



Our Principles, our Move
Nos Principes, nos Actions
Nuestros Principios, nuestra Acción
مبادئنا, حراكنا



CROCE
ROSSA
SAMMARINESE

Original: English

12th Mediterranean Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Agenda item no. 3

Concept paper

YOUTH AND VOLUNTEERING PROMOTION

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“Voluntary service is at the heart of community-building. Volunteering promotes trust and reciprocity. It encourages people to be responsible citizens and provides them with an environment where they can learn the duties of democratic involvement. Volunteering within National Societies is carried out by people who are committed to the Fundamental Principles and motivated by their own free will without the expectation of material or financial gain. Our volunteers serve vulnerable people, and work towards a more humane and peaceful world.”

From IFRC Strategy 2020
Enabling Action 1: Build Strong Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, work can be considered as the epicentre of the majority of people's everyday life. In such a scenario, it may seem confusing that people carry out non-remunerated work for organizations that may range from humanitarian aid to sport associations, from literature to environmental societies. However, when taking a closer look at the people that are part of such organizations it is possible to see that they all share a strong interest for the purpose of the organization and are highly motivated by the benefits they gain from their volunteering activity, which range from increased social interactions to acquiring new skills that may be useful both personally and professionally, from having contributed to a cause to making a good use of their free time.

According to the **Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work**, published by the International Labour Organization in 2011, ‘Volunteer work’, often referred to as ‘volunteering’ is a crucial renewable resource [...]. The scale of such work is enormous and the contribution it makes to the quality of life in countries everywhere is greater still.’

Regardless of the scope of the activities, duration and end beneficiaries, it is widely agreed that volunteering is an important human resource which many organizations count on: when opening up to volunteers, organizations are well aware that they are not only recruiting people that will help them carry out specific tasks and duties, but that they are also welcoming people that add their personal and professional skills to the table, hence increasing the human potential of the organization itself. Other remarkable aspects of volunteer work are that it is generally open to both adults and young people and offers diverse volunteering options for all age groups as well as tailored training opportunities depending on the field of action of the volunteering activities.

When taking volunteering into consideration from a wider point of view, it is possible to state that it represents an incredible opportunity which also generates social value for the main actors involved: for organizations -because it enables them to respond to the many vulnerabilities and issues that would otherwise remain unattended-, for local communities –which are encouraged to act as responsible citizens that are able to bring about a positive change- and also for volunteers themselves –who gain new skills and competencies, and are acknowledged by the members of their community for the work they carry out.

In such a wide and diverse context, the Red Cross and Red Crescent is placed in a privileged position for volunteer recruiting, being able to count on a worldwide network of National Societies, and offering diverse possibilities to those who wish to dedicate themselves to humanitarian work.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The International Red Cross and Red Cross Movement is the largest volunteer-based humanitarian network in the world, numbering 17 million volunteers spread through 189 member National Societies. People represent the very essence of the Movement, and -as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' **Strategy 2020** states- a strong commitment is made towards communities and volunteers: "*Voluntary service is at the heart of community-building. Volunteering promotes trust and reciprocity. It encourages people to be responsible citizens and provides them with an environment where they can learn the duties of democratic involvement.*"

Developed through a Federation-wide consultation and reflecting the opinions and points of view of National Societies, Strategy 2020 does not only describe the challenges envisaged for the future of the RC/RC, but it also underlines what are the actions needed in order to respond to such challenges and move towards the future. **Enabling Action 1 -Build Strong National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**- underlines that a nationwide network of organized branches/units with members and volunteers who have agreed to act by the Fundamental Principles is at the very heart of a strong National Society.

Such a network must count on both adult and youth volunteers which are encouraged to work together in order to promote intergenerational dialogue, as well as the exchange of experience and expertise in a spirit of mutual respect. Youth involvement is considered a "*crucial investment, not only for today but also for the future. [...] In their multiple roles as contributors – and acknowledging their skills as innovators, inter-cultural ambassadors and peer-to-peer facilitators – young people are educated, enabled and empowered to be active in leading and participating in voluntary activities and in the governance, management and services of their National Societies.*"

Indeed young people constitute a powerful force in the RC/RC Movement, representing approximately 50% of volunteers and numbering almost 9 million. Furthermore, youth have demonstrated they have the potential to carry out broad-reach and non-traditional mobilisation campaigns, as well as to engage in social, economic and political issues, acting as the driving force to promote the change they want to see in the world.

According to the [State of World Population 2014](#), published by the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), "*Young people matter. They matter because they have inherent human rights that must be upheld. They matter because an unprecedented 1.8 billion youth are alive today, and because they are the shapers and leaders of our global future. Yet in a world of adult concerns, young people are often overlooked. This tendency cries out for urgent correction, because it imperils youth as well as economies and societies at large*".

