

EYV 2011: Italy The situation of volunteering in Italy¹

Legal framework

Through specific and ad hoc legislation Italy acknowledges the positive role of volunteering within active welfare policies.

Different laws adopted in the past decades identify and regulate the main categories of organisations operating in the third sector:

- non governmental organisations [in the framework of development cooperation] (Law n. 49 of 1987);
- Organised volunteering (Law n. 266 of 1991);
- Social cooperatives (Law n. 381 of 1991);
- Social promotion associations (Law n. 383 of 2000);
- Other third sector organisations (which do not fall within the a.m. categories).

Finally, we should mention the “Framework law for assistance reform” (n. 328 of 2000), the first organic reform of social policies, which foresees the recognition of individual rights, the identification of bodies entrusted with assistance, the integration of services, the adoption of programming as a method, the recognition of the value of third sector organisations and provides for new interventions for social integration and support.

The legal status and condition of volunteers are disciplined by the a.m. Framework Law on Volunteering (n. 266/91), which affirms the social value and function of volunteering as an expression of participation, solidarity and pluralism, by promoting its development and safeguarding its independence and pluralism.

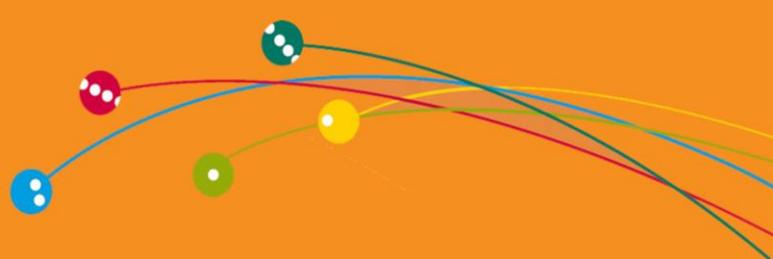
The word “volunteering” stands for aid and solidarity interventions performed by a group or an organisation, not by individuals. By “solidarity” we mean acting a community-type behaviour in which the bond is particularly close, so much so that the various individuals involved share values and fundamental behaviours. Therefore, “volunteering” (in a non strictly legal sense) may be defined as a community-type action aimed at carrying out altruistic and solidarity services for the promotion of rights and the development of active and participated citizenship.

Voluntary organisations are established by the free-will of its members. Being part of a voluntary organisation does not entitle to any type of financial remuneration, its primary goal being the promotion of rights and the delivery of socially relevant activities and services, directed to non members or the community as a whole.

Volunteering in Italian society

It is hard to determine the actual number of persons operating within voluntary, third sector and active citizenship organisations.

¹ Ministry of Employment and Social Policies DG Volunteering – National Observatory for Volunteering, IV Biennial Intermediate Report (2008-2012), 2011.



Research shows that:

- There are **235.232** third sector units officially identified (these were 61.376 in 1991), employing over 488.000 employees, which add up to over 100.000 term-contract workers (s.c. “co.co.co”) and over **3,3 million volunteers**²;
- There are **differences between North (31,3%), South (15,2%) and the Islands (8%)**;
- Most volunteers have an **upper school degree** and female volunteers, generally speaking, have a higher education level than fellow male volunteers;
- 57,3% of Italian volunteers perform voluntary activities on a regular and systematic basis, dedicating **5 hours per week on average**;
- The three most popular sectors are health, social services, leisure and culture.

Voluntary organisations

Different types of organisations involve volunteers: voluntary organisations (s.c. “organizzazioni di volontariato” – OdV) defined on the basis of the Framework Law on volunteering 266/91³, and **various legal entities**: non governmental organisations, social cooperatives, social promotion associations, foundations and other types of third sector organisations and associations.

At National level, the main public institution in charge of volunteering is the Ministry of Employment and Social Policies – Directorate General for Volunteering, in coordination with the National Observatory for Volunteering (pursuant art. 12, Law n. 266 of 1991), entrusted to conduct research and promote volunteering at national, local, European and international level.

