



Voluntary sector policy platform 2015-2019

Space for civil society

The voluntary sector is a fundamental building block in society. It also transforms society, through communities, activities, initiatives, and collaboration with the public and the private sector. Voluntary work changes the people involved, by exchanging knowledge, values and ideas, it builds character and social capital. The voluntary sector itself is constantly changing, adapting to the needs of its participants and surroundings.

1. Vision

The vision of Frivillighet Norge is to expand the space for civil society. We regard civil society as a corner stone in a vital democracy and the welfare state. Our goal is that

- The Government provides better conditions for voluntary organizations, greater space for actions, and takes the voice of the organizations into account when making decisions
- more citizens participate in voluntary organizations through membership, voluntary work and financial support
- the voluntary organizations' capacity, impact, activities and results are strengthened through better cooperation and coordination
- that voluntary organizations are visible in local societies throughout the country and in public debate

2. Definitions

The voluntary sector is diverse, but united by sharing common, distinct features. The legislation and regulations of public support and tax exemption schemes operate on a variety of definitions of "voluntary organizations". This is problematic, as it both complicates running a voluntary organization, and creates confusion in questioning what kinds of organizations the voluntary sector consists of. Frivillighet Norge defines voluntary organizations and non-profit enterprises as:

A voluntary organization is a group of persons or enterprises operating on a non-profit, non-public basis, according to the definition in the Law of Public register of NGOs (Frivillighetsregisterloven) §§ 3 and 4. In running a voluntary organization, a significant contribution comes from membership subscriptions, gifts, collecting funds and/or voluntary work. A voluntary organization may be an association, union, party, foundation, a non-profit corporation, a network or an umbrella organization.

An non-profit enterprise in the health and social sector is a financial enterprise that



- is a non-profit enterprise. Any profit is invested in running the enterprise, not to be paid as financial gain to owners
- is registered in the Public register of NGOs
- is owned by, or stems from, a foundation, or a voluntary organization with a democratic structure with a high level of participation and co-determination
- “adds value” to society, due to its pioneering role, its client-based perspective, its role as spokesperson for the interests of its clients, its entrusted confidence and/or its holistic perspective as the fundamental basis in working method and philosophy of operation

3. The voluntary sector

Volunteerism has an intrinsic value, and voluntary activity is in itself beneficial to its participants. Still, volunteerism plays an important, purely functional role in society as a whole, and bridges the individual and the public and private sector. Thereby, voluntary organizations constitute an independent sector in society. However, it differs from the public and private sector in means of ensuring and stimulating its growth.

Both national and local authorities must establish a holistic voluntary sector policy, with a premise to treat the voluntary organizations as a separate sector. Such a policy must respect the voluntary organizations' values and recognize the need for organizational diversity.

By a holistic policy, Frivillighet Norge refers to a policy aimed at creating growth in the voluntary sector as a whole. The policy should contribute to

- making it easy to be a volunteer and to run voluntary organizations
- maintaining and cultivating the uniqueness and independence of volunteerism
- increasing access to ethical and long-term sources of financial support
- increasing knowledge in the public sector of participation in, and motivations for, volunteer work, and its impact on society
- that the public sector becomes aware of, and requests, the "added value" of cooperating with voluntary organizations
- that the public sector facilitate volunteerism, and ensures access to competence and knowledge, facilities and other resources

A voluntary sector policy can, in the same way that private sector policy does, use measures specifically assigned to different parts of the sector.

4. Voluntary organizations manage knowledge and trust

Volunteerism has a long history, and operates in almost every segment of society – in leisure activities for children and youth, sports, cultural events, training, rescue and emergency services, health and care services. Voluntary organizations have acquired a lot of knowledge, experience and enjoy a high level of trust in society. The responsibility to continue to develop, and make use of this position in society, lies within each organization. However, authorities must ensure that



they are able to do so, by making information about financial support and other supportive measures available to the organizations.

