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CHAPTER



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VOLUNTEERING  
INFRASTRUCTURE

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# 1. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

## CONCEPT DEFINITION

The concept of volunteering infrastructure in France is still lacking a well-defined framework, therefore the most acceptable definition would probably be a rather general one, such as the United Nations Volunteers definition<sup>1</sup>, “*systems, mechanisms and instruments needed to ensure an environment where volunteerism can flourish*”, which was also discussed at the symposium “*An enabling volunteering infrastructure in Europe: Situation – Trends – Outlook*”<sup>2</sup>, organised by the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) in Malmö, Sweden, in October 2009.

In France there are two major conceptualisations of volunteering, namely:

*The concept of “Volontariat”* is used to name the eight different forms of volunteer services that exist so far, such as the civil service. These services are voluntary and call for altruistic engagement, but entail the payment of a stipend and benefits in kind. Specific laws and regulations provide a framework for these forms of volunteering, giving them also a formal legal status. The number of volontaires in France is around 70,000 (2010 data).

*The concept of “Bénévolat”* is used to name persons who engage voluntarily in altruistic activities without any financial retribution or material benefits. Bénévoles have no formal legal status, although their activities are ruled by a series of legal regulations. The number of bénévoles in France is around 18 million. For the purpose of this report, the English term of “volunteer” will be used as a translation of the French concept of “bénévoles”.

Historically, volunteering in France had been mainly carried out within volunteer organisations (associations) and had no visibility of its own as a concept and even less as a movement. Volunteering was an act of activism within an organisation in which volunteers stayed for a lifetime contributing to a cause. The concept of volunteering/“bénévolat” began to be used first in the 1970s, always labelled as “militant bénévole” or “bénévole militant”. Social changes gradually got the concept of “bénévole” closer to the meaning of the Anglo-Saxon concept of “volunteer”, but it has not yet reached the same visibility in France as in other countries. Volunteer centres were founded very late in France (in the ‘70s) and did not do too well. They are more and more important nowadays because they fulfil a growing need. Volunteer involving organisations nevertheless remain the main voice of volunteering, and they see volunteering as an important element for their functioning.

1. United Nations Volunteers, 2005. ‘Developing a Volunteer Infrastructure – A Guidance Note’, Bonn: Bonner Universitäts-Buchdruckerei

2. European Volunteer Centre (CEV), 2010. “An enabling volunteering infrastructure in Europe: Situation – Trends – Outlook, Final Report – Conference Conclusions”, [http://www.cev.be/data/File/101027\\_GARreportMalmoe\\_INTERNET.pdf](http://www.cev.be/data/File/101027_GARreportMalmoe_INTERNET.pdf)

## 2. VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE

In France, there is no official definition of volunteering. The definition most commonly used was put forward in a report<sup>3</sup> of the French Social and Economic Council in 1993 “*Le bénévole est celui qui s’engage librement pour mener à bien une action en direction d’autrui, action non salariée, non soumise à l’obligation de la loi, en dehors de son temps professionnel et familial.*” (The volunteer is a person who engages freely to carry out an action for the benefit of others, without remuneration and not subject to obligations under a law, outside of one’s work time and family). This definition was reached after a long debate within an organisation in which all segments of the French society were represented.

Volunteer work is therefore defined in opposition to paid, remunerated work. The main elements of the definition are: no salary or remuneration and the voluntary nature of the activity, entailing the lack of a juridical subordination. Volunteers, however, have to respect the statutes of the organisation they work for, as well as the security norms and regulations existing in their field of activity.

Official data on volunteering, produced by the national statistics institute<sup>4</sup> goes back to 2002 and indicates that there are 12 million bénévoles in France. A more recent survey<sup>5</sup> commissioned by France Bénévolat from the French Institute for Public Opinion, Institut Français d’Opinion Publique (IFOP), published in October 2010, indicates that there are 18 million French bénévoles engaged in voluntary activities, as follows: 11.3 million volunteers within volunteer organisations, 4.5 million in other organisations such as trade unions, political parties, religious organisations and 7.5 million engaged in informal volunteering within the community (outside

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**There are 18 million French bénévoles engaged in voluntary activities: 36% of the French population aged 15 or older.**

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of their families). In total, 36% of the French population aged 15 or older engages in volunteering activities of various kinds.

