

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES ON PAY AND RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTEERING

Ibero-American Association of Time Banks
February 2025

MOST RELEVANT ORGANISATIONAL MODELS

Summary



Project number: 2021-2-AT01-KA220-ADU-000049463

INTRODUCTION

This summary of the second chapter of our main report on best practices in the reward and recognition of volunteering focuses on the many models that have largely been developed by civil society and later adopted by local authorities, as well as other public and private institutions. While state-led recognition models are often well-established and, in many countries, based on legal regulations, many other recognition systems have emerged through the participation and initiative of civil society.

In this chapter, we have sought to identify the factors that contribute to the long-term sustainability of these models, drawing on the experience of the various stakeholders involved in this European project all of whom have extensive expertise in the field of volunteering and in implementing different approaches to recognising or rewarding volunteer efforts.

For greater clarity, we distinguish between different types of sponsors or organisational models, and examine how these influence the sustainable implementation of such initiatives.

Local Associations and Networks:

From the 1970s onwards, many recognition system initiatives began to emerge across Europe at the local or regional level. In most cases, they were freely organised as informal groups or through civil associations. More structured models — organised as formal associations with legal status — have typically had greater longevity. Today, there are numerous examples demonstrating that these types of organisations remain active and effective even after more than 30 years, although the number of participants has been decreasing due to a decline in direct citizen engagement in matters of general interest through these structures.

Umbrella Organisational Structures:

In Austria, umbrella organisations such as ASIBT or ZA:RT (a cooperation network of regional barter systems) have played a significant role in supporting the creation and development of local associations. They do this through various support measures, coordinated lobbying efforts, shared software standards, common platforms, and more. However, unlike umbrella structures such as alpine clubs, umbrella organisations dedicated to recognition systems typically cannot offer financial incentives to their members largely due to a lack of income or very limited financial resources.

Beyond the Associative Movement:

Also relevant are **foundations**, which are sometimes very actively involved in the fields of volunteering, assistance, and care. Similarly, there are broad networks of organisations dedicated to volunteering or other social causes for example, Spain's *Coordinadora de ONGs para el Desarrollo*¹, or the *Red Soledades*². The latter comprises over 50 Spanish organisations focused on the issue of unwanted loneliness, and the Ibero-American Association of Time Banks is a member of this network.

Public Bodies:

However, the long-term viability of public sponsorship depends on political decision-makers, and this commitment may shift over time potentially leading to the discontinuation of these models, even when they have demonstrated a positive social impact.

¹ <https://coordinadoraongd.org/>

² <https://redsoledad.es/>

It is clear that the **principle of subsidiarity**³ should be applied to all matters of social responsibility, by actively involving those public bodies closest to citizens, such as municipal councils and local authorities.

Non-Governmental Organisations:

NGOs often succeed in mobilising the commitment of many individuals around a shared cause. However, this collaboration is frequently limited to periodic financial contributions particularly when the cause is distant or unrelated to the immediate environment of its members. In contrast, when the objective is local and directly relevant, the organisation is more likely to foster meaningful, community-based volunteering.

Social Enterprises:

Social enterprises are defined as businesses whose primary objective is to address social, environmental, or community-related issues in a sustainable manner — generating a positive impact on society while operating in a financially viable way. Social enterprises are generally less well-known than NGOs and are referred to by different names in various countries. In Spain, for example, social enterprises may take the form of **reintegration companies**, **B-Corps**⁴, **labour limited companies**, or **cooperatives**.

In Austria, social enterprises — such as *Zeitpolster* — are organisations that generate income through market activity, clearly articulate their social impact, and, where profits are made, reinvest the majority for the pursuit of their mission. Although they participate in the market, these organisations are not profit-driven. Austria has established its own label to recognise such organisations: the VSE – Verified Social Enterprise label⁵, awarded by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, AWS (Austria Wirtschaftsservice), and SENA (Social Entrepreneurship Network Austria).

Several European countries and cities have developed their own strategic policy frameworks to support the creation and growth of social enterprises.

