



Recommendation 1496 (2001)¹

Improving the status and role of volunteers as a contribution by the Parliamentary Assembly to the International Year of Volunteers 2001

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The year 2001 has been declared International Year of Volunteers by the United Nations General Assembly, and the United Nations Volunteers programme has been designated as the focal point for its preparation and follow-up. Voluntary action has a long tradition in most European countries, even though the degree to which it exists and the forms which it takes vary with individual states' political, democratic, socio-cultural and economic conditions.
2. Voluntary action involves learning, sharing and helping others; it enables the young and not-so-young to acquire experience of life, civic spirit and vocational skills. It plays a part in transmitting knowledge. It makes unemployed volunteers more employable, and helps to keep the elderly active.
3. Voluntary action represents a substantial proportion of the gross domestic product in many states. It responds to social change, new needs and human suffering. Sometimes, it anticipates political intervention by creating new types of service, which later provide paid employment. Voluntary action is therefore a source of jobs.
4. The Assembly has often called on the forces of civil society to emerge, as a guarantee of social cohesion and an expression of participatory democracy. Voluntary action should enable all citizens to play a part in the democratic process, and its role should be particularly encouraged in the central and east European states, which are working to consolidate their new-found democracy.
5. The Assembly welcomes the United Nations initiative, which also turns the spotlight on the Council of Europe's ongoing activities, such as its European Convention on the promotion of a Transnational Long-term Voluntary Service for Young People (ETS No. 175) and its work on a code of ethics for young volunteers. The Assembly strongly favours the development of a genuine culture of voluntary action, necessarily extending to the Council of Europe itself.
6. The Assembly accordingly asks the Committee of Ministers to call on member states to:
 - 6.1. become involved, during this celebratory year, in information and awareness-raising campaigns on voluntary action, emphasising the invaluable contribution which volunteers make to the community, and the vital need for partnership between volunteers and professionals in all fields, particularly the social sector;
 - 6.2. declare a European day of volunteers;
 - 6.3. seek to identify and eliminate, in their laws and practice, any obstacles which directly or indirectly prevent people from engaging in voluntary action, and to reduce tax pressure which penalises voluntary action;

1. Assembly debate on 24 January 2001 (5th Sitting) (see [Doc. 8917](#), report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Ms Gülek). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 January 2001 (5th Sitting).



- 6.4. adopt and promote, in accordance with their national traditions, dynamic policies favouring voluntary action which, inter alia:
 - a. recognise the democratic, humanitarian, social, educational, training and economic value of voluntary action;
 - b. endorse the role played by voluntary action in involving citizens in the democratic process;
 - c. give voluntary workers legal status and adequate social protection, while respecting their independence, and removing financial obstacles to volunteering;
 - d. use various measures and incentives to encourage everyone and all sectors of the community – including political leaders, the active, the unemployed, the disabled, the elderly, the retired, migrants, refugees, and the excluded – to become involved in voluntary action;
 - e. help, particularly by earmarking budgetary and other resources, to support and develop voluntary initiatives of value to the community, while ensuring that the funds in question are appropriately used and allocated;
 - f. urge voluntary associations and volunteers themselves to respect the values and principles of the Council of Europe in their objectives and their activities and to remain politically neutral.
7. The Assembly takes the view that the Committee of Ministers should also:
 - 7.1. urge the member states to ratify the European Convention on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-term Voluntary Service for Young People, so that it can come into force by the end of 2001, and use up-to-date technologies, such as the Internet, to implement it;
 - 7.2. work for ratification of this convention by the European Union and non-member states of the Council of Europe;
 - 7.3. speed up preparation of the code of ethics for young volunteers, setting out the rights and duties of young volunteers in Europe, with a view to finalising it as soon as possible;
 - 7.4. sponsor the organisation of an annual televised European contest, in co-operation with Eurovision, designed to reward outstanding individual, group and community volunteer achievements;
 - 7.5. institute a European observatory and registry of volunteer work.
8. Finally, following the example set by other international organisations, the Committee of Ministers should bring the voluntary dimension into the Council of Europe Secretariat and recruit volunteers to work alongside Council staff and experts in areas which are insufficiently developed, such as the rights and welfare of children, the promotion of women's status, the fight against trafficking in human beings and anti-racism.