According to this IFOP Survey, people above the age of 65 are those who engage most as volunteers (one in every two volunteers), followed by the group aged 50 to 64 (48% of the population in this age group engages in volunteering). The engagement of young people, aged 15 to 24, is also quite high (one in three volunteers) and there is a decrease in the level of engagement after the age of 25, which then picks up and raises again after the age of 35. There are more female (roughly 54%) than male volunteers, although the difference in numbers increases when volunteering is carried out within voluntary organisations. However, it should be noted that women are under-represented in boards of directors and in leadership positions within voluntary organisations. The study also shows that level of education and readiness to volunteer correlate.

Volunteer organisations have a positive image in the French society. A number of opinion polls indicate that citizens trust volunteer organisations more than politicians. It would therefore seem logical that the image of volunteers, the key element of volunteer organisations, should also be positive. Yet this is not always the case, since labels such as “charitable ladies from the upper class”, “naïve do gooders”, “amateurs” are still, at times, attached to volunteering, which contradicts volunteers being regarded as true heroes when they respond to natural catastrophes and other emergencies.

3. Rapport du conseil économique et social sur l’essor et l’avenir du bénévolat, facteur d’amélioration de la qualité de la vie. Par Marie-Thérèse Cheroutre)

4. Enquête de l’Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), “Vie Associative” October 2002

5. La situation du Bénévolat en France en 2010 - Enquête France Bénévolat – IFOP – Crédit Mutuel

### 3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

*There is a widely shared feeling that volunteer engagement can take such a great variety of forms, that it is not desirable to try to put them all under one specific law.*

There is no specific law on volunteering, “bénévolat” in France. One rationale is that there is a widely shared general feeling that volunteer engagement (bénévolat) can take such a great variety of forms, that it is not desirable to try to put them all under one specific law. But there is an agreement on the fact that the law ruling voluntary organisations<sup>6</sup> (VOs) should be preserved in its present form, as it offers a balanced legal framework for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs).

There are also many legal acts concerning volunteering, in particular concerning labour regulations, for instance dispositions allowing staff to take time off for volunteering. Sometimes the lack of legal regulations creates some uncertainties, and a need to study jurisprudence before being sure about the legality of certain actions. VIOs are strictly controlled by tax and financial authorities, who may challenge volunteering activities if they consider that they might qualify as “disguised labour”. There is also a strict control on how grants (subventions) are spent by VIOs. Another area of strict control concerns the public fund-raising activities of VOs, such as collecting money in the street for a cause or calling for donations. The volunteering sector has set up its own body of peer-control, Le committé de la Charte<sup>7</sup>, and VIOs have the responsibility of respecting all these regulations affecting volunteering activities.

The ministry overseeing the non-profit sector in France at present is the Ministry of National Education Youth and Associative Life (Ministère de L'éducation Nationale, de la Jeunesse et de la Vie Associative).

### 4. STRUCTURE OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEERING

The most relevant part of the non-profit sector, from the point of view of volunteer involvement, consists of volunteer organisations (VOs) and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs). The following sections refer only to this kind of organisation, leaving aside other structures such as foundations, cooperatives and mutual organisations. The VIOs sector is presently undergoing major changes. Currently, the main actors in the volunteering sector in France are:

**Conseil National de la Vie Associative<sup>8</sup> - CNVA** (*National Council for Associative Life*) Founded in 1984, the CNVA used to be a consultative committee composed of VIOs and attached to the French prime minister. This council was replaced in June 2011 by an Haut Conseil de la Vie Associative, a committee whose task is to give expert advice to the government on issues concerning VIOs.

**Conférence Permanente des Coordinations Associatives<sup>9</sup> - CPCA** (*Standing Conference of Associative Coordinations*) Founded in 1992, the CPCA currently unites 16 sectoral umbrella bodies, representing 700 federations and more than 500,000 local organisations. The CPCA

6. Loi du 1er juillet 1901 relative au contrat d'association.

7. <http://www.comitecharte.org/>

8. <http://www.associations.gouv.fr/112-le-conseil-national-de-la-vie.html>

9. <http://www.cPCA.asso.fr/>

works to promote the sector in its diversity and the development of the civil dialogue in France. As a national umbrella body, the CPCA deals with cross-sectoral issues of voluntary organisations, represent and promote their common interests towards public authorities and French institutions.

**Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental<sup>10</sup> - CESE** (*Economic, Social and Environmental Council*) Since 1984, VIOs are represented in this consultative assembly of the French government. VIOs can therefore have a say in all issues debated at the CESE, and they are able to put forward topics for discussions. The CESE has regional counterparts (CESR) in which local VIOs are also represented.

