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# Volunteers and delivery of welfare services

The changing perspectives, in the context of the economic crisis and consequential austerity measures, on the role of volunteer organizations in the delivery of welfare services



**Fondazione  
Volontariato  
e Partecipazione**

## **Abstract**

This report clarifies the concepts and connects the relationships between austerity measures, welfare services, volunteers and the question of their exploitation by the State. Using a combination of primary and secondary data sources the study reflects on the changing provision of welfare services to vulnerable people over the last century giving particular attention to the changing roles of state and non-state actors.<sup>1</sup> The report highlights the need for further study and monitoring of this changing landscape in order to ensure that the role of the State and that of volunteers and their organisations in delivering welfare services remain complementary and with the needs of the beneficiaries at their heart. In this way keeping volunteering as a complementary feature of welfare states and not harnessed as an integral feature of it.

**Keywords:** Volunteering, Austerity, Welfare

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<sup>1</sup> Note: VIOs, NGOs, CSOs are used interchangeably in this study to refer to non-state actors and should be understood in this context to mean largely the same thing

## INTRODUCTION

The European Volunteer Centre (CEV) carried out the study “The changing perspectives, in the context of the economic crisis and consequential austerity measures, on the role of volunteer organizations in the delivery of welfare services” in 2012. The aim was to analyse whether volunteering is being instrumentalised for the delivery of welfare services<sup>2</sup> as austerity measures<sup>3</sup> intensify. In this context the concept of instrumentalisation was taken to refer to the legitimised exploitation of volunteers as part of the State system of welfare service delivery. In other words, the manipulation and exploitation by the State of activities offered by volunteers to be used to their advantage, not as added value to State services, but as an integral part of the service provision design and “business plan” in relation to welfare service provision.

When looking at the history of the development of State welfare services in Europe it can be seen that services which at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were being provided within the family, or by local community groups (formal or informal) or larger regional or national philanthropic organisations were gradually, during the course of the century, to be replaced by State organised services.

Before 2007 and the onset of the economic crisis, countries in Europe could be divided into those with well established State welfare services, those with newly established welfare systems and those with emerging welfare systems. Even with these different categorisations a clear pattern could be observed of a trend towards reduced reliance on local and philanthropic (voluntary) responses to the needs of vulnerable people and a greater role for the State in providing uni-

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.crbs.org.uk/EnrolledOrganisations/Disclosures/DisclosureLevels/ServiceDefinitions/tabid/465/Default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Austerity measures- official action by a government to reduce the amount of money it spends, or the amount of money that people in a country spend. It also refers to a policy of deficit-cutting by lowering spending via a reduction in the amount of benefits and public services provided.

versal welfare services for all. This trend was made possible through the varied approaches existing in Europe to taxation and the consequential financing, and therefore availability and access, to welfare services. In most cases the funding model was based on the premise of full employment and that people would rarely be vulnerable and therefore in need of welfare services for their entire lives. The premise was rather that this need would be for certain periods of time, followed and preceded by periods of employment and therefore net contribution to, as opposed to receipt of, welfare services.<sup>4</sup>

Pre 2007 the system was already under pressure due to increasing numbers of vulnerable people resulting from advances in health care and improved nutrition and sanitation leading to longer life expectancy. The rising unemployment rates caused by the economic crisis resulted<sup>5</sup> in both a decrease in net contributors to the costs of State welfare service provision and an increase in vulnerable people in need of services.

It is important to recognise that even during the period of growth of the volume and scope of State welfare service provision in Europe that non-State actors (NGOs) continued to play a role in meeting the varied needs of the vulnerable and most vulnerable in communities across Europe. These non-State actors invariably relied on the activities and expertise of volunteers to meet their aims and objectives. In this context volunteers are understood to be people of diverse groups including all races or ethnicity, gender, age, disability and religion undertaking a wide range of tasks in conditions meeting the following principles:

- Undertaken of a person's own free-will, choice and motivation.
- Without seeking financial gain i.e. Financial gain being neither the objective, nor the way to recognise the contribution or the achievement.
- Is a journey of solidarity and provides a way to address human, social or envi-

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ofce.sciences-po.fr/pdf/dtravail/WP2008-10.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Impact\\_of\\_the\\_economic\\_crisis\\_on\\_unemployment](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Impact_of_the_economic_crisis_on_unemployment),  
[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-13-282\\_en.htm?locale=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-282_en.htm?locale=en)

ronmental needs and concerns.

- Is often carried out in support of a non-profit organisation or community-based initiative.

The involvement of volunteers by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can often be motivated by budgetary restrictions i.e. that there is a lack of available funds to pay someone to carry out the required role. However, it can also, and often more importantly, be based on the added value that volunteers can bring to meeting the needs of vulnerable people. The fact that someone is offering to meet needs not based on a contractual financial obligation but on other factors related to social capital such as a sense of solidarity or a willingness to contribute to social cohesion and community transformation is often reported by beneficiaries and service providers as a contributing factor towards increased output and effectiveness in the results achieved.

It can be observed that the austerity measures introduced as a response to the economic crisis have required States to look at other, more cost effective ways to deliver services to the most vulnerable. It can also be observed that in countries governed by political parties where the preference is for a 'smaller' state that the crisis and implementation of austerity measures have been used as a pretext and rationale for the abdication of state responsibility in certain areas of welfare provision. Both of these trends have required the development of alternative responses and sources of responses to meet needs and in many cases this has led to an increasing reliance on volunteer organisations to ensure that a safety net for the most vulnerable continued to exist. It has also led to an increased number of volunteers being engaged directly within the State systems of provision. This study aimed to measure the extent of these trends and also provide some analyse as to whether these trends are a manifestation of a cynical exploitation of the good will and endeavours of volunteers to the advantage of the State, in other words the instrumentalisation of volunteering as part of welfare service provision in Europe.