One of the goals of the United Nations' **UNV Youth Volunteering Strategy 2014-2017 'Empowering Youth through Volunteerism'** is 'strengthening youth volunteerism for global

peace and sustainable human development. The Strategy states that ‘Young people are increasingly acting as the agents of change in society, calling for institutions that are more responsive not only to their needs, but to national or global concerns [...] Without youth participation, not only are youth voices excluded, but we also risk becoming irrelevant ourselves as young people increasingly develop their own solutions to global challenges’.

During the last IFRC General Assembly, held in Sydney in November 2013, the **IFRC Youth Engagement Strategy (Y.E.S.)** was presented and endorsed by National Societies, underlining the strong will of the IFRC of reinforcing the role of Youth in the present and future of the Movement. ‘*The IFRC Y.E.S. is a global unifying strategic framework for youth engagement in RC/RC National Societies and is specifically linked to the Enabling Action1 [...]. The Y.E.S. is not a Strategy only for youth. It needs to be owned and implemented by and throughout the National Society. Senior Leadership of National Societies, as key stakeholders, are encouraged to actively engage in dialogue and equal partnership with young people to bring the Y.E.S. to life*’.

In the Mediterranean region, further reference on the topic is provided in the **Dubrovnik Declaration** –the final document resulting from the 11th Mediterranean Conference of the RC/RC Societies, celebrated in Croatia in 2010. The Declaration calls on National Societies to ‘*reinforce the role and the action of youth as the key factor in social change and development*’ as well as to ‘*emphasize the importance of promoting youth volunteer work and the advantages of their civic engagement at the national and international level*’.

CHALLENGES

The Fundamental Principles underline our main features: the Red Cross and Red Crescent ‘*is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain*’, which counts on a network of 189 National Societies, each of which ‘*must be open to all [...] and carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory*’. The Principles of **Voluntary Service** and **Unity** speak of our very essence; they define how we approach communities and involve them in our mission of preventing and alleviating human suffering wherever it may be found.

In a fast-paced and globalized world, living trends are continuously changing, influencing the ways in which people volunteer and creating new volunteering paths. Given the lack of an extensive and up-to-date database on RCRC volunteerism, during 2013-2014 the IFRC carried out a **Global Review on Volunteering (GRoV)** –the largest and most thorough review ever undertaken in the RCRC– highlighting some critical and perhaps unexpected aspects on the volunteer base of the Movement.

The overall number of 17 million volunteers suggests that the RC/RC is indeed a powerful and global organisation. However, a closer analysis of the data collected suggests that we are struggling -as a Movement- with volunteering. The following are some interesting and thought provoking facts concerning the Euro-Mediterranean area:

- The population in European countries almost doubles the one of MENA, however, the Europe Zone gathers only 10.5% of the total number of volunteers in the Movement, while the MENA Zone has 15.1%.
- In the MENA Zone, there are approximately 2.6 million volunteers. More than 90% of which are from Iran, leaving the other 17 National Societies with only 10% of the

volunteers, with an average of 1 out of every 3.045 people in the Zone as a RC/RC volunteer.

- In Europe, the German Red Cross has 22% of the volunteers of the Zone.

Even though there are many factors in volunteering that are beyond the control of National Societies, a question that arises spontaneously is 'What are the causes of these disparities'? It may be impossible to answer this question in the near future, however the data collected should help National Societies understand where they stand and how to face this reality. The GRoV underlines that '*The 'numbers' of our Volunteers are not just about the size of our workforce, it paints a picture about our capacity to engage with and connect to the communities in which we operate; about our capacity to mobilise people in support of themselves and others. Volunteerism speaks to our identity and to our philosophical and methodological approach to development. And to some extent it speaks to our relevance as an organization [...]. While we look big globally, we are not universally strong. Our engagement with volunteers may still be among the largest in the world however it is under threat. We need to talk about volunteering*'.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION

The general goal of the session is to explore volunteering in the Mediterranean context, taking into consideration both adult and youth participation in activities and programmes. The Mediterranean National Societies should commit to adapt themselves to this new and evolving scenario, in order to further promote volunteering and engagement with local communities, in order to truly build strong RC/RC Societies.

National Societies will cooperate in order to:

- Reflect upon the possible threats to volunteer retention, and discuss on how to develop new volunteering paths;
- Explore how to promote the joint work of young and adult volunteers, in a space of mutual respect in order to guarantee an intergenerational exchange of experiences, and reinforcement of the National Society's capacities;
- Discuss on how to support and encourage youth engagement for greater humanitarian action and development;
- Engage in encouraging diverse youth participation, especially in leadership positions, and ensure that young people are involved in decision-making at every level.

FORMAT

Chair: Cyprus RC

Contributions by:

- IFRC Youth Action and Volunteering Development Department
- European Youth Network; MENA Youth Network;
- Youth Commission

Panellists: French RC; Tunisian RC; Andorran RC (tbc); RCSBH; Italian RC; Portuguese RC

Date: 27th May 2015

Time: 9:00am – 11:00am