

“Shaping policy for voluntary service through service” - investigating the effects of research in the field of voluntary service for forming global and European policies

**13 June 2007, European Parliament
Brussels**

CONFERENCE REPORT

On the 13th June 2007 in cooperation with MEPs **Marian Harkin** and **Gisela Kallenbach** AVSO organised a conference in the European Parliament. The aim of the conference was two-fold: firstly to present the latest research projects in the field of voluntary service and volunteering, and secondly to hear from policy makers about their take on research and how research results could be fed into policy-making.



The conference took place in the **European Parliament** in Brussels, courtesy of the two Members of the European Parliament, and attracted more than 130 participants from Brussels but also a fair amount from abroad. The conference kicked-off with introductory remarks by the two MEPs, who both stressed the importance of research in the field of voluntary service, where the evidence is overwhelmingly anecdotal. Mrs. Harkin stated, that volunteering and service is of course about action and

about doing things, however we need reflection in order to improve. Research can give us the answers of how we can add value to this activity. She also mentioned the example of the growth of the volunteering movement in Ireland, to which proper research and reflection can add in terms of better structures and better tailored placements, alleviate the blockages and support the sector in general. Mrs. Kallenbach in addition to this mentioned the cultural and historical differences between volunteering in the old and the new EU member states, as well as between South and North and mentioned the need to foster volunteering policies in the new and the future member states of the EU.

1. Panel on research in the field of volunteering and voluntary service



After these introductory remarks, the researchers presented their work. First off **Steve Powell** of ProMente research presented the research results of the study commissioned by AVSO on “the impact of youth voluntary service in Europe”. Steve Powell stressed the need for more research in the field, since voluntary service is gaining in popularity. However, he cautioned, that volunteerism is about action, over-administration, over-burocratising might also damage the “volunteer-

spirit”. Steve Powell then listed some of the key debates of the moment that tie in closely with the research results:

- ★ the national debates about the military services for young men, and replacing it with compulsory civil services;
- ★ another key aspect is the question, what kind of service has what impact? We need to look into this carefully, so that we can design programmes that really achieve the results we want them to achieve.
- ★ Another important debate topic is volunteering versus the provision of social services. This ties into the polemic of government structures job replacements...etc.

Steve Powell then listed a number of other “hot-topics” like volunteerism as a tool for social inclusion, fighting xenophobia, fostering tolerance, volunteering of older citizens, measures for active-ageing, skills and competences for the unemployed...etc. Volunteering and voluntary service thus can be seen as a tool-box for social change tying in closely with social policy issues. However, all of this can only be documented if properly researched in a systematic structured way. Steve Powell then went on to summarize the findings of their research, which will be published by the end of July.

The next presenters were **Professor Leila Patel** of the Johannesburg University and **Helene Perold** of VOSESA - Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa. Their discourse was about the overall findings of five-country study on service and volunteering in SADC - the Southern African Development Community.



Their research was a unique South - North collaboration between VOSESA, an organisation addressing the need for well researched up-to date information on civic service and volunteering in Southern Africa, the Centre for Social Development in Africa at the University of Johannesburg, the Centre for Social development at the Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri and as well the country researchers from Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The aim was to create the knowledge base on their continent, which is data poor and research poor in general. The research team realised, that they have to take charge of their own data and already these features makes it a different kind of discourse to northern countries. Another challenge was that service and volunteering is not a field in Africa, not an area of investigation in the academic community, there is a lot of activity going on, but it is not a field of enquiry.

First **Helene Perold** detailed the research methodology and the basic approach. The research was designed using the social development approach to service and volunteering, the countries were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- ★ There were sufficient service programmes to study
- ★ Experienced in-country researchers were available to conduct the research

The findings of the research was summarized and presented by Professor **Leila Patel**. Firstly she explained the findings in terms of the profile of the servers, which were quite contradictory to the historical assumptions of well-off volunteers helping out the poor. They found, that a large number of poor people volunteer across the region, and those volunteers were mostly women, and especially in the care of HIV/AIDS sufferers it was mostly older women. There are also a great number of young volunteers involved in different activities. The act of giving provided an opportunity for collaboration and mutuality where both servers and beneficiaries are poor and depend on each other for their survival and support. The research focused on the benefit for the server, but the findings confirmed a great sense of reciprocity, that the servers and the beneficiaries both depend of the act of giving, and this is a very important aspect when devising new programmes.

Professor Patel then went on to detail the different programmes of the region, all of which had a strong focus on empowerment and fostering active citizenship. A common feature within the programmes is the general desire to build democracy and encourage participation, and that the profile of the server matches the profile of the beneficiaries, which is a very important piece of information. The human development goals most prevalent with focus on health, peace building, livelihoods, employment, environmental protection and education, and the social development approach one of the defining features of service in the region with programmes involving collaborative partnerships between government, community-based groups, faith-based groups, etc.