The research methodology was comprised of online surveys and semi-structured telephone interviews. Data collected from representatives of volunteer centres and volunteer-involving organisations from within the CEV network and the revision of secondary literature inform the conclusions of the study.

The decision to launch the study to inquire into the issue of whether and how austerity measures influence the delivery of welfare services and the roles of volunteers in this context was made following recognition within the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) that this was a topic touched upon, but not sufficiently documented or studied. Mainly anecdotal evidence from professionals and volunteers in the voluntary sector about the effects of the economic crisis on their work and roles inspired the commissioning of the present report.

Moreover, the *Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (P.A.V.E)* drafted during the European Year of Volunteering 2011 submitted that “the crisis is forcing governments to re-assess the European Social Model” and that “in some spheres the debate has led to suggestions that volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations can and should deliver services instead of the state”.<sup>6</sup>

The online CEV *Volunteering Infrastructure Publication*<sup>7</sup> compiles reports on the different volunteer support systems in place across several European countries. The report highlighted that the legal and financial frameworks as well as the operational spheres for volunteer organisations are going through an unprecedented period of change. The publication however, whilst alluding to a causal link to the economic crisis and resulting austerity measures, failed to identify reliable evidence pointing to common causes for this trend.

The results of the study show that in order to reach more reliable conclusions further triangulation of results must be facilitated and therefore further data needs to be collected and analysed in the upcoming months.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.eyv2011.eu/images/stories/pdf/EYV2011Alliance\\_PAVE\\_copyfriendly.pdf](http://www.eyv2011.eu/images/stories/pdf/EYV2011Alliance_PAVE_copyfriendly.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cev.be/knowledge-sharing/volunteering-infrastructure/>

## ***STUDY RESULTS***

### ***Response rate***

The link of the study was sent to 143 recipients, there were 23 responses of which 65.2% finished the study completely. Please consult Annex 2 for further information.

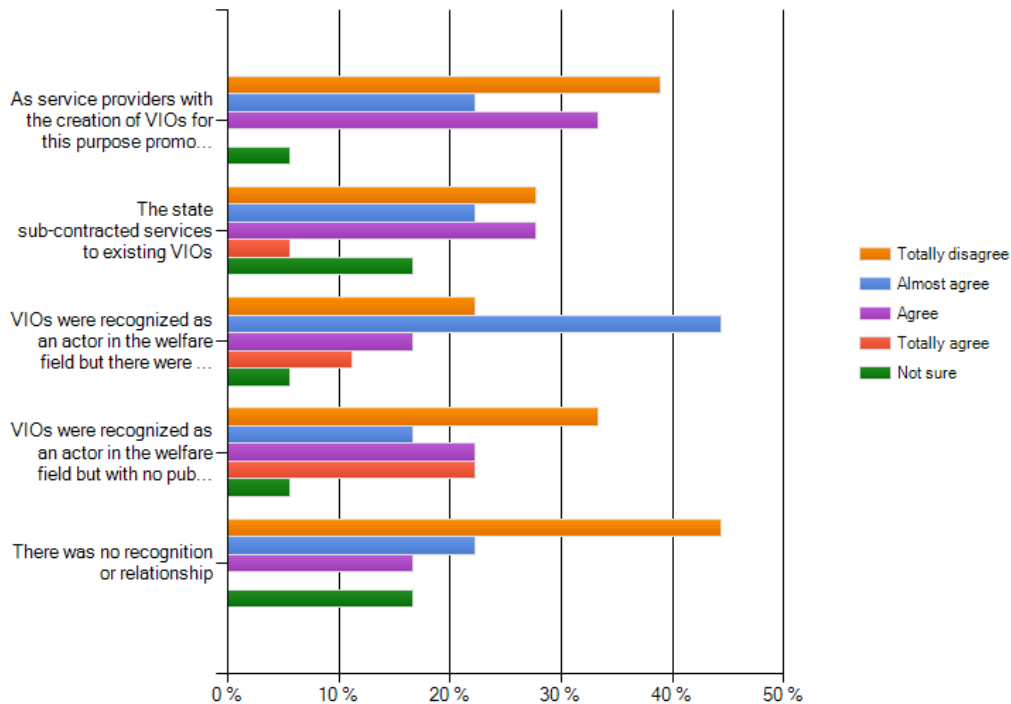
Responses:

### **The role of volunteer involving organizations in delivering welfare services according to survey results**

44.4% of respondents almost agree that the pre-crisis role of volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) in welfare service provision was mainly that VIOs were recognized as actors in the welfare field but there were no specific contracts, only general funding. The majority disagreed to the statements that VIOs were seen as service providers with the creation of VIOs for this purpose promoted and supported by the state (38.9%), the VIOs were recognized as actors in the welfare field but with no public funding (33.3%) and that there was no recognition or relationship (44.4%). However, the issue of whether the state sub-contracted services to existing VIOs or not triggered the most obvious difference in point of views– 27.8% hereby totally disagree, 27.8% agree. The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 1).