**France Bénévolat<sup>11</sup>** (*France Volunteering*) Created in 2003 by the merger of Planete Solidarité and the ailing Centre National du Volontariat, France Bénévolat is the largest national volunteer centre in France today, with 300 regional centres or counters nationwide. France Bénévolat fulfils three main functions: 1) brokerage between volunteer availability and demand 2) promotion of volunteering and 3) recognition of volunteering. It undertakes studies, commissions surveys, organises two big, annual conferences on different volunteering-related topics. It has developed tools for the recognition of skills and competences acquired through volunteering, for instance the Volunteer Passport.

**Espace Bénévolat<sup>12</sup>** (*Volunteering Space*) is a Paris-based structure of volunteer centres, focused on e-techniques for volunteering brokerage. It also undertakes activities related to the promotion or recognition of volunteering, such as awards for youth volunteering. It runs a special program for volunteers involved in literacy programs called “Coeurs à lire”.

**Fondation du Bénévolat<sup>13</sup>** (*Foundation for Volunteering*) set up in 1994, the foundation provides insurance schemes for volunteers.

**Fédération Française du Bénévolat et de la Vie Associative<sup>14</sup>** (*French Federation of Volunteering and Associative Life*) is based in the city of Mulhouse and does brokerage at local level, and holds a yearly European Award for volunteering in the framework of an event usually held at the European Institutions in Strasbourg.

The Regional centres of France Bénévolat are autonomous and independent organisations with their own governing bodies. They fulfil similar functions to the three roles described above for France Bénévolat, with different levels of efficiency. The national structure provides help and guidance for the regional centres when needed and there is cooperation and pooling of resources, in particular between local centres in the same region.

Generally, there used to be little cooperation between the different volunteering support-structures listed above. One of the collateral benefits of the European Year of Volunteering (EYV) 2011 has been a greater cooperation between them, in particular between France Bénévolat and Espace Bénévolat, as they contributed to the same preparatory meetings and were members of the same Alliance EYV -France.

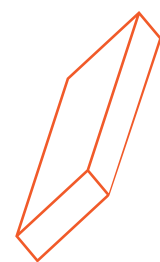
10. <http://www.conseil-economique-et-social.fr/>

11. <http://www.francebenevolat.org/>

12. <http://www.espacebenevolat.org/>

13. [http://www.benevolat-info.fr/index\\_accueil.php](http://www.benevolat-info.fr/index_accueil.php)

14. <http://www.benevolat.org>



CPCA acts as an umbrella organisation for VIOs, working in different but well-defined fields of activity such as sports, culture, environment etc. Volunteer centres were not members of this structure but France Bénévolat and Espace Bénévolat have cooperated closely with the CPCA during the European Year of Volunteering, in the framework of the Alliance EYV-France. The idea of this Alliance was launched by France Bénévolat but its secretariat was then taken over by the CPCA, which as an advocacy body promoting issues that are common to associations, had the scope to promote volunteering, the common feature for the organisations.

The largest VIOs are active in field like sports, health care, first aid and medical assistance. Some of the most representative ones are the French Red Cross, Secours Catholique (French Caritas), Secours Populaire (a secular counterpart of Secours Catholique). It is difficult to know the exact number of volunteers in each structure. According to the survey commissioned by France Bénévolat from the Agency IFOP<sup>15</sup>, there are 11.3 million French people who volunteer within VIOs, 4.5 million in other organisations such as trade unions, political parties, religious organisations, and 7.3 million who engage in volunteering in the community (outside their families), concluding that about 36% of the population aged 15 and over engages in voluntary activities.

VIOs cooperate with each other within the same sector, e.g. sports, youth, culture, social sector and structures such as CPCA also facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation. Moreover, the French government periodically organises conferences, prepared by different working groups composed by voluntary sector representatives. Volunteer centres participate in such conferences and also remain involved in sectoral groupings. In addition, France Bénévolat has a standing committee uniting some of its most important partners amongst VIOs, with the aim of pooling information and resources as well as carrying out some prospective work.

15. La situation du Bénévolat en France en 2010 - Enquête France Bénévolat - IFOP - Crédit Mutuel

## 5. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The other components of the non-profit sector, namely cooperatives and mutuals are partly managed by volunteers and provide voluntary activities.

