

A EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR VOLUNTEERS – A BASIC DECLARATION

Volonteuropa believes that this charter should be voluntarily adopted by all organisations that are concerned directly indirectly with the work of volunteers, by policy makers and by volunteers themselves. Recognising the wide variation in practices and standards, this represents a statement of aims. In some circumstances only partial adoption may be feasible.

Volonteuropa stimulates the promotion of volunteering and supports the work of volunteers.

Promotion of the concept of voluntarism includes:

The attitudes which takes responsibility for activities with and for other people, for society and develops an active participation in it.

The developing of networks to complement the support of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

Volunteer work can be defined in different ways but should include at least the following elements:

Activities concerning the interest of other people and of society.

Without financial interest.

In a more or less organised framework, local or national, small or large.

By free choice and by peaceful means.

VOLUNTEERS' CHARTER

1. Volunteer work has a value for the community, for:

- improvement of the quality of society.
- defending the interests of people and groups who are in a disadvantaged position.
- and can be a fundamentally democratic way to meet needs and to create opportunities in society.

Volunteer work can be either autonomous or additional to professional service, to renew, enlarge or support it. Volunteer work is done both by men and by women, young people and children, in the field of human service, culture and citizen action, and environmental protection.

2. Every citizen has a right to do volunteer work according to his/her capacities.

3. The right to do volunteer work does not mean that any volunteer can do every kind of volunteer work. Organisations match according to the tasks. The development of a wide range of opportunities should be encouraged, so that there is a place for everybody.

4. Volunteer work should not be the privilege of certain groups in society. No citizen should be excluded from volunteer work because of financial problems (expenses), or social handicaps like being out of work, being old, very young or disabled, or belonging to a minority group. Obstacles in law, in systems of taxation, or income should be removed.

5. Volunteers have rights. These rights should be respected and put into operation by the organisations which work with volunteers. Volunteers have a right to:

- information about the work and the organisation.
- introduction to the work.
- support.
- a chance to learn and progress in the work.
- a chance to have a say in the work being done if they so wish.
- a chance to participate in their organisational structure.
- when volunteers are working in a professional setting, they have a right to have their own organisational structure (group or association).
- volunteers have a right to receive out of pocket expenses. If the organisation is not in a position to do so, this must be discussed and plans made to remedy the situation.
- insurance.

6. Volunteers have obligations: volunteering does not mean working without commitment. Volunteers should act as agreed, and do as promised: volunteers should be dependable.

7. Citizens who volunteer have a right to expect that they will not be exploited and that the true social value of their contribution will be recognised and respected by the agency concerned.

8. Both volunteers and paid workers are indispensable. Each should acknowledge the value of the other's contribution, and each should receive equal appreciation in society and by the organisations with which they work. Both volunteers and paid staff should be able to contribute from their own specific positions and possibilities which include respect for each other's codes of work and interests, and the general interest of the public.

9. Volunteers should be valued and recognised by government – at all levels. This includes the financial support which should make the functioning of volunteer work possible. When establishing advisory councils, the government should see that representation of volunteers is included.

10. Volunteer work has a function for the future. It is a power for renewal of the present system, shaping, together with others, the society of tomorrow.