The member organizations of Frivillighet Norge have different purposes, methods, activities, and differ in political matters and points of view. Yet, they agree that the voluntary sector is, and should be:

- independent and of intrinsic value
- diverse, varied and innovative
- challenging, critical and promoting development
- social, inclusive and open to everyone
- transparent, safe, honest and carry a high ethical standard

5. The functions of the voluntary sector in society

The voluntary sector constitutes a corner stone in our democracy and welfare society, and plays a decisive role in the civil society, which is fundamental to democracy. The organizations are:

- “schools” of democracy, developing understanding of how society works, channels of impact and society's "watchdogs"
- arenas of inclusion and of building social capital
- pillars of cultural heritage, and intermediaries of knowledge
- pioneers and community builders
- collaborators for public rescue and emergency and welfare services
- creating vital, warm, safe and welcoming communities
- contributors to improved public health

6. Space for civil society 2014-2019

Society is constantly changing. In the five years to come, Frivillighet Norge regards the following points, as something that will affect the voluntary organizations' needs, challenges and possibilities. These must be taken into consideration by both organizations and public authority in creating greater space for civil society and volunteerism, thereby strengthening our democracy and welfare society

a. Higher life expectancy

Seniors in activity stay healthier for longer. By recruiting seniors, the voluntary sector may gain more participants and volunteers, while reducing health demands that follows from increased life expectancy. Senior citizens as a group are active participants in voluntary work, sharing a spectrum of interests, as is the rest of the population. To succeed in recruiting seniors,

- the organizations and the public sector must increase their knowledge of motivational factors for seniors
- the public sector must collaborate with the entire spectrum of voluntary organizations in the local communities



- this collaboration between the public and voluntary sector must be between equals, sharing an understanding of each other's goals, and avoid an "order-delivery" nature in the relationship
- the main focus must be, that both participants and volunteers experience a sense of purpose and empowerment, not just relieving pressure on the public health care services

b. The public sector needs collaborative partners to cover health care needs

The voluntary sector also includes the non-profit service providers collaborating with the public sector in health and care services. The non-profits don't only add increased capacity. Their values and range of experiences also commit them to speaking the clients' cause, and shaping the public agenda, and creating understanding for vulnerable groups and developing new working methods. According to research among Frivillighet Norge members involved in health and care institutions, 44 % of those that are competing with commercial businesses, fear that their non-profit services will be shut down within the next five years. To ensure non-profit service providers' continued role in public health care,

- The Government must continue the collaboration agreement from 2012, between public and non-profit service providers in the health and welfare area
- the public sector must request the "added value" of non-profit service providers and lead a policy that ensures their continued role in the welfare services of the future
- The Government must take responsibility for the historical pension costs of non-profit service providers, this being a direct consequence from long-term cooperation with the public sector

c. Increased social differences

After the millennium, social differences and inequality has increased, as has the number of poor people in Norway. This is reflected in the voluntary sector. People that fall outside of education and work life, more rarely participate in voluntary organizations.

In voluntary organizations, people with shared interests, cause and outlook on life come together. The participants gain social competence, skills, friends, networks and a sense of empowerment. In consequence, volunteerism is increasing the possibility of its participants to engage in several arenas in society, like education, work and political elections. Volunteerism may hold the key to participation in society for those falling outside of it, and contribute to minimizing social inequality.

Volunteerism needs growth in members and volunteers, and is open to anyone who wants to participate. For successful recruitment of groups that are falling outside of society, the organizations need to

- gain more knowledge about motivational factors for participation
- increase consciousness about potentially excluding structures
- focus on how high participation fees may prevent people from joining voluntary activity; children and youth in particular



- find new methods for recruitment
- adequately train volunteers in running the activities they are engaged in and the organizational work
- ensure abstinence from alcohol in activities for youth and children
- be allowed to spend more time on activities/causes, less on bureaucracy
- collaborate more, with other voluntary organizations and the public sector

d. Individualization

More than before, people have an expectancy to fulfil personal goals through participation in voluntary organizations. This does not mean that people don't want to participate, but they generally expect a higher standard of facilitation in performing voluntary work, and a heightened quality of the activities. Some create their own projects of development aid and establish their own organizations, although similar organizations with the same purpose already exist, and without knowing how to run a NGO or to recruit more members.

