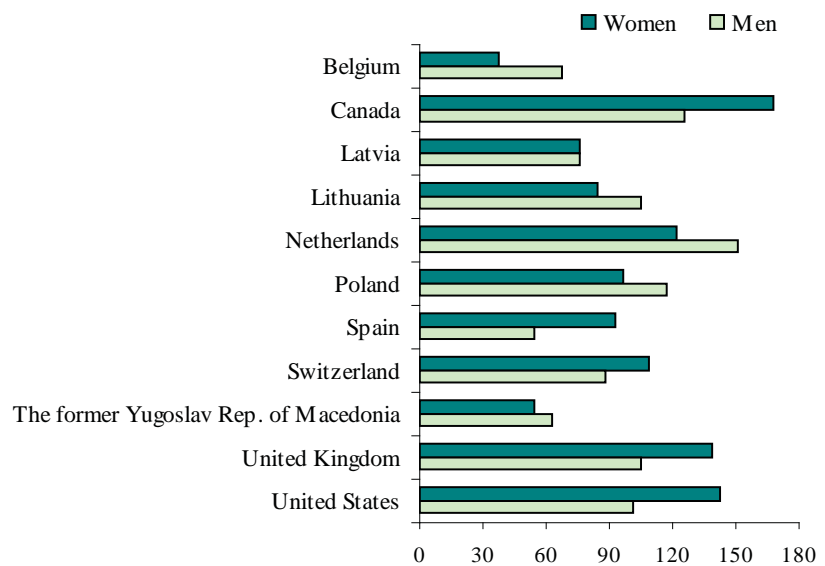
How frequently do people volunteer?

Gauging how widespread volunteering is in general, and amongst the older population in particular, is not an easy task. Time use surveys, which collect data on how individuals (usually aged 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 provide some indicative statistics.

Among women in 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 per week in Canada to about 40 minutes per week in Belgium. Men spend on average from two and half hours per week in the Netherlands to about 55 minutes per 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.

¹In some countries the age of the surveyed population may be defined differently and have lower and/or 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 organization and informal help to other households.

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

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 exhibits 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.

UNECE member States may want to consider how volunteer engagement could be promoted among women and men of all ages, in order to allow them to participate actively in society. The following sections may clarify some concepts and suggest some ideas in this regard.

Volunteering by older persons

One of the questions discussed in this section is why does volunteering constitute a useful means of enhancing older people's participation in society?³ The transition from working life to retirement marks a milestone in life. After the 'retirement honeymoon' phase is over, many retirees begin to feel a void in their lives. They miss many aspects of working life: the relationships with their colleagues, the challenges of their work, the social milieu and office humour, the professional identity that defined who they were and the respect they gained from this. In order to fill this gap, retirees might look for new opportunities that can fill their lives and give them new purpose.

This sense of void is aggravated by thoughts of the inevitable ageing process – growing old and frail and fears of becoming of no use to society. If this gap is not filled, it will become more than just a personal problem for the individual concerned. It will become a concern for society, because this individual may

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.

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

come to rely on the community to take care of his or her needs. How can the retiree fill the emptiness and live a healthy, long and satisfying life: how can they age successfully? How can we encourage a process of ageing that would benefit both the retiree and society? ‘Successful ageing’ describes a process in which there is little or no age-related decline in physiological and cognitive abilities. Successful ageing 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 retire, their opportunities for active social engagement derive mainly from their professional life. After retirement, alternative opportunities for active engagement⁵ can be found in volunteering, an important tool for social inclusion in old age.⁶

“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 managed by an organization, while informal volunteering refers to giving unpaid help as an individual to someone who is not a family member, for example a neighbour or a friend. The present policy brief focuses on formal volunteering, providing examples and suggestions to support volunteers and their organizations.⁸

When considering volunteering programmes it is important to ensure that older persons are not forced into retirement when they are still fit and willing to continue regular non-volunteer work, thus finding themselves continuing the same activity under less favourable conditions.

Lire et Faire Lire: reading programme in France

Lire et Faire Lire (Read and Let Read) is a programme designed to spread both the pleasure of reading and the benefits of intergenerational solidarity, and is aimed at children in primary schools and in other educational settings (recreation centres, nurseries, libraries).

The programme, founded in 1999 and promoted by the national association of the same name, was inspired by a similar programme founded in Brest in 1985. Lire et Faire Lire is organized in each département by coordinators of two national networks of associations: the Ligue de l’Enseignement (the League of Education) and the Union Nationale des Associations Familiales (the National Union of Family Associations). A large committee of writers has supported Lire et Faire Lire since its creation.

