

# Joint Position Statement



## *For a European Year for and by Volunteers in 2011!*

*By the Europe Region of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (Europe Region **WAGGGS**) and the World Organization of the Scout Movement – European Region (**WOSM** – European Region)*

While welcoming the decision of the EU Council of Ministers<sup>1</sup> to name 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering, we call on the European Institutions, Member States, local authorities, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to

- work together to maximize every opportunity during the Year to raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering;
- empower volunteer organizations
- improve the quality of volunteering;
- reward and recognize volunteer activities
- create a more enabling environment for volunteering.

The Europe Region WAGGGS and WOSM – European Region represents national Guide and Scout associations in 46 European countries and over 2 million members. Being voluntary-based, voluntary-led participative youth organizations, volunteering policy is a key issue for members of Guiding and Scouting. For the past 100 years, Scouting and Guiding through their organizations and activities, have supported the development of young people as active citizens and “agents of change” to build a better world ; supporting volunteers leading young people and contributing to the quality and development of the movements.

*What do we understand by volunteering?*

- *it is an activity undertaken of a person's own free will and involves the commitment of time and energy to actions of benefit to others and to society as a whole;*
- *It is about devoting part of one's time to a project, and action, but also taking part in the life of an organisation, participating in its democratic structures, its progress and the choices that the organisation is making.*
- *the activity is unpaid but can include reimbursement of expenses directly related to the voluntary activity;*
- *it is for a non-profit cause and is primarily undertaken within a nongovernmental organisation and therefore cannot be motivated by material or financial gain;*
- *volunteering should not be used to substitute or replace paid employment.*

We believe that volunteering, particularly through Guiding and Scouting, enables young people and their leaders to develop core competences in leadership, and other life skills which will empower them in their daily lives; intercultural and intergenerational understanding; a sense of identity; and to experience participation in decision-making. Volunteering also provides all Scouts and Guides with opportunities to become involved and take action in their local communities, supporting them to develop a sense of solidarity and often life-long habits of civic engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> COUNCIL DECISION on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) Brussels 24 November 2009

However, despite various initiatives at European<sup>2</sup> and national levels there are still many barriers which prevent the involvement and participation in voluntary activities:

**Legal:** the definition and legal status of volunteers can vary from country to country and there is often no framework clarifying their rights and responsibilities. At the same time, legislation at European or national level may have the unintended effect of restricting volunteers from participating in voluntary activities, voluntary organizations to function or simply voluntary activities to happen.

**Mobility:** Volunteering in Europe is not only about EU citizens but also volunteers coming from outside EU borders. We want to ensure that volunteers from outside the EU can easily obtain visas to take part in volunteering opportunities.

**Recognition and Reward for Volunteering:** The contribution of volunteers to supporting communities, building social cohesion and even contributing to economic growth is often not acknowledged. The time spent by volunteers is free of charge but their impact is priceless. We wish all volunteers are recognized for their actions within the communities and their organizations. Skills acquired in volunteering as well as non formal education programmes need to be better recognized: the personal, cultural or social competences they have gained and the contribution of voluntary skills to employability.

**Information and Perception:** there is still a lack of information available to citizens, especially young people, about the possibilities and benefits of volunteering, which can prevent their participation.

**Resources:** Voluntary organizations, such as Guide and Scout associations are core actors in the volunteering movement which creates and manages the provision of voluntary opportunities, providing information, training and support. However, the nature of such organizations often means that they lack adequate financial or human resources to support and develop their capacities, particularly to reach out to disadvantaged and socially excluded young people.

During the European Year of Volunteering, the Europe Region WAGGGS and the European Scout Region aim to:

**Support** Guiding and Scouting associations to work for policies better meeting the needs of volunteers at European, national and local level;

**Encourage** Guide and Scout Associations to share best practice within and outside Guiding and Scouting to improve recruitment, training and retention of volunteers in the Guide and Scout movements;

**Raise awareness and promote** the recognition of volunteering both within and outside Guiding and Scouting so that it is valued by more Europeans and they are motivated to be volunteers themselves.

**Provide** opportunities for Guide and Scout associations at local and national level to form partnerships and projects which will support their volunteering activities and which are long-lasting and sustainable

The Europe Region WAGGGS and WOSM – European Scout Region anticipate that the raised awareness as a result of the events and activities at European and national level will lead to:

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<sup>2</sup> For example: Communication from the Commission to the Council of 30 April 2004 – Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth – Proposed common objectives for voluntary activities among young people in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field [COM(2004) 337 final –Official Journal C 122 of 30.4.2004].



- Increased participation in voluntary activities
- A greater awareness of the value of volunteering
- Removal of the barriers which prevent volunteering,
- Reaching out to all Europeans and open Guiding and Scouting to more volunteers, especially those who are socially excluded
- Increased recognition of volunteers and the voluntary activities that they undertake

We call on all stakeholders participating in the Year at European and national level to consider as part of the preparations, how the activities during the year can build a long-lasting and sustainable environment for the support of voluntary activities at European, national and local level.

We hope that although the European Year of Volunteering 2011 is currently an EU initiative for the Member States of the European Union, the achievements occurring as result of this initiative will also benefit voluntary organizations and the development of an infrastructure of volunteering within a wider European environment. We actively promote a synergy between the European Year and the celebrations of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Year of the Volunteer 2001. Indeed, the needs for better recognition and conditions for volunteers are needs across the European continent.

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