Along with national competences, there are competences attributed to Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

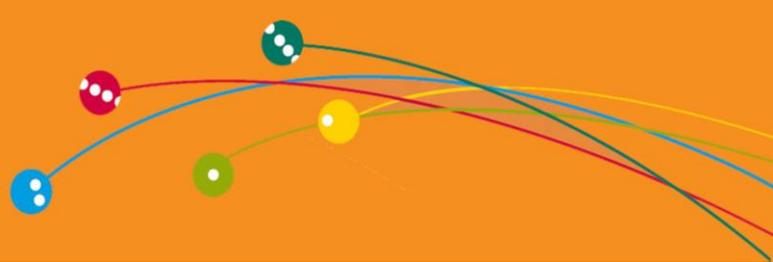
The **Voluntary Service Centres** – foreseen by Law n. 266 of 1991 – are in charge of free delivery of services for voluntary organisations (registered and non registered in regional registers), with the aim of supporting and qualifying voluntary activities, through the setting up of tools and initiatives for the development of a culture of solidarity, the promotion of new volunteering initiatives and the strengthening of existing ones, counselling and qualified support to planning and start-up of specific activities, training and other initiatives for the qualification of voluntary member organisations, and providing news, information, documentation and data on volunteering.

The main national programmes for the promotion of volunteering, active citizenship and civil participation are the following:

- The **annual Directive of the Ministry of Employment** (pursuant art. 12, Law n. 266 of 1991), a specific budget line funding experimental projects for disadvantaged people of all age groups, including young;
- The **national civil service** (for young people aged 18-28 years);
- The **National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme** (providing mobility for young people aged 15-28 within or beyond EU borders);
- **Other calls and initiatives at national, regional and local level.**

² Istat, 8th General census of industry and services (data of 2001, made public during 2010).

³ According to an on-going in depth-analysis carried out by the Ministry of Employment DG Volunteering – National Observatory for Volunteering, as of 31 12 2010 there were over 29.000 voluntary organisations registered in the Regional and Provincial Voluntary Registers (Law 266/1991) .



Economic and social value of volunteering

Volunteers – as defined by Law n. 266 of 1991 - dedicate approximately 3,2 million hours per week to voluntary activities, the equivalent of the work produced weekly by **80.600 full-time workers**⁴.

Several studies and in-depth analyses are currently being undertaken in Italy on the value and impact of social GDP of voluntary activities, as present data show that the economic hence social role of the third sector is relevant.

The National Coordination of Voluntary Service Centres, in cooperation with Johns Hopkins University, is carrying out an in-depth study on measuring voluntary activities, while the Ministry of Employment and Social Policies - Directorate General for Volunteering and the National Observatory for Volunteering are carrying out a study on measuring voluntary activities in the health sector⁵.

Volunteering in Italy, specifically with regard to young people, is mainly considered **a training experience for active citizenship contributing to social cohesion**; to this aim, the National Observatory for Volunteering has been running the project “Young and volunteering: a laboratory for ideas in evolution” in schools since 1997.

Motivations to volunteer

A study carried out by FEO-FIVOL⁶ indicates that personal motivations for the participation of Italians in voluntary activities are connected with their need to be altruistic, to participate actively in society, to grow as a person and to socialise with others who are like-minded. However, there are differences between age groups: whilst the majority of people beyond 60 years old (63.2%) choose to volunteer for altruistic motivations, a significant share of young people below 29 years old choose to volunteer for personal growth motivations (71.5%).

Challenges

Through its various daily practices and projects for active aging and inter-generational relations, volunteering has important perspectives ahead and represents a significant way to involve people, by making them the main actor of their time, to the benefit of individual well-being and the promotion of the common good. In various ways, voluntary activities are an opportunity for informal as well as formal learning and therefore play a decisive role in citizens' life-long learning.

⁴ Frisanco R., FEO-FIVOL Survey 2006.

⁵ Several other studies and research initiatives are currently being undertaken by Universities, public and private research institutions.

⁶ Frisanco R., *Volte e orizzonti del volontariato*, Diocesane Caritas 33rd National congress ‘Do not conform to this world’, 2009, p. 23 in: *Country report Italy*, p. 21.