Figure The pre-crisis role of VIOs in welfare service provision

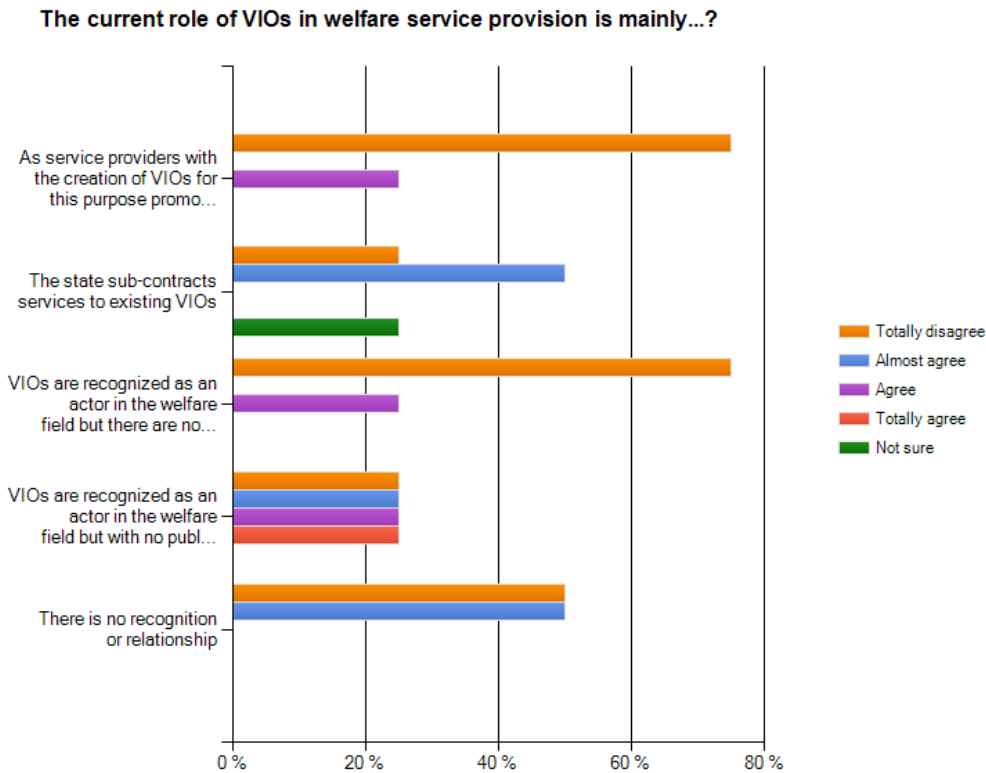
**The pre-crisis role of volunteer involving organizations (VIO) in welfare service provision was mainly...?**



**The prevailing view for the current role of VIOs in welfare service provision is that they are mainly recognized as “actors in the welfare field but with no public funding”.** 25% of respondents totally agree with the statement, 25% agree and 25% almost agree. Furthermore, half of the respondents almost agree that the state sub-contracts services to existing VIOs. The majority totally disagrees that there is no recognition or relationship (50%), that VIOs are recognized as actors in the welfare field but there are no specific contracts, only general funding (75%) and that VIOs are seen as service providers with the creation of VIOs for this purpose promoted and supported by the state (75%). The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 2).

Figure The current role of VIOs in welfare service provision





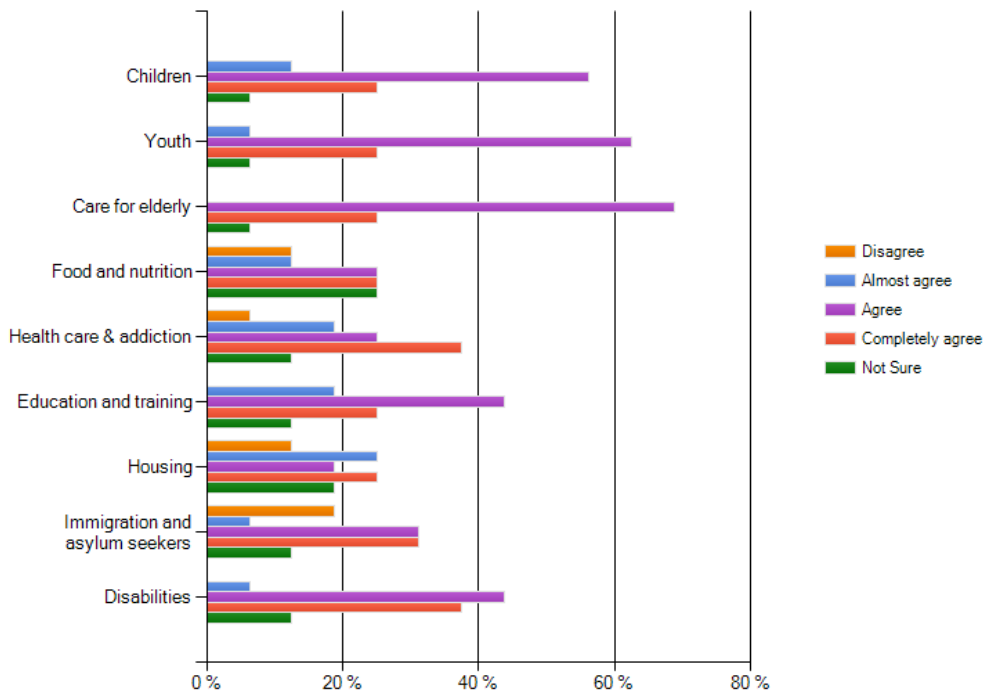
**Although there are evident changes comparing the pre-crisis and current role of VIOs in welfare service, 55.6% of respondents believe that this is not a result of austerity measures.** However, 27.8% believe that the changes are happening because of the implemented austerity measures and 16% do not know.

### **The sectors where VIOs are active**

68.8% of the respondents agree that before the crisis and austerity measures the VIOs were most active in the sector of care for elderly, 62.5% agree that it was youth and 56.3% that it was children. The least active sectors were food & nutrition (25%) and housing (25%). The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 3).

