

# VERSO

VOLUNTEERS FOR EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT

NEWSLETTER: ISSUE 2, 2012



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## WELCOME

Welcome to the second issue of the VERSO newsletter. VERSO (Volunteers for European Employment) is a new Pan-European development and knowledge-sharing project funded by the European Regional Development Fund, INTERREG IVC.

Eight regional authorities and four research institutions in Europe collaborate in the VERSO project. Until 2014, VERSO will map ways to create fruitful interplay of regional political authorities and volunteers of civic society in the fight against unemployment. The challenge is to both trace good experiences – what works? – and clarify transferability of the good experiences across national, governmental, societal and cultural differences in Europe. In this issue you can learn more about the background for VERSO and the most recent project activities.

You can subscribe to VERSO's electronic newsletter by sending an email to [verso@dpu.dk](mailto:verso@dpu.dk)

Learn more about VERSO at the project website:

[www.versonet.eu](http://www.versonet.eu)

### FRAMEWORK SET FOR EUROPEAN RESEARCH IN VOLUNTEERING

The first INTERREGIONAL VERSO workshop organised by the University of Ioannina set the framework for further research of volunteering in the combat against unemployment.

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A UK charity could be becoming a victim of its own success. Read about the Hull & East Yorkshire Citizens Advice Bureau.

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**European Union**  
European Regional Development Fund



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# FRAMEWORK SET FOR EUROPEAN RESEARCH IN VOLUNTEERING

**In the first week of September, the Knowledge Partners from Hungary, Denmark and Spain travelled to Ioannina city for the first INTERREGional VERSO workshop organised by the University of Ioannina. The workshop set the framework for further research of volunteering in the combat against unemployment.**

VERSO is a Pan-European development and knowledge-sharing project funded by the European Regional Development Fund, INTERREG IVC. The INTERREGional VERSO workshop was held from the 5th - 7th of September. The four Knowledge Partners finalized the Methodology Manual and an online-survey questionnaire, which eight public authorities in eight countries will use to identify 24 good practices of volun-

teering that improve the employment situation of the involved individuals.

‘The uniqueness of the VERSO project lies in the fact that it does not constitute merely academic research but rather a close collaboration between policymakers, implementers and researchers. The constant interaction between public authorities and the Knowledge Partners offers an invaluable debate, in which ideas from theory and praxis are being fermented and new ideas emerge’, explains Professor Dr. Spiros Pantazis from the University of Ioannina.

## **An alternative arena**

‘Volunteering is seen as an activity performed out of free will for a number of diverse reasons and has as a result contribution to the public good and interest. Voluntarism is an alternative arena where both marginalized groups as well as

## ABOUT VERSO

VERSO is a new Pan-European development and knowledge-sharing project funded by the European Regional Development Fund, INTERREG IVC.

VERSO seeks to improve the quality of life for people across Europe by means of learning and sharing the best practice of voluntary work to improve European employment as well as social capital, social cohesion and the quality of life.

Unemployment is increasing all over Europe. The problems cannot be solved within the frameworks provided by the traditional systems - neither the welfare state, the family nor the market offer adequate solutions for unemployed citizens, who turn to them for assistance. New and innovative approaches are needed all over Europe.

Volunteering can provide a pathway to new skills and eventually a paid job; civic society and volunteerism can also be instrumental in creating new types of social spaces capable of including or connecting with marginalized groups whose employment needs are not currently met by the established employment systems.

All over Europe, there are valuable good practice experiences in creating fruitful collaboration between regional political authorities and volunteers of civil society in the fight against unemployment. But a cooperation between regional political authorities and research institutions is essential in order to identify the good practice experiences that works and identify how it is possible to transfer them from one particular national, social and cultural context to another.

VERSO will develop a best practice catalogue to be used by the participating regions, and the project will ultimately result in a range of research-based policy recommendations in 2014. These recommendations will identify effective forms of volunteerism and indicate how they can be transferred to contexts across Europe.

the unemployed workforce in general can maintain and develop job skills and enhance their network in an informal educational setting. In this sphere, it is possible to acquire, re-acquire or re-orient job skills and develop familiarity with or tolerance of changing job demands', explains Professor Pantazis from the University of Ioannina.

During the workshop the local media covered the workshop proceedings and the Knowledge Partners had the opportunity to inform the public about the aims of the VERSO project. At the last day of the workshop, Ms Anette Eriksen representative of the project Lead Partner together with Knowledge Partners visited Mrs Aikaterini Ramioti the Political Panel Board Member of the University of Ioannina at the local branch of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and the region of Epirus. Then, a press conference was delivered at the region of Epirus with Mr Odysseas Potsis the Political Panel Board Member of the region of Epirus, Professor Pantazis the Project Manager of the University of Ioannina, Ms Anette Eriksen representative of the Lead Partner and Ms Eleni Kalampoka the Project Manager of the region of Epirus. The VERSO Project concept and aims as well as results of the 1st INTERREGIONAL workshop were presented. Ms Eleni Kalampoka highlighted the close collaboration between the university and the region of Epirus in addressing the rising unemployment through innovative and efficient policy measures borrowed from other EU countries.

### Next stop East Riding of Yorkshire

The workshop was the third European meeting in the VERSO project. Next stop will be East Riding of Yorkshire in UK the 21st - 23rd of November, where partners from four universities and eight regional authorities from different European countries will meet for a Political Briefing and a European Press Conference about the project.