Helene Perold then drew up the following conclusions:

- ★ None of the countries had specific social policies on service and volunteering
- ★ Instead, they were integrated into other policies and national strategies concerned with social welfare/development, health, HIV/AIDS, youth, orphans and vulnerable children and rural development
- ★ Lack of policy considered to be a barrier to development of the field

Then Helene Perold also mentioned some of the policy implications this research project has, and also the need for follow-up research linked to these initial findings.

As the last speaker of the first panel, **Sonia Haapanen** presented the preliminary findings of her research project entitled "Inclusion work: immigrant youth in voluntary service - a Case Study on Organisations' Intercultural Competence". The research started in February and will be finalised in July 2007.

The aims of the research are:

- ★ The evaluation of the cultural barriers that ethnic minorities face for participating in international voluntary service projects, which brings us to the concept of intercultural competence
- ★ Therefore, the main aim is the identification of the level of intercultural competence required for sending and hosting organisations to facilitate the inclusion of ethnic minorities in EVS projects
- ★ Also, by looking at specific organisations and evaluating their level of intercultural competence, we have the possibility to identify challenges and best practices in inclusion work

Sonia Haapanen gave the background for her study, by explaining, that voluntary service has been realised as an effective tool in solving certain social and economic problems. Consequently, its role in the fight against xenophobia and in the reinforcement of social cohesion has also become evident. This is especially so due to the positive impact that it can have on both the individual and the societal levels. Particularly at the individual level, through its non-formal and informal learning dimensions, voluntary service can empower disadvantaged youth, and thus promotes their social inclusion. Within the scope of this dissertation, the focus is on youth who are disadvantaged due to the cultural obstacles they face in life. These include especially the descendants of the post-World War II labour migrants, in other words, the second and third generation immigrants in Europe.

She mentioned, that some of the voluntary service organisations do not even have a definition or policy for disadvantaged, or immigrant young people, fearing, that defining them would in itself be discriminatory.

However, the number of immigrant participants in voluntary service, and particularly in the European Voluntary Service programme, has been rather low. Many formal, practical and personal barriers still hinder participation. The assumption here is that one of the reasons for the low rate of participation is the lack of appropriate consideration given by voluntary service organisations to intercultural issues. Consequently, the aim of Sonia Haapanen's study is to identify the required level of intercultural competence needed for these organisations to facilitate the inclusion of immigrant youth in European Voluntary Service projects. Against this background is evaluated the level of competence that four case organisations have developed for inclusion work. The case organisations were chosen from France and Germany, since these two countries have had a long and rather similar history with voluntary service as well as with immigration. However, they have

pursued rather different integration policies, which may have influenced also the civil societies' approaches to inclusion work.

Sonia Haapanen in conclusion gave a brief insight into the methodology she uses for the research, namely Bennett's developmental model to:

- ★ Give insight to organisations' experiences and approaches to inclusion work (in this respect, also identify the organisations' level of intercultural competence),
- ★ Map out challenges organisations have faced, and
- ★ Share good practices

2. Panel on policy and programmes

During the second panel of the conference, the representatives of two major international organisations gave an overview of their research and policy efforts in the field of volunteerism.

The first speaker of the second panel was **Karin Lopatta-Loibl**, policy officer within the Youth policy unit of the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture. Mrs. Lopatta-Loibl is responsible for the inclusion strategy and development cooperation. She first outlined the current state of play within her unit in relation to research and voluntary activities. Among other issues she mentioned the consultation procedure with the member states governments about the implementation 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. Voluntary activities exist in all the Member States in various forms, and the Commission's objectives are to develop these activities in their diversity, facilitating access to them for even more young people and promoting and better recognising their individual and collective benefit. The European Commission is currently evaluating the first reports on the implementation of the common objectives in the member states. The analyses report will be published as an annex to the European Commission Communication in September.

Mrs. Lopatta-Loibl then went on mentioning that there are still quite some obstacles to the full achievement of these common objectives especially related to the visa problems for young people coming from third countries, the incompatibility between volunteering and unemployment benefits, the still existing barriers to including young people with fewer opportunities to voluntary activities and the specific challenge of the recognition of volunteering and its potential as the bridge between education and employment. Mrs. Lopatta-Loibl updated participants about the events to come during the Portuguese EU Presidency, such as the Youth event on the 15-17 September which will have a special focus on youth volunteering and the subsequent resolution that will be taken. She also mentioned the new features of the new Youth in Action programme 2007 - 2013 in relation to voluntary activities.

To conclude Karin Lopatta-Loibl highlighted some of the achievements of her unit within the European Commission in cooperating with research teams in the framework of the European Network of Youth Knowledge and the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning based on indicators and benchmarks (CRELL).



The next speaker was **Mae Chao**, who is Volunteer Infrastructure Specialist within the Research & Development Unit at the United Nations Volunteers. Ms. Mae Chao started her presentation by reminding the participants, that volunteering is an effective and an essential means to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It can only be achieved with the full involvement of people all over the world. Citizens need to take ownership of the MDGs and use their ingenuity and creativity if absolute poverty is to be reduced.