Figure Sectors of VIOs active before crisis

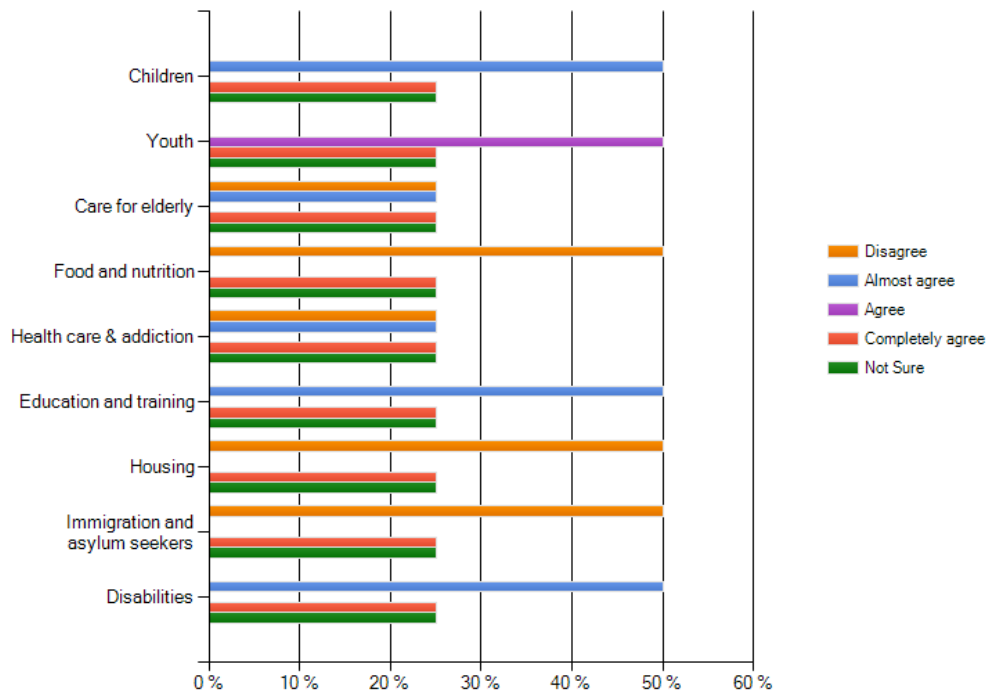
**In which welfare sector were VIOs before the crisis and austerity measures active?**



From these results it cannot be concluded that the current situation of VIOs is as a result of major changes caused by the implementation of austerity measures. However, it can be argued that a consequence of austerity measures is the growing participation of VIOs in the sector of youth (50% agree), children (50% almost agree) and disabilities (50% almost agree). The findings report no visible growth in the fields of food and nutrition, housing and immigration and asylum seekers (50% totally disagree). The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 4).

Figure VIO sectors with growing participation

**In which welfare sectors is VIO participation is growing as a result of austerity measures?**

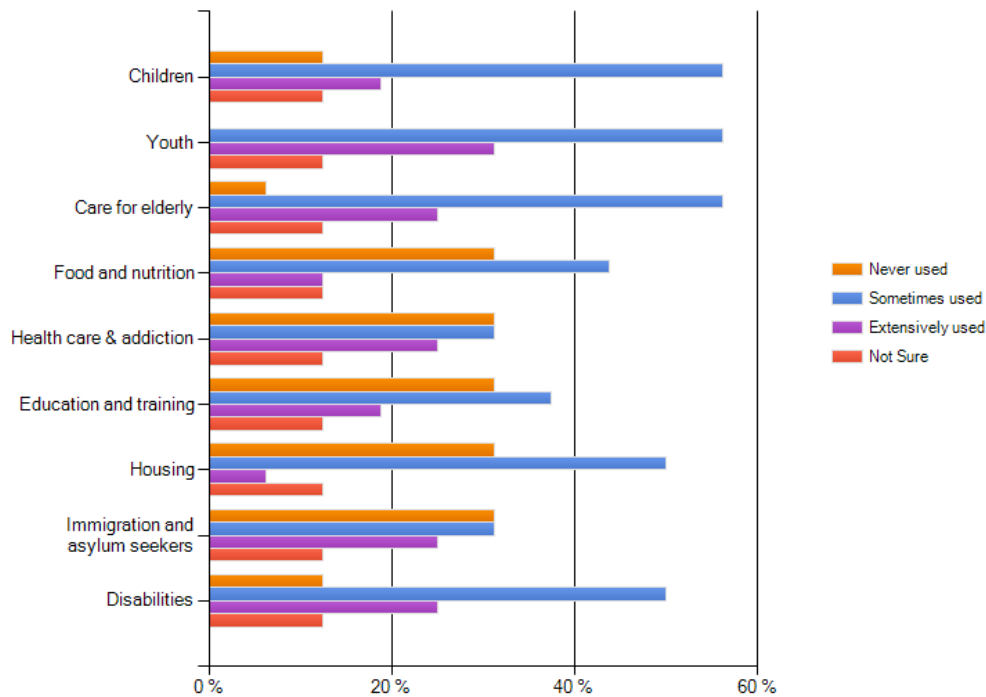


**The use of volunteers in welfare service by the State**

**Before the crisis** volunteers were most extensively used in the sector of youth (31.3% say extensively used and 56.3 say they are sometimes used). The volunteers were also sometimes used in the sectors of children and care for elderly (56.3%). The volunteers were least used in the sectors of immigration and asylum seekers and health care and addiction (31.3% say never used). The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 5).