**Public authorities** are mainly engaged in supporting and promoting the other form of volunteering, the volunteering with a status (volontariat) for the age group 18-28 by financing 85% of the monetary compensation they receive during their volunteering mission, whether these are missions overseas for humanitarian aid, missions in diplomatic service, civic service etc.

There are no volunteers involved in public services. However, public authorities (municipality, local authorities) also promote volunteering (bénévolat) through activities such as town twinning, actions that involve a great number of volunteers usually managed by a VIO subsidised by the municipality. Many local authorities have set up and are subsidising structures called Houses of Associations (Maison des Associations), aiming to facilitate the work of local VIOs by providing information, office space and equipment, meeting rooms and guidance to VIOs.

Some large **companies** have set up volunteering programmes for their own employees; this is not yet a common practice, although its scope is growing. When setting up these programmes, they sometimes seek advice from volunteer centres such as France Bénévolat. Businesses also fund volunteer activities carried out by VIOs.

**Schools** are not involved in the promotion of volunteering, and there is no volunteering subject included in the school curricula. Another positive result of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 was that the Ministry of Education allowed VIOs to launch an operation called “Ambassadors” in schools aiming at raising teachers and pupils’ awareness of volunteering. This operation will continue and is one of the legacies of the European Year in France.

Some schools and higher education establishments, such as Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de la Rochelle<sup>16</sup>, encourage volunteering but mainly as private initiatives, which thus remain isolated cases rather than a norm within the school system.

Since the national government is tending to diminish its support for VIOs, the latter are developing closer links to local authorities in order to promote their aims and volunteering. Partnership with businesses is still at its very beginning, but interest in establishing such partnerships is growing.

## 6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

It is difficult to identify the concrete funding sources for volunteering in France as the funding is part of the general system of supporting the overall non-profit sector. The main source of funding is the public sector, state and local authorities. Social Institutions, social security bodies also participate in the funding of the non-profit sector. There are no reliable figures of the global amounts.

At national level, some organizations sign triennial funding contracts with the government. However, such funding is not always reliable as contracts may be changed and payment schedules are not always respected, which generates cash-flow problems. As a result, requirements to receive such funding get more and more demanding and complex.

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**Membership based volunteering is in decline and present members of local voluntary organisations are getting older - therefore there are concerns about the future of voluntary organisations.**

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Other sources of funding for the non-profit sector include own funding of organisations and funds from businesses or donations. Operational grants are rare, and project-based funding is more frequent. Project targets have to be defined more and more precisely in order for a proposal to be accepted and funded. Funding by business as well as private, individual donations are still not wide-spread in France but there is tendency towards them increasing.

Fund-raising by organisations is well-organised in the charity, social and cultural sectors. Only about 60 large organisations appeal to the generosity of the public by fund-raising. They are united in an organisation called “France Générosité”. Volunteer centres are not members of this body and they do not run fund-raising campaigns.

16. [www.esc-larochelle.fr](http://www.esc-larochelle.fr)

## 7. REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

There is reliable research on volunteering in France but it is not carried out systematically. There are institutes conducting research in the field of volunteering, for example *Recherches et Solidarités*<sup>17</sup> and universities, such as the *University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne*, where excellent research has been carried out by reputable researchers such as Viviane Tchernonog and Edith Archambault. There are also sociologists in different French universities who have worked on voluntary organisations or related subjects. These academic works are used by VIOs, but unfortunately organisations cannot influence the researchers' topic choice.

The government has a specific fund for which VIOs can apply in order to carry out research on topics of their interest but the sums are not substantial. The impact of volunteering is not constantly and properly measured. Voluntary organisations are advised to indicate in their budgets the monetary value of the volunteer work, merely as an indication. These amounts are approximate, calculated on the basis of what the replacement cost, meaning what would have been the cost of the service delivered by volunteers if paid staff would have been employed. More regular research and statistics would be helpful in order to identify the targets and real issues, and therefore to develop the right programmes responding to real needs.

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**Voluntary organisations are advised to indicate in their budgets the monetary value of the volunteer work, as an indication.**

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## 8. ETHICS AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR VOLUNTEERING

There are no formal ethical codes for volunteering in general. Individual VIOs have nevertheless developed different documents such as charters, in which the rights and responsibilities of volunteers engaging in these organisations are mapped out. There are two organisations that comprise those VIOs who want to respect ethical codes concerning donations: "*La chartre du Don en confiance*"<sup>18</sup> created in 1988, and "*France Générosité*"<sup>19</sup> created in 1999 as a union of 71 organisations who carry out public fund-raising campaigns.

