

## European Year of Volunteering 2011 Volunteer! Make a difference

The messages of EYV2011 are two-fold: To celebrate current volunteers for their efforts (recognition), in other words a 'THANK YOU' approach; and to empower new people to volunteer, the 'YOU CAN' approach (promotion and facilitation).

The experience of community and voluntary organisations shows that there is a need at all levels - EU, national, regional and local - to increase volunteering and the awareness of the added value it brings to European society, to celebrate volunteers, involve more volunteers and improve the policy framework on volunteering.

Therefore, the general objectives of EYV 2011 are

- 1. Recognition and awareness raising on the value of volunteering**
- 2. Celebration of volunteer efforts**
- 3. Empowerment of people and volunteer organisations**
- 4. Work towards the creation of an enabling environment for volunteering including a volunteering infrastructure**

### EYV 2011 & IYV+10: Working together in 2011

2011 is the tenth anniversary of the 2000 International Year of Volunteers and is being marked by IYV+10. IYV+10 and the European Year of Volunteering (EYV 2011) are conceptually linked together and share many of their goals.

The common focus of EYV 2011 and IYV+10 poses an invaluable opportunity to explore synergies and collective initiatives to promote and recognise volunteerism in 2011. EYV 2011 and IYV+10 provide an opportunity for engagement with both the EU and UN policy debates about volunteering and to celebrate and promote volunteering in all its forms through different

governmental and non-governmental structures. Volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are encouraged to engage with the activities offered by EYV 2011 and IYV+10 to promote volunteering and improve volunteering infrastructures for volunteer-involving organisations, volunteers and their communities.

### Why a European Year of Volunteering in 2011?

More than 100 million Europeans engage in voluntary activities 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.

The network of Volunteer Centres in Ireland (who provide support for Volunteers and Volunteering Involving Organisations) dealt with over 13,000 registrations in 2010. Of these:

- 61% have never volunteered before
- 68% are aged 35 or under, of which 50% are 25 or younger
- 40% of people find out about Volunteer Centres via the internet and more than 75% of registrations come through the web
- The most popular area in which people want to volunteer is youth / children or education / literacy - but 10% of people don't know what they want to do, they just know they want to do something!
- 38% are motivated to volunteer primarily from altruistic reasons (give back; make a difference; do something in the community), 33% by other needs (gain / improve skills; free time; work experience)

There is a vast array of notions, definitions and traditions concerning volunteering.



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 initiate actions to help ensure that everyone enjoys a decent life, both society as a whole and the individual volunteer benefits 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. They 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 has a considerable economic value. The voluntary sector contributes an estimated 5% to the GDP of our national economies;
- Volunteers and their organisations are at the forefront of developing innovative actions to detect, voice and respond to needs arising in society.
- 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 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; negative associations surrounding 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.

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.

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.

### Events and activities during 2011

There will be a number of national, regional and local events organised during EYV 2011. Details of these events and activities, can be accessed from your local Volunteer Centre's web site. You will also be able to find a calendar of events on [www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie).

**To find how you can get involved in the European Year of Volunteering why not download our information sheet "Ways to get involved in EYV 2011" from the web site of your local Volunteer Centre or from Volunteer Centres Ireland: [www.volunteer.ie](http://www.volunteer.ie)**