Figure Use of volunteers by the State before crisis

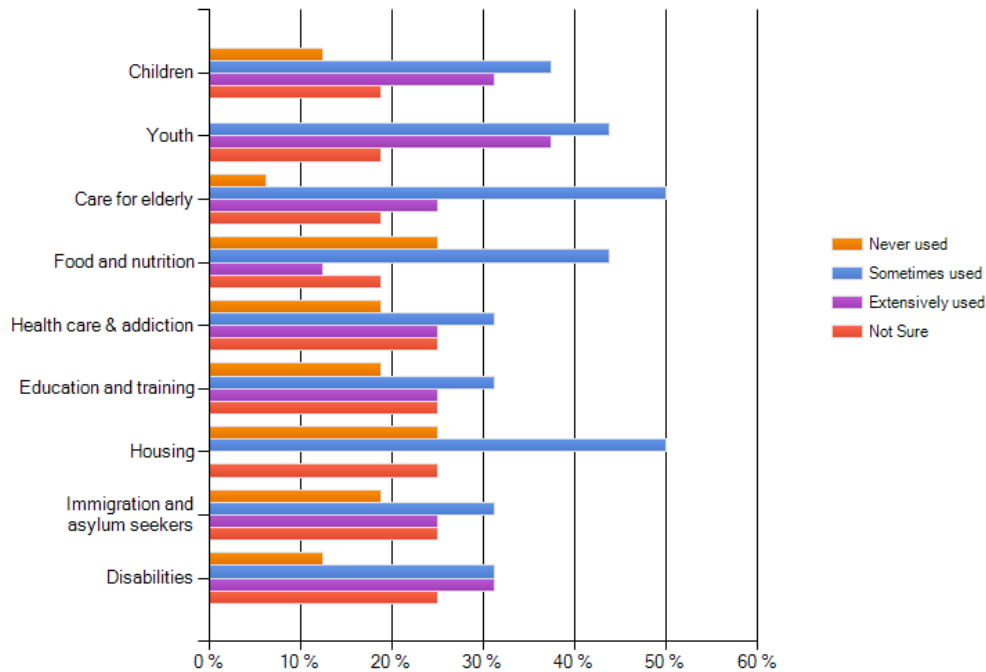
With regards to the use of volunteers in the following welfare service sectors provided directly by the State before the crisis they were...?



With regards to the use of volunteers in the welfare service sectors provided directly by the State, **after the introduction of austerity measures** volunteers are still most used in the sectors of youth (37.5% say extensively used and 43.8% say sometimes used) and children (31.3% say extensively used and 37.5% say sometimes used). They are also often used in the sectors of care for elderly (50%), housing (50%) and food and nutrition (43%). Volunteers are least used in the sectors of immigration and asylum seekers and education and training. The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 6).

Figure Use of volunteers by the State after austerity measures

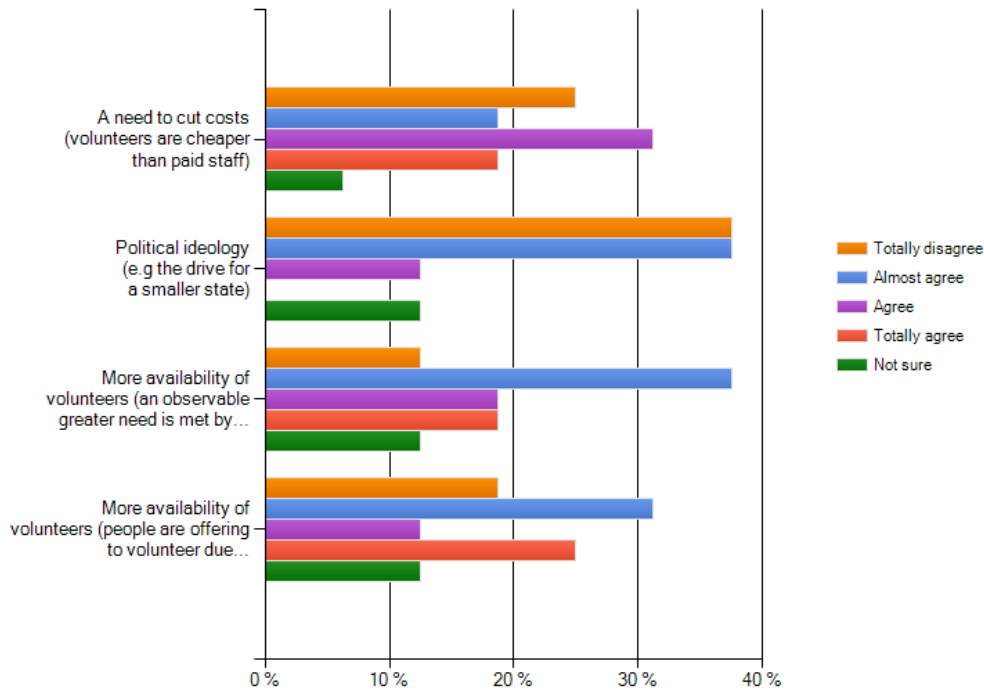
**With regards to the use of volunteers in the following welfare service sectors provided directly by the State after the introduction of austerity measures they are...?**



The two previous charts show that there **were changes after the austerity measures**. The main reason for this seems to be the increasing availability of volunteers. This has been observed to at least in part due to the high unemployment rate and the perception that volunteering offers opportunities to improve skills and competences and offers a way to gain valuable demonstrable experience. 25% totally agree, 31.3% almost agree, 12.5% agree with this premise. The need to cut costs and the reality that volunteers require less financial investment than paid staff is also a popularly cited reason (31.3% agree, 18.8% totally agree and almost agree). The lowest perceived reason for the changes was due to political ideology (37.5% totally disagree). Additional reasons for the increase were suggested as being due to better promotion of volunteering, the increased economic situation of some people and the availability of more highly qualified retired people. The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 7).