Upon request from the directors of educational institutions, volunteers aged 50 years or above offer part of their free time to children to encourage their enthusiasm for reading and promote their interest in literature. Reading-out-loud sessions are organized in small groups, once or twice per week. The volunteers, after a month-long trial period, commit until the end of the scholastic year. In 2008-2009, 5,530 educational institutions welcomed 11,901 senior volunteers, who worked with more than 250,000 children. Lire et Faire Lire was also launched in Switzerland in 2001 and in Québec (Canada) in 2002.

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

⁴ E 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. A/RES/46/91

⁸ For further information on informal volunteering in the area of social care, see: Eurofound. (2006). *Employment in social care in Europe*, pp. 67-69.

⁹ European Volunteer Centre. (2006). “Manifesto for Volunteering in Europe”, p. 4.

Areas of work

Volunteers work in a variety of areas, such as education, culture and the arts, health and social services, sport and leisure, child care, counselling, mentoring, support for prisoners and victims, advocacy, campaigning, animal and environmental protection, management, disaster control and other emergency services.⁹ Volunteering takes place within both the non-profit and private sectors. Since volunteering serves the principal purpose of enhancing social participation, volunteering in the non-profit sector should be prioritized. However, if the private sector offers opportunities for volunteering, the context and conditions under which volunteer work takes place need to be clearly framed, so that they do not entail any exploitative elements.

Supporting volunteers

To encourage volunteers, member States may want to consider how they could support volunteering by offering a legal and social framework for safeguarding financial 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 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 organizations”.¹⁰

The Reserve Grandparent Scheme in Denmark

Since parents in Denmark can only take one paid day off work at a time 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 return to work.

In total the Danish Ministry of Social Welfare allocated 650,000 Euros (State budget 2008) for financial support. Both local municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can apply for funding. There are ‘Reserve Grandparent Scheme’ initiatives in seven locations across Denmark. Four of these projects are run by local municipalities and three 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 of informational material to organizations for elderly people and public institutions such as childcare facilities, doctors’ clinics and libraries.

To be selected as reserve grandparents, volunteers must meet strict selection criteria. Reserve grandparents are typically retired, aged 60 years or more, in good physical condition and live in the same neighbourhood as the families for whom they offer their services. They undergo a check of their physical condition and criminal record; members of the association staff, prior to selection, make a home visit. Volunteers are also required to pass training courses in first aid and childhood illnesses. The scheme’s organizers believe 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 Euros 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:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/families/docs/Gladsaxe%20Reserve%20Grandparents.pdf

(Websites last accessed on 10 November 2010)

¹⁰ GHK. (2010). “Volunteering in the European Union. Final Report”, p. 17.

- 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 consideration “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”.¹¹ Even if a volunteer has a secure principal source of income, some form of compensation for expenses occurring in the context of the volunteer work should be considered, such as reimbursement of expenses (e.g. for equipment, materials), meal tickets or token payments.¹²
- Social security** Volunteers have the right to work in a safe, secure and healthy environment. UNECE member States may want to encourage organizations 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 volunteer activity, as well as civil liability coverage in case the volunteer should cause any damage or injury in good faith.¹³ “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”.¹⁴

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 organizations 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 organizations. 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 organizations in Serbia that both focuses on older people’s issues and also involves older people themselves in the activities. Since 2004 HumanaS network has increased the level of NGO cooperation 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 network a survey has been conducted to ascertain the number of older people without any income, and the activities have been devised and planned on the basis of these data.¹⁵

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

¹¹ 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.

¹² Ibid. p. 13, 19, 21.

¹³ Ibid. p. 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁵ See as source: Lidija Kozarcanin. Department for Research and Development. Republic Institute for Social Welfare.

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 organizations to older volunteers, in effect closing the gate at the very time would-be volunteers should be free to enter”.¹⁶ Older persons “often encounter discrimination in the form of ‘ageism’,¹⁷ and general prejudice on the part of potential user organizations, 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”.¹⁸ 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 as much as possible the discomfort caused by physical impairments.

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 learning¹⁹ 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.”²⁰ Education and training opportunities provided can be various: “introductory training, ongoing and advanced training, peer volunteer support, mentoring or ‘buddying’ schemes and specialist training”.²¹ 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 (BMFSFJ) developed a course for older persons to train them as 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 cooperation with network partners, which are associations, initiatives and groups in the voluntary sector, and in particular agencies for civic involvement such as volunteer centres, 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.