Then Mae Chao gave some concrete examples about the cooperation between UNV and researchers. She mentioned that when the UN General Assembly declared 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, it recognized and sought to enhance the potential of volunteerism to contribute to the achievement of national and global development agendas. The United Nations Volunteers as the UN programme responsible for promoting and harnessing volunteerism for effective development was designated as the focal point for IYV.

Before the end of IYV in 2001, 123 National Committees in six continents, composed of government, private sector, academia, and civil society organizations, were established to recognize, promote and facilitate volunteering contributions. To facilitate research on volunteer activity worldwide, a team led by UNV and the "INDEPENDENT SECTOR", a US-based non-profit organization, developed a methodology for a comprehensive qualitative survey of the extent and nature of volunteering in a country, called "Measuring Volunteering: A Practical Toolkit".

In 2002, based on the follow-up report on IYV, the UN General Assembly in a formal resolution recognized the importance of volunteerism as a resource for development saying: "volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at...poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management, social integration and...overcoming social exclusion and discrimination." The UN General Assembly resolution not only recognized the power of volunteerism to contribute to the achievement of development goals, but also the need for actions and policies to enhance this contribution. It recognized the need for research at the national, regional, and global levels to provide objective advocacy and proven models for informed policy-making supportive of volunteerism for development. The resolution explicitly "Recognizes the increasing attention being given to the economic dimension of volunteerism, and encourages Governments, with the support of civil society, to build up a knowledge base on the subject, to disseminate data and to expand research on other volunteer-related issues, including in developing countries..."



In the very near future, at the request of the member states, work will begin on a report to the UN General Assembly on the status of volunteerism since the IYV, and include proposals on how **IYV + 10** might be marked. We are looking forward to all the stakeholders contributing. It is a tremendous opportunity to take stock as well as look to the future. Here is an opportunity for the research community and its partners to propose a global agenda for knowledge building to inform volunteerism for development policies.

Mae Chao went on giving some very specific examples of economic benefits of volunteering worldwide as well as mentioning new government led initiatives. In conclusion she even gave the participants a "hot off the press news" that the G8 committed to support initiatives in Africa such as "to assist the AU in setting up an African Volunteer Service, which will recruit experts for participation in post-conflict and reconstruction operations in accordance with the needs identified by the AU."

Massimiliano Viatore, President of AVSO gave the concluding remarks of the conference by summing up the presentations and the main points of the discussions. He began by reminding the participants how important it is to involve the young generations actively into the society, and how life-changing these volunteer experiences really are. It is crucial to recognise and value the educational value of voluntary service. Massimiliano Viatore congratulated the conference and the fact, that it receives attention in the European Parliament, which indicates, that voluntary service is gaining in importance and attention. However, there remain a few issues to be mentioned, where there is still

room for improvement, areas where we can still strengthen our efforts jointly to achieve results:

- ★ An existing gap between policy statements and what is happening in reality, one sign of this is the reality of the European Union budget allocated to these issues of education and training and programmes for citizens. If we really want to encourage European Active citizenship, some more funding and investment is necessary.
- ★ In all the countries something is happening concerning national civic services, there are on-going political discussions and programmes. Voluntary services are more and more being recognised as a tool for involving young people actively. The challenge is now to link the different national efforts, exchange information, best practice and policies. Linking and connecting these different initiatives would further promote and advance the case of civic service and volunteering.

In conclusion, Massimiliano Viatore highlighted some areas, where future focus is needed:

- ★ International voluntary service has a huge potential to become a powerful tool for social change, to create dialogue between different cultures and an opportunity for young people.
- ★ There is very little literature and research on voluntary service, what it is, the benefits. More research and documentation will help the promotion and recognition.
- ★ More financial resources should be allocated to programmes and policies, both at EU level and national government levels. Financial resources mean more opportunities for discussions, exchange of best practice, overcoming barriers and better quality programmes.
- ★ To create a European platform for voluntary service organisations, to have a political space in promoting and professionalizing the sector, to gain recognition and be included much more in political and policy debates concerning all the cross-cutting issues that voluntary service effects.

In conclusion we believe the conference was a success, some spin-off activities already confirmed this. We are continuing the work and efforts that we as AVSO summarized in this conference. All the presentations will be uploaded on the avso website shortly.

Resources

AVSO - Association of Voluntary Service Organisations

www.avso.org

PROMENTE - Social research

www.promente.org

VOSESA - Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa

www.vosesa.org.za

University of Johannesburg, Centre for Social Development

<http://staging.uj.ac.za/Default.aspx?alias=staging.uj.ac.za/csda>

UNV - United Nations Volunteers

<http://www.unv.org/>

European Commission portal for volunteering

http://europa.eu/youth/volunteering - exchanges/index_eu_en.html

European Commission Youth policy portal

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/whitepaper/post-launch/post_en_1_en.html

European Parliament

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/default_en.htm

MEP Marian Harkin

<http://www.marianharkin.ie/>

MEP Gisela Kallenbach

<http://www.gisela-kallenbach.de/>