Figure Changes in the use of volunteers by the State

**If you observe that the use of volunteers has increased do you think that this is due to...?**

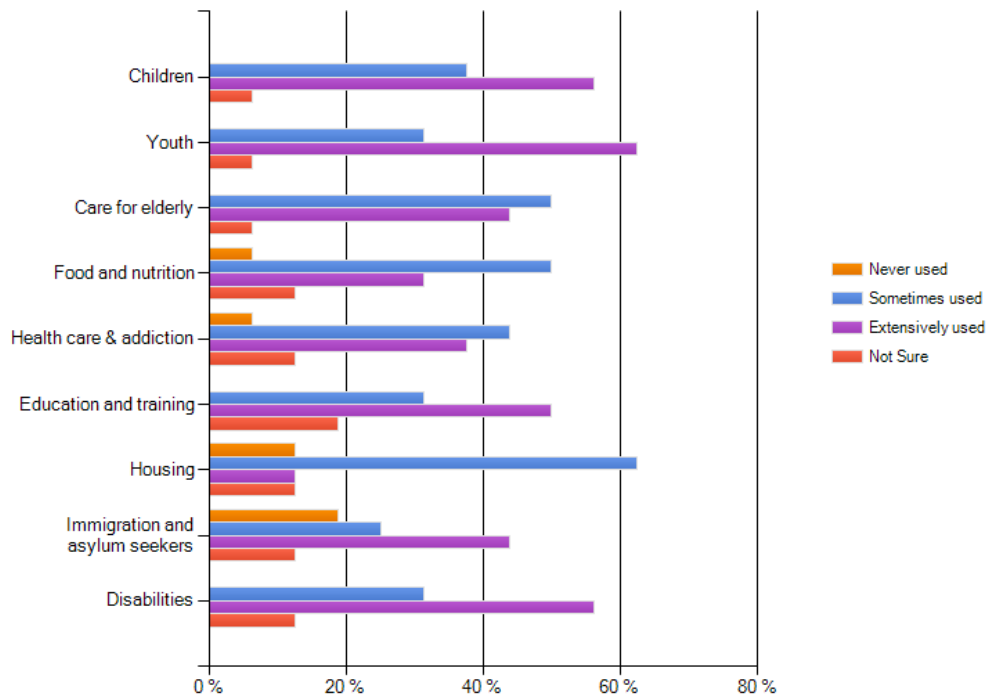


### **The use of volunteers in welfare service by VIOs**

The use of volunteers in welfare service sectors provided directly by VIOs before the crisis was most prominent in the sectors of youth (62.5%), children and disabilities (56.3). The volunteers were least used in the sector of housing. The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 8).

Figure Use of volunteers by VIOs before crisis

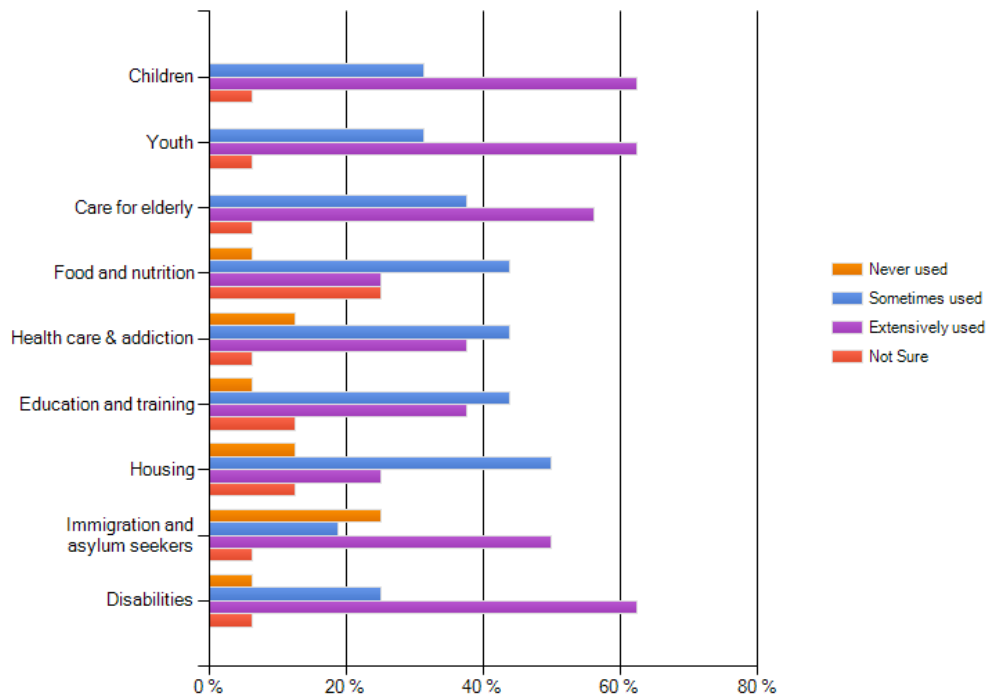
With regards to the use of volunteers in the following welfare service sectors provided directly by VIOs before the crisis they were...?



**After the austerity measures were introduced, the use of volunteers in the abovementioned sectors hasn't notably changed.** The volunteers are still most extensively used in the sectors of youth, children and disabilities (62.5%). Furthermore, they're least used in the sector of housing. The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 9).

Figure Use of volunteers by VIOs after austerity measures

**With regards to the use of volunteers in the following welfare service sectors provided directly by VIOs after austerity measures they are...?**