Sources: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend: SeniorTrainerIn. Erfahrungswissen für Initiativen. http://www.bmfsfj.bund.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Weiterbildung-_C3_A4lterer-Menschen-senior-Trainer,property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,rwb=true.pdf and <http://www.efi-programm.de/> (last accessed on 10 November 2010).

¹⁶ Davis Smith J., Gay P. (2005). “Active Ageing in Active Communities”. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p.3.

¹⁷ 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

¹⁸ UN Volunteers concept paper for the Second World Assembly on Ageing. (2002). “Voluntary action by older people”.

¹⁹ 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

²⁰ Yad Sarah. Op. cit. See: http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Policy_briefs/GoodPractices.html

²¹ GHK. Op.cit., p. 161.

Network organizations can also 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 Centre 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).²²

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: micro-projects 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 organized by CEV at the European Parliament in Brussels on 19 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.

Source: Think Future, Volunteer Together. European Volunteer Centre.

[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 10 November 2010)

Feedback on volunteering

Feedback on volunteer work is an important measure for the volunteer as well as the organization that gains from this kind of support, in order to attain the best possible benefit for both partners. A clear agreement on the activities, timeframe and responsibilities of the volunteer work to be 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.

Benefits for volunteers

Volunteering can be a gratifying and fulfilling experience for older persons. Senior volunteers give much to society through voluntary work, but they also benefit. The possible psychosocial benefits include the fact that older people are induced to go out of their homes and meet new people,²³ thus entering new social circles which may replace the ones they have left behind in their former workplace.²⁴ Moreover, their lives may take on a new scope after retirement, as they put their experience to good use, repaying assistance that they have received elsewhere, and they have the opportunity to feel satisfied with their accomplishments and their contributions to society. Making a difference is in fact something that most volunteers look for in their volunteer work.²⁵

²² The project involved five CEV member organizations: SPES – Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio (Italy); C.A.R.D.O. (Slovakia); ÖKA – Önkéntes 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) as part of the EU ENEA - European Network of Environmental Authorities for the Cohesion Policy - pilot programme, for the mobility of people older than 55 years. The European Volunteer Center (CEV) was responsible for policy advising, and promotion and dissemination of the project results at EU level.

²³ Davis Smith J., Gay P. Op.cit., p.22.

²⁴ Yad Sarah. (2010). Op. Cit., p. 2. See: http://www.unece.org/pau/age/Policy_briefs/GoodPractices.html

²⁵ Ibid.

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 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 the young and the 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 Generationen. <http://www.freiwilligendienste-aller-generationen.de/freiwilligendienste-aller-generationen.html> (last accessed on 10 November 2010)

Volunteering is not only a good way to actively engage in social life; it also contributes to the maintenance of physical and mental functions, as it promotes physical activity and keeps the mind active.²⁶ More practical benefits include training courses, reimbursement of expenses and financial remunerations.

‘Generations Together’ in the United Kingdom

‘Generations Together’ is a 5.5 million UK pound 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 run a number of different activities to recruit older and younger volunteers including mentoring, skill 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 [information technology] skills) and other caring acts (for example gardening, or reading to people with failing eyesight);
- Old and young coming together to improve the community”.

Sources: Generations Together. Department for children, schools and families.

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

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

²⁶ Corporation for National and Community Service. (2007). The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research.

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 a focus on 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, a contest of ideas, '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 social 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 spend time proactively with children, depending on their own time resources and their other commitments. The support offered to volunteers is in the form of company, an exchange of experience, responsibility, supervision and further training.

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

Volunteering for older persons

Age 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, employed, unemployed or retired people, of either sex. 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, both young and old, are welcomed into organizations in the same manner, in equal proportions and with a level of responsibility assigned according to their skills.²⁷

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). The national helpline works together with 120 local centres. The volunteers number around 6,000, from all over Italy. Filo d'Argento, like a thread, ties together senior citizens and volunteers: it offers conversation and 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 in which they. 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 10 November 2010).

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

²⁷ 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.

Areas of work

Volunteer services for older persons may exist in hospitals and nursing homes, and these may range from assisting or entertaining patients and residents to providing transportation to people who are ill and in need. Volunteers may participate in older persons' everyday lives 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 and taking part in recreational or learning activities (computer skills, foreign languages, arts). Special events may be organized on relevant dates (e.g. 1 October, United Nations International Day of Older Persons), aimed either at senior citizens to get them involved, or at the society in general to raise awareness of age-related issues.²⁸

Yad Sarah in Israel

Yad Sarah is the one of the largest voluntary organizations 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 organization 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 organization is the 'Lending Centre', a service that exists in every one of the 103 branches of the organization. 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 US dollars 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 organization 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 organization 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 Department of Public Information of the United Nations (DPI/UN) since 2003.