NEW SOCIAL OBJECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

While state-led recognition systems such as certificates and competency records emerged at a later stage, the first civil society-based recognition systems, such as Time Banks, began to appear in Europe during the 1990s. The objectives of these systems were often quite diverse and typically shaped by local needs, operating independently of public policy frameworks. In many cases, their goals were also conceived as alternatives to the capitalist system and consumer model promoting circular economy

³ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/es/sheet/7/el-principio-de-subsidiariedad>

⁴ <https://www.bcorpSpain.es/>

⁵ <https://www.aws.at/en/verified-social-enterprise-label/>

principles or the valorisation of voluntary work, among other aims. Many of these early initiatives have since laid the foundation for established and recognised systems of social recognition.

Today, however, objectives are often defined by higher-level and more distant political bodies, or framed in terms of top-down social impact targets, sometimes set by international organisations such as the United Nations and its **2030 Sustainable Development Goals⁶ (SDGs)** — now embedded in the agendas of all states and public institutions. Issues such as combating loneliness, providing basic support services for the elderly, or assisting families are gaining visibility, but often through increasingly specific and restrictive regulations that do not always facilitate community-based solutions. These recognition systems and alternative care models originated as grassroots initiatives, yet they now serve as powerful examples of how current social challenges can be addressed from a perspective that is closer to citizens and their lived realities.

This highlights the importance of standardisation, clear objectives, and the safeguarding of systems that already function efficiently as long as both their independence and their professionalisation are preserved. If public authorities wish to support recognition systems, a model must be developed that achieves broad public and social acceptance.

CHALLENGES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RECOGNITION SYSTEMS

Legal Issues:

The development of clear and coherent legal frameworks is essential for the expansion of these models, whether through legislation from the European Union or from individual national governments.

Appropriate Organisational Models:

Sustainable organisational structures require professional design and implementation, without overburdening entities with excessive administrative demands.

Funding:

Reliable financing is a fundamental pillar for these models. This can be achieved through public or private funding, as well as self-generated income such as membership fees, service-related revenue, or a combination of all of these.

Changing Attitudes Towards Volunteering:

The conditions surrounding volunteering have changed significantly in recent decades. Digital platforms and social networks now allow volunteering to be organised independently of time and location, giving rise to new forms of engagement such as microvolunteering, where tasks are completed at short notice and require minimal time commitment.

⁶ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible/>

Despite this evolution, long-term commitment traditionally nurtured within associations or non-profit organisations remains highly relevant. Many people seek to disconnect from the digital world and become involved in real-life initiatives such as community gardens, sharing circles, Time Banks, or food banks. These types of activities also offer the opportunity to build long-lasting relationships and make a meaningful, sustained contribution to the community.

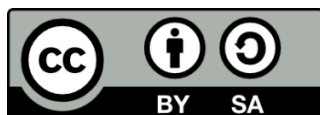
The role of the state has also evolved. The **Volunteering Act** and other legal frameworks have introduced greater regulation of volunteering, which in some cases has made it more complex and challenging both for organisations and for volunteers themselves.

Time provision models, particularly those focused on providing care for vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities, or children, are a relatively recent development, even among time credit systems. Both in **Time Banks worldwide**⁷ and in initiatives such as *Zeitpolster*⁸ in Austria and *Zeitvorsorge*⁹ in Switzerland, these models have proven effective in attracting a high proportion of individuals who were not previously engaged in volunteer work. In the case of *Zeitpolster* in Austria, depending on the region, between 60% and 70% of volunteers had no prior volunteering experience.

Finally, both local and national governments, as well as public institutions, are increasingly adopting these recognition models to help achieve their social objectives. For this to be effective, the associated organisational models are becoming progressively more professional, facing all the challenges described in the introduction of this report and in the present chapter.

As in other sectors of society, we must move beyond the assumption that these organisations whether civil or public can rely solely on small teams of volunteers. **Professionalisation** also means building sustainable structures capable of evolving further and ensuring continuity over time.

„Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or OeAD-GmbH. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.“



Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

⁷ There are more than 1000 Time Banks all over the world dedicated to care, especially the Asian models for elderly care: <https://www.asibdt.org/2024/10/iv-informe-mundial-de-bancos-de-tiempo.html>

⁸ <https://www.zeitpolster.com/>

⁹ <https://www.zeitvorsorge.ch/>