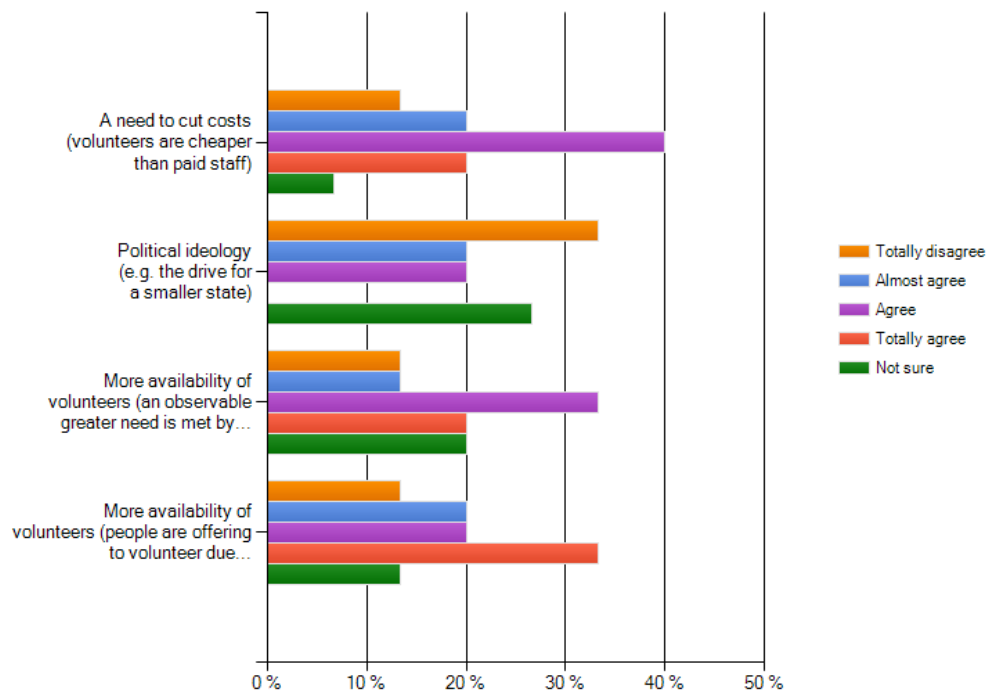


Although there have been no remarkable changes in the sectors after austerity measures have been implemented, there still have been some shifts in the use of volunteers. Those have occurred mainly because of a need to cut costs (volunteers are cheaper than paid staff) (40%) and the availability of volunteers (both because of unemployment and an increased sense of solidarity) (33.3%). It was also highlighted that it is due to the promotion of volunteering and an improving relative economic situation of some people. The exact results are shown in the chart below (Figure 10).

Figure Changes in the use of volunteers by VIOs



**If you observe that the use of volunteers has increased do you think that this is due to...?**



## ***Semi- Structured telephone interviews***

### **Participant Numbers and Selection**

As part of the study six semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted. The participants were selected based on comments made in the online questionnaire, due to their expressed interest, and/or due to geographical representation. The following organisations were represented:

Fundacion de la Solidaridad y el Voluntariado de la Comunidad Valenciana - Spain, Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organisations - Slovakia, France Benevolat, CEDAG A.I.S.B.L - Belgium, Eurodiaconia, and the National Forum for Voluntary Social Work – Sweden.

### **The Role of Volunteers**

The experience in France shows that the role of volunteers and therefore volunteer involving organisations is becoming more important in welfare service pro-

vision. The challenge concerning welfare service professionals being too busy and overwhelmed with work and that with a lack of budget to hire new employees, the volunteers have a bigger role since they can contribute to the provision of services at a greatly reduced cost compared to paid staff was described. This matter of volunteers potentially replacing paid staff is one on which the trade unions are paying special attention to in the French context. The same issue was reported from Belgium in noting the non-conscious substitution of paid workers with volunteers. Additionally for the Belgian experience it was noted that there is a visible change of the variety of tasks the volunteers carry out compared to other countries where volunteers can tend to be limited to assist in organisations administrative tasks rather than in the delivery and implementation of everyday projects and activities provided to the target groups. In France, the role of volunteers is connected to tasks that bring a human touch to services. For example, in French hospitals sick children are educated thanks to volunteers and volunteers provide companionship to the terminally ill and the elderly.

### **Volunteer Motivation**

The respondent from France also reported that in their experience in many countries volunteering is becoming more popular because of the increased unemployment in the labour market leading to increased volunteer availability. The need to have a positive mark on your CV, develop your skills or get work experience is making people volunteer while they're unemployed and seeking for a job. Another respondent believed that volunteering is becoming more popular thanks to better volunteer strategies implemented by the VIOs. He notes that there are no more long-term volunteers but rather short-term – youngsters looking for a job and quitting volunteering the same day they find one. Also in Spain the increase in volunteers is notable. The main reason for this is unemployment and the fact that young people (mainly university students) would like to occupy themselves with different activities even if they're not getting paid for that. The trend in some countries regarding the increase in volunteering is thanks to the unemployment benefits – you cannot get the unemployment benefit unless you volunteer.

### **Changing Situation for Volunteer Involving Organisations**

All of the interviewees acknowledged that in recent years there had been changes in the field of volunteer involving organizations providing welfare services but that in their experience those changes are not a direct result of austerity measures. However, the direct impact of austerity measures on the NGO sector in Spain where the state and local authorities have had cut their budgets enormously, in turn influencing the budgets and services provided by the VIOs, was highlighted. The respondent stressed that many organisations have even been forced to close through a lack of finance to run their everyday activities. **A lack of specific data concerning the welfare service providing NGOs was noted.**

The respondent from Sweden reported that in Sweden the financial crisis is not that evident and therefore austerity measures have not played a role in the increased interest towards VIOs from the state and local authorities. This interest was reported as being towards involving VIOs in “doing things”, and a definite increased political interest in getting VIOs to move towards becoming deliverers of services.

### **VIO funding arrangements and contracting**

In Sweden the state or local authorities are already contracting VIOs to deliver services, but it is still on a very low level, private companies are much more visible. In France, there is a close connection between state and VIOs. For example, NGOs run a lot of hospitals with state funding. Each ministry has various NGOs with whom they collaborate. In Slovakia there's still a project based funding system. There are some organisations subcontracted by the state and therefore are in receipt of direct funding but their activities are not directed to volunteering. The respondent from Slovakia noted that there are improvements such as a law on volunteering approved in 2011-2012, although it is not widely recognised or implemented and there is still no additional funding from the state.

In Belgium, subcontracting is not a right term to use, rather the first hand aid from volunteers and VIOs – the state has their associate VIOs to help out with the delivery of services. Similarly, in Spain there are no direct contracts, the state and local authorities are funding the volunteer organisations through subsidies or separate calls for projects /programmes.

Meanwhile, the most contentious issue is whether the VIOs would like to beco-

me contracted deliverers of services. The VIOs already make a huge difference in the welfare sector as they regularly and consistently deliver all kind of services on a daily basis. Furthermore, one of the respondents argued that organisations are much better at reaching the target groups than the public authorities or private companies. Moreover, VIOs are seen as separate and self-governing actors and that this is one of the reasons why few organisations are interested in being-subcontracted – they don't want to be 'reduced' to a deliverer of services, or to be too closely connected to the public welfare authorities.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that the voluntary sector and the way that welfare services are being delivered is going through a period of change. This study however does not demonstrate a clear causal link between the implementation of austerity measures and the instrumentalisation of volunteers. The authors believe however that this has more to do with the scope and limitations of the study than the premise itself. The study was conducted with limited resources and during the on-going period of change and adaptation to which the study refers. This factor of a continually changing and instable situation together with the lack of data and evidence available to the respondents provides some explanation for the absence of a demonstrable link through this study.