The bar of organizational loyalty has been lowered, and more people do voluntary work without being a member, and vice versa: donors, members and volunteers "go shopping" between different voluntary organizations and purposes.

For organizations to succeed in recruiting and keeping its members, donors and volunteers, it is necessary with

- more resources to facilitate, lead and inspire volunteers
- more resources for facilities, equipment, organizing, instruction, etc. so that organized activities can maintain the requested quality
- more resources for actively communicating the efforts and results of the organization to donors, members and volunteers

e. A diverse society

A substantial part of the immigrant population in Norway are active members of minority organizations. These organizations play an important role in creating social, cultural and/or religious communities, in giving guidance to its members when facing a new country and culture, and constitute an important voice of minorities in democracy.

Minority organizations are often more loosely organized than traditional Norwegian organizational life, and often have less financial resources to resort to.

The voluntary sector, as others sectors in society, is an important arena for including new members of society. The very nature of volunteerism, with a low bar for participation, makes it a gateway for inclusion and participation in civil society for immigrants. To recruit more immigrants:



- voluntary organizations must work towards a goal of representing the diversity of the Norwegian population within the organization, through its members and volunteers
- minority organizations must be included in the voluntary sector as collaborative partners both by other organizations and by the public sector

To succeed in this,

- minority organizations need access to premises for their activities
- shared spaces for dialogue in local communities, between traditional Norwegian organizations, and minority organizations, must be established
- traditional Norwegian organizations and immigrant organizations must collaborate more
- the public sector must initiate more collaboration with minority organizations

A diverse society demands inclusion of all groups, and that they are all offered the opportunity of participation. For this to happen, the voluntary organizations must gain access to universally accessible premises to ensure equal availability to events and activities, for everyone.

f. Increase in public health challenges

In the last years, we have seen an increase in overweight, diabetes, loneliness and psychological issues. Public health does not just concern physical health issues, but also the entire compound of financial, physical, psychological and environmental factors that may affect the health condition of a person. Ensuring good public health, then, is not just about eating right and getting enough exercise. For instance, it also concerns loneliness, drug problems, poverty and living with functional disabilities. Volunteer work may itself contribute to improved public health, although this isn't an explicit goal in many organizations.

To increase the positive health effects of volunteering to the benefit of both participants and society as a whole,

- the public sector must be aware of local voluntary resources and its public health potential, and facilitate collaboration that may benefit both volunteerism and public health
- organizations need to be more aware of its potential to make an impact on public health
- organizations need to see the potential of recruitment and to increase resources in focusing on public health

g. Digital communication

Our society has gone through a digital revolution. This is demonstrated to voluntary organizations by demands to register digitally for public financial support, and to increase the level of professionalism. There is no reason to think otherwise than that more changes are to come. To ensure that this doesn't become an obstacle, but benefits volunteerism,

- voluntary organizations must train their volunteers in using digital tools, and prevent digital divides by requiring that all participants have IT-knowledge
- the public sector must prevent digitalization from becoming an obstacle, and rather simplifying organizational work. One example is finalizing the categorization of



organizations by activity codes in the Public register of NGOs. This register should be applied by the entire public sector, thereby operating as a gateway to financial support and in dialogue between the public and voluntary sector

- in giving financial support, the public sector must ensure sufficient funds for investment in digital tools and equipment, expenses that can not be compensated for by increasing the amount of voluntary work

h. Climate challenges

Climate changes are on the rise. This is not only a subject in public debate on environmental issues, but affects all sectors of society. Voluntary organizations have an awareness responsibility; to know how climate changes may affect our work, the groups we aim to support, and how organizational activities may affect the environment. Climate changes pose a threat for an increase in catastrophic situations. Volunteerism may contribute in preparedness measures and rescue and emergency services. Voluntary organizations must

- map out and reduce the potential harm our activities may pose to the environment
- ensure that the risk of climate change is taken into account when planning events, and rising buildings and constructions
- be included in public stand-by duty plans for handling environmental crises

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