17. <http://www.recherches-solidarites.org/>

18. <http://www.comitecharte.org/>

19. <http://www.francegenerosites.org/>

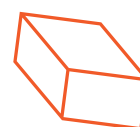


## 9. AWARENESS OF VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

France is lacking a national database of volunteers and volunteer opportunities. France Bénévolat at the national level as well as other volunteer centres at a more local level, however record volunteer opportunities in order to match them with people wanting to volunteer. There is no public policy to promote volunteering or communicate volunteering to the public at large on a regular basis. This is done occasionally, linked to particular events, such as the organisation of a national conference on the future of volunteer organisations, the EYV2011 Tour<sup>20</sup> stop in Paris etc. The promotion of volunteering is undertaken by each individual organisation according to its own policies and means.



National media is not very receptive to volunteering, except for very particular circumstances or events. Local media is more likely to carry items on volunteering describing the activities of local volunteer organisations. The coverage generally sheds a positive light on volunteering but tends to concentrate on exceptional events.



## 10. ADDITIONAL COUNTRY SPECIFICITIES

All relevant country specificities have been outlined above.

## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

In France, a distinction is made between mainstream volunteering (Bénévolat) and volunteering with a status (Volontariat). This is not the case elsewhere in Europe and permanently needs explanation. Yet it would be very useful to make this difference also at the European level when proposing helpful infrastructures for the development of volunteering, as the needs of these two forms of volunteering are not the same.

As already proposed in CEV's Manifesto for Volunteering<sup>21</sup>, we recommend the adoption of a status for "European Associations", considering that "such a status would enhance the visibility of the volunteering infrastructure organisations at the European level and would acknowledge their role in building a European identity, in fostering mutual understanding and building European social capital".

20. <http://europa.eu/volunteering/>

21. The European Volunteer Centre (CEV), 2009. European Elections Manifesto Do you engage for those who engage?

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## Resources

Conférence Permanente des Coordinations Associatives [www.cpa.asso.fr](http://www.cpa.asso.fr)

Conseil Economique Social et Environmental [www.conseil-economique-et-social.fr](http://www.conseil-economique-et-social.fr)

Comité de la Charte [www.comitecharte.org](http://www.comitecharte.org)

Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de la Rochelle [www.esc-larochelle.fr](http://www.esc-larochelle.fr)

Espace Bénévolat [www.espacebenevolat.org](http://www.espacebenevolat.org)

European Volunteer Centre (CEV), 2010. *“An enabling volunteering infrastructure in Europe: Situation – Trends – Outlook, Final Report – Conference Conclusions”*

European Volunteer Centre (CEV), 2009. *“European Elections Manifesto Do you engage for those who engage?”* [http://www.cev.be/117-cev\\_2009\\_2014\\_european\\_parliament\\_manifesto-en.html](http://www.cev.be/117-cev_2009_2014_european_parliament_manifesto-en.html)

France Bénévolat [www.francebenevolat.org](http://www.francebenevolat.org)

France Générosités [www.francegenerosites.org](http://www.francegenerosites.org)

Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques [www.insee.fr](http://www.insee.fr)

La Fédération Française du Bénévolat et de la vie Associative [www.benevolat.org](http://www.benevolat.org)

La fondation du Bénévolat [www.benevolat-info.fr](http://www.benevolat-info.fr)

La situation du Bénévolat en France en 2010 - Enquête France Bénévolat – IFOP – Crédit Mutuel

Le Passeport Bénévole [www.passeport-benevole.org](http://www.passeport-benevole.org)

Loi du 1er juillet 1901 relative au contrat d'association

Ministère de L'éducation Nationale, de la Jeunesse et de la Vie Associative [www.associations.gouv.fr](http://www.associations.gouv.fr)

Marie-Thérèse Cheroutre. *Rapport du conseil économique et social sur l'essor et l'avenir du bénévolat, facteur d'amélioration de la qualité de la vie*

Recherches Solidarités [www.recherches-solidarites.org](http://www.recherches-solidarites.org)

United Nations Volunteers, 2005. *'Developing a Volunteer Infrastructure – A Guidance Note'*, Bonn: Bonner Universitäts-Buchdruckerei