The survey results show that before the crisis the **VIOs were recognized by the state as actors** in the delivery of welfare services and this remains unchanged. In some countries the VIOs are subcontracted by the state or local authorities, however in most of the countries the VIOs are still funded with general funding and project based funding. VIOs were reported to have been traditionally most engaged in the following sectors: youth, children and care for elderly and the survey results demonstrates an unchanged situation with a slight increase in involvement in the sector of disabilities.

The results also show that before the crisis the **state was using volunteers mainly in the fields of youth, children and elderly** and that currently, the situation remains similar but with an increasing interest to engage volunteers in the field of housing and of food & nutrition. The reason for these changes cannot be irrefutably identified but all the indications are that they are a result of both a need or desire to cut cost and the increased availability of volunteers caused in part by the rising unemployment rate.

Unemployed people are increasingly turning to volunteering as a way to seek a solution to their situation. This could be in a direct correlation with a wish to find work or as a response to remain active in a situation where paid work is no longer an option. For those that are volunteering in the hope that it will help them find work there are a variety of trends that can be observed. People may

offer to volunteer in an organisation in the hope that if a job vacancy becomes available in that organisation that they will be in a favourable position to fill it with an advantage over other applicants. In other cases work experience in a particular sector or skill set is the motivation and this could be the case for example for volunteer bookkeepers or carers. A large number of countries in Europe and the EU institutions themselves are increasingly promoting volunteering as a way to increase employability and this sanctioning of the trend is undoubtedly having an impact on the uptake. It is important to observe however that the Youth Guarantee focuses on work, education or training and does not allow for volunteering in its framework.

Another indication from the survey results is that before the crisis the **VIOs were using volunteers** mainly in the fields of youth, children and disabilities and the situation today remains unchanged. According to the results of this study there appear to be only slight shifts generated by the need to cut costs and the availability of volunteers.

Limiting the conclusions of this report to the outcomes of the study undertaken in 2012 within the CEV members would lead to the argument that the changes in the sectors where VIOs and the State engage volunteers are not very pronounced although an increased attention and interest towards VIOs as deliverers of services together with the state can be observed.

This issue was highlighted in the study commissioned by the EESC on *“The Impact of the Crisis on Civil Society Organisations in the EU – Risks and Opportunities”* (2012) “The socio-economic crisis triggered by the financial crisis in Europe has resulted in an increased need for CSOs to work hand in hand with governments to solve these pressing problems that have emerged, in part, as the result of the financial crisis.” The EESC study together with the outcomes of this study and conclusions of other reference material show that volunteers and VIOs have gained a greater role in welfare service delivery in recent times as compared with the pre-crisis situation where welfare systems were either universal or developing in that direction. A consequence of reduced public budgets for welfare service provision has been to weaken the state institutional actors charged with dealing with the needs of vulnerable people. Volunteering is being looked to as a counterbalance to this situation and volunteers are proving to be

capable to help organisations and state institutions either with the administrative tasks or with the specific activities foreseen for various projects and therefore are proving to be an efficient and effective resource that can be used to meet the needs of vulnerable people.

Similarly, the current context offers more opportunities to volunteer, which can benefit the volunteers not only from a participatory perspective, but also at the level of the possibilities for increased skills and knowledge acquisition. The skills gained through volunteering will better equip them to integrate in the labour market in their field of study and previous expertise, or in new spheres, introduced to them through volunteering.

One further aspect to consider, as it follows from the survey, is the quality of the volunteer engagement. Volunteer organisations face a challenge when dealing with the management of volunteers due to the decrease in funding opportunities coming from the budget cuts. The reduced funding leads to less capacity in the volunteering infrastructure sector to properly manage volunteering schemes, train volunteering managers and provide on-going support and advice to VIOs and volunteers. There is also a reduced capacity to monitor on-going developments, advocate for policies that are conducive to an enabling volunteering environment and contribute to properly matching supply and demand of volunteers.

CEV in common and together with other volunteer organisations promotes volunteer engagement and works to increase the numbers of volunteers in line with the objectives of European Year of Volunteering (EYV) 2011 and the particular interest of European Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding to double the estimated 100 million volunteers in Europe. CEV is anxious however that this support and enthusiasm to increase the numbers of volunteers does not result in the instrumentalisation of volunteering, a move that could damage the fundamental nature of the added value that volunteers bring to the provision of welfare services whether that be through state providers directly or through NGOs.

The full assessment of the situation of volunteers and the question regarding their instrumentalisation in the delivery of welfare services will rely on the continuous gathering of further data and monitoring of the situation. CEV will con-

tinue to do this and share more complete and updated findings at the autumn 2014 CEV conference in Salerno, Italy.

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*Gabriella Civico, CEV Director*

Gabriella Civico is from the UK but has lived for many years in Spain and Portugal. She has a degree in Social Policy and Education from Surrey University (UK) and a Masters in Education in E-learning from the University of Hull (UK). Her professional background is in business and the Youth NGO Sector where she has worked as an administrator and also as a trainer and expert. Through her work in the youth field she was involved in the campaign to establish 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering. Gabriella has volunteered since childhood in a variety of fields including Youth Advocacy, International Development, Disability, Environment, Immigration, Human Rights, Sports etc. She



has worked closely with CEV since July 2010 in her role as Project Manager for the EYV2011 Alliance until the end of the project in March 2012 before becoming CEV Director in April 2012.

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