

CSC Briefing on the European Year of Volunteering 2011

WHAT?

With the decision of EU Culture Ministers of 27 November 2009, the EU officially nominated 2011 as the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship¹. The proposal of the European Commission, first requested by the European Economic and Social Committee, was also strongly supported by the European Parliament. The year has a budget of EUR 8 million. In addition, EUR 3 million has been granted for preparatory actions. The slogan of the year will be "Volunteer! Make a difference".

The European Union will use this European Year to work towards four main objectives:

1. To create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU;
2. To empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering;
3. To reward and recognise volunteering activities; and
4. To raise awareness on the value and importance of volunteering.

The activities to be carried out at Community, national, regional or local level include exchange of experience and good practices; studies and research and the dissemination of their results; conferences and events; information and promotion campaigns. The Communication DG of the European Commission, which coordinates the Community-level action, is planning a range of activities which include "EYV Tour", "EYV Relay", and "EYV Website" as well as thematic conferences.

EYV Tour will provide an opportunity for volunteer organisations in each Member State to showcase their work. Concretely, in each capital, a space of 300-400 m² will be made available for several days for live demonstrations, debates or, for example, matchmaking between those offer to do volunteer work and those interested in benefiting from this work. The EYV Tour is organised by the National Coordination Bodies (NCB; see below) of each country. See the "window" of days for the Tour here below:

Brussels (BE)	03/12/2010	20/12/2010
Budapest (HU)	09/01/2011	17/01/2011
Vienna (AT)	20/01/2011	28/01/2011
Lisbon (PT)	02/02/2011	10/02/2011
Luxembourg (LU)	15/02/2011	23/02/2011
Madrid (ES)	25/02/2011	14/03/2011
Athens (GR)	16/03/2011	24/03/2011
Nicosia (CY)	28/03/2011	05/04/2011
Paris (FR)	08/04/2011	25/04/2011
Tallinn (EE)	29/04/2011	07/05/2011
Bucharest (RO)	08/05/2011	16/05/2011
Ljubljana (SLO)	18/05/2011	26/05/2011
London (UK)	29/05/2011	15/06/2011
Vilnius (LT)	19/06/2011	27/06/2011
Rome (IT)	28/06/2011	15/07/2011
Copenhagen (DK)	28/07/2011	04/08/2011
Stockholm (SE)	07/08/2011	15/08/2011
Dublin (IE)	21/08/2011	29/08/2011
Warsaw (PL)	29/08/2011	15/09/2011
Helsinki (FI)	14/09/2011	22/09/2011
Riga (LV)	25/09/2011	03/10/2011
Berlin (DE)	04/10/2011	21/10/2011
Amsterdam (NL)	20/10/2011	28/10/2011

¹ Also "The European Year of Volunteering 2011". The acronym EYV 2011 is in used by the NGOs.

Prague (CZ)	01/11/2011	09/11/2011
Bratislava (SK)	13/11/2011	21/11/2011
Sofia (BG)	20/11/2011	28/11/2011
La Valletta (MT)	27/11/2011	05/12/2011

EYV Relay offers volunteer journalists of one EU Member State an opportunity to report (audiovisual media, in particular) about the EYV Tour activities in the EU country which is succeeding his/her country in the EYV Tour.

EYV Website will be launched in November (www.europa.eu-volunteering). It is meant to serve as a forum for the volunteers and volunteer organisations willing to share their experiences, and to provide information on their activities and events.

There are initial plans to organise five high visibility events. The first is the media launch expected to be held in Brussels around the International Volunteering Day on 5 December. The second is the official kick-off event which will be organised by the Hungarian EU Presidency some time in January. The third and fourth events will take place around May-June and September-October but the days, location and exact themes are not yet defined. As a closing event for the year, the Polish EU Presidency is planning to hold a conference centred on policy-making.

Those interested in taking part in the events of the European Year of Volunteering should be in touch with the NBCs.

The Community funding for projects will be given through existing Community programmes: Lifelong Learning Programme, Europe for Citizens and the European Voluntary Service of the Youth in Action Programme. In addition, a call for proposals was launched on 1 October in order to fund one or two national level projects on volunteering. The deadline for applications is 12 November. For more information, please click on the link below.

WHY?

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. According to the Council Decision, volunteering is an expression of civic participation which strengthens common European values such as solidarity and social cohesion. Voluntary activities are considered to have the potential to contribute to the well-being of individuals and the harmonious development of European societies. In its proposal the European Commission recognizes that volunteering plays an important role in sectors as varied and diverse as education, youth, culture, sport, environment, health, social care, consumer protection, humanitarian aid, development policy, research, equal opportunities and external relations. It also suggests that involvement in voluntary activities can provide people with new skills and competences that can even improve their employability. The European Commission regards this as especially important in this time of economic crisis. The Member States and the European Parliament were, however, careful not to make too close a link between employment and volunteering. The European Parliament in its opinion about the Year stressed that volunteering should not be seen as a "substitute for paid work," "a means of meeting basic needs normally met by social services" or "a substitute for action by public authorities". The final decision states that "voluntary activities do not replace professional, paid employment opportunities but add value to society".

The year 2011 marks the 10th anniversary of the UN International Year of Volunteers (IYV). According to EYV 2011 Alliance (see below), 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. The Alliance hopes for synergies to be sought with the UN's activities in 2011 and for the EU to develop a European policy agenda for volunteering "2011+". The Alliance argues that while the EU has over recent years increasingly paid attention to volunteering in all its forms, it is still far from a comprehensive strategy and action at the European level to promote and support volunteering in order to realize its full potential. It is expected that the European Year on Volunteering will result in a set of policy recommendations, but which form these recommendations will take (for example, a Green Paper or White Paper) is still to be decided.

FOR WHOM?

The target groups are both current and potential volunteers, policy makers and civil society. The ownership of the European Year is meant to remain as much as possible with the volunteers and the volunteer organisations.

The strategic partners of the European Commission are the National Coordinating bodies and EYV 2011 Alliance. The NCBs are designated by each Member State to be responsible for the planning, coordination and organisation of events and activities in its territory during the European Year.

EYV 2011 Alliance is an informal network of major NGO European networks with a particular interest in volunteering and committed to working together on the implementation of the European Year. The members of EYV 2011 include the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) (<http://www.avso.org/>). Besides NCBs, those willing to play an active role in the Year are encouraged, on behalf of the European Commission, to make themselves known to the Alliance as the Alliance has been given a key role in suggesting speakers for the high visibility events as well as presenters of best practises.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

At this stage, prior to the launch of the official website, the European Commission informs about this European Year at: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/focus/focus840_en.htm

Call for proposals for funding:
http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news/news1092_en.htm

Contact details of National Coordinating Bodies:
http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/annexes-citizenship/doc1069_en.htm

Website of the EYV 2011 Alliance:
<http://www.eyv2011.eu/>

See also the following European Commission websites:
Youth: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm
Lifelong Learning: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm
Europe for Citizens: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en.htm

The Council Decision of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011):
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:017:0043:0049:EN:PDF>

A study commissioned by the European Commission on volunteering in Europe:
<http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/eyv2011/doc/Volunteering%20in%20the%20EU%20Final%20Report.pdf>

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