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

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

²⁸ For the International Day of Older Persons, see: <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/olderpersons/>

Supporting volunteers

As volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds, it is important to provide some degree of financial and social security. In contrast to volunteer work performed by older persons who may 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 preventative health care measures or training. Especially for volunteers working with people who have communicable diseases, specific health insurance coverage could be considered, to protect the volunteers from falling ill as well.

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

The aim of the project ‘core functions supporting local voluntary work and family care’, 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 coordinate their own services. In 2009 a detailed operation, which started out with 3.5 million Euros 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 10 November 2010)

Training of volunteers

Training aimed at volunteers working for older persons should focus especially 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 volunteers to perform their tasks 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 lifelong 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.

Benefits for volunteers

As regards psychosocial benefits, volunteers gain a better understanding of older persons’ issues, achieve personal development, feel satisfied with accomplishments and with their contributions to society, and are empowered to employ their free time in a useful way. At the same time, more tangible benefits may accrue from work performed on a volunteer basis. The benefits may include: reimbursement of expenses, token payments, training courses, field experience and enhanced employability in the job market²⁹. Moreover, volunteers could receive accreditation and certification (of the nature and length of activity)³⁰ and a letter of recommendation.

²⁹ GHK. Op.cit., p.32.

³⁰ IFRC Societies, Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN Volunteers. Op. cit., p.21.

The National Gerontological Association 'Second Breath' in the Republic of Moldova

Respirația a Doua (Second Breath), the National Gerontological Association, is an NGO active in promoting a rights-based agenda for older people in the Republic of Moldova. The Association is a HelpAge International (HAI) affiliate and main partner for projects organized 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; coordination of and collaboration with NGOs and governmental organizations; development of palliative care services and training programmes.

In 2003-2004, Second Breath and HelpAge International 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 organizations and initiative groups were selected to work on the project as implementing partners, with the active support of the lead southern partner, Rural Social Initiative. Second Breath provided advisory support, undertaking to organize the participation of five northern organizations as mentors.

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

Recommendations

Volunteering is a desirable form of social participation for people who are not otherwise able or willing to be active in gainful employment, and for people who engage in volunteering in addition to gainful employment. UNECE member States may consider supporting volunteering activities by ensuring an enabling environment for volunteers and their organizations. The following recommendations may help member States to promote volunteering in their countries.

Appropriate legal framework

In creating or reforming the legal framework, close consultation with stakeholders is strongly recommended.³¹ In fact, in order to achieve effective implementation, it is essential to "ensure a participatory drafting process and maintain good relations and open communication between government and civil society".³² A legal framework may entail elements such as the legal distinction between non-profit, state and private organizations, as well as legal provisions that guarantee tax incentives and fundraising opportunities for organizations that work on a non-profit basis with the help of volunteers.

Support for organizations and volunteers

Governments may want to consider the most appropriate and most effective way to support organizations 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 impacts of volunteering.

³¹ IFRC Societies, Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN Volunteers. Op. cit., pp.9-10.

³² UN Volunteers. (2009). "Laws and Policies Affecting Volunteerism Since 2001", p.16.

Adult learning A clear framework for training schemes for volunteers is essential. UNECE member States are invited to “support certification schemes for volunteers aimed at recognizing the development of competencies through volunteering in the educational systems”,³³ Furthermore, member States may wish to facilitate adult learning programmes and provide instruments to share information and good practice, with the purpose of informing and further qualifying interested volunteers.

Awareness-raising activities Awareness-raising campaigns, aimed at the whole society, could be launched to underline the extraordinary contribution made 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 UNECE 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 European Volunteer Centre (CEV). Op. cit., p. 8.

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Checklist : Tapping the potential of volunteering

Main areas	Areas of implementation	Key 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 organizations and volunteers	Lifelong learning	Training
		Mentoring
		Networks of organizations to share experience
	Awareness-raising	Promoting a positive image of volunteering
		Campaigns, annual events aimed at the whole society
		Specific recruitment campaigns aimed at senior citizens
	Research	Data collection
		Data analysis
		Dissemination of results
		Measuring the economic value of volunteering