Read more at [www.versonet.eu/events](http://www.versonet.eu/events)



# MAKING VOLUNTEERING COUNT

**A UK charity could be becoming a victim of its own success. The Hull & East Yorkshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has been so successful in getting people back into work that it can struggle to maintain the necessary numbers of volunteers it needs. In the current economic climate, funding sources are being squeezed and there is a greater demand for the services. The CAB estimates the economic value of our volunteers to be in excess of £989,000 per year.**

Anne-Marie Benson Community Legal Advice Network Manager says: 'During the financial year 2011-12 our volunteers provided more than 36,200 hours of advice, the equivalent of a further 19 full time paid staff.'

The Citizens Advice Bureau is a National Charity which exists to provide free, confidential, independent, impartial advice, information and representation to members of the public on a wide range of issues including debt, welfare

rights, employment, housing, relationships, consumer and all other issues.

Citizens Advice was established in 1939, as a response to help citizens cope with the outbreak of war. There are 382 bureaux across England and Wales, and they all offer information and advice through face-to-face, phone and email services and online via [Adviceguide.org.uk](http://Adviceguide.org.uk).

During 2010/11, the service nationally helped 2.1 million people with 7.1 million problems relating to issues including debt, benefits, employment, housing and immigration. Advisers help clients to fill out forms, write letters, negotiate with creditors and can even represent them at court or tribunal.

Volunteering is and has always been an integral part of Citizens Advice Bureaux across the country. Nationally, volunteer numbers at Citizens Advice Bureaux have remained at approximately 21,000 for the last six years.

## **The Hull & East Riding Citizens Advice Bureau**

The Hull & East Riding Citizens Advice Bureau serves those living and working in Hull and East

Riding. In 2010/11 the Hull & East Riding CAB assisted over 12,781 people with 69,295 issues.

Anne-Marie Benson says: 'Of our clients who have gained financially by the advice and representation we provided an average of £9,036 in payments was obtained for them.'

The Bureau employs 55 paid members of staff in various roles, including Management, Advice Supervisors, Training Supervisors, Caseworkers and administration to deliver the core service. However, it also has 201 volunteers; 72 of which are fully trained advisers. More than 36,200 hours of advice was provided by volunteers in 2011/12.

Hull & East Riding CAB is a charity and relies on funding to deliver its service. The Bureau attracts volunteers from all walks of life, but all of them live within the local communities that it serves. It is a safe environment for people to learn new skills and regain confidence, particularly people who have been out of the work place for some time due to unemployment, illness, disability or caring responsibilities.

'Whilst we accept and encourage suitable volunteers from all sections of society and walks of life we particularly target the unemployed, people seeking to return to work after a break, for example due to illness or caring responsibilities.'

'For example, we had a volunteer who was a lawyer but was unemployed after a period of illness. The local Job Centre strongly suggested that he should volunteer with us at the Bureau to regain his confidence and re-establish his work ethic. He joined us and did eventually move on into a job being a solicitor once again.'

'We also encourage people who are currently caring for children or family members to volunteer with us, to ensure they maintain skills, experience and employability. For example, one volunteer had had to give up work to care for her terminally ill mother, but received respite care from a relative two days a week. She volunteered with us for one day a week, in a bid to maintain her working skills as well as to provide social interaction and companionship.'

Students are particularly attracted to volun-

teering with the organisation, either formally as part of their studies or in their spare time and holidays to gain invaluable experience and enhance their CV's and job prospects. Similarly, we also attract students who have completed their degrees, but have not yet found gainful employment.

Anne Marie adds: 'We estimate that 80% of the Bureau's employees first joined the CAB as a volunteer. Furthermore, our main offices are situated in areas of deprivation, thus providing much needed volunteering opportunities, as well as skills, training and enhancement of employability.'

### So what's in it for the volunteers?

The people who benefit and get a better quality of life are the volunteers, the clients who receive the service that the volunteers provide and the local community.

One volunteer says: 'When I first moved to the town, I didn't know anybody, had no job and few prospects. Since joining the Bureau I have made new friends, have a focus to my life and feel that I am gaining new skills which will help me in my job search.'

The local community benefits as volunteering encourages community participation and develops strong active and empowered communities. The local community is also aided through the extra monies gained for clients (£2m), which are often fed back into the local economy and local businesses.

Read more at [www.versonet.eu/case-stories](http://www.versonet.eu/case-stories)





# OPENING THE DOOR TO REHAB

**Fundació Ared is a non-profit organisation that was founded in 1994 as an association for social integration of women.**

Ared was created in the basement of Wad-Ras Women's Prison in Barcelona by five women prisoners, and a clothes-making instructor, who is today the Ared Foundation's President. Together they created the first clothes-making workshop. This innovative and pioneering initiative, supported by the enthusiasm and keenness of its users, has grown to become a stable platform providing a link between exclusion and genuine integration. This has been made possible by the help and partnership of private and public organisations together with people who believe in integration and have made a sustained effort to drive the foundational purpose. The Fundació Ared also drives social volunteering in all its forms.

The Fundació Ared's mission is to foster access to full citizenship for people at risk of so-

cial exclusion by promoting their independence through comprehensive training and mentoring. It works in coordination with other organisations to raise awareness in institutions and the wider society about the reality of social exclusion.

The project has been running for 18 years. This experience in the field of social action has made it possible to build and consolidate a methodology of intervention based on personalised mentoring and comprehensive training of women experiencing social exclusion.

Read more about the project at [www.versonet.eu/case-stories](http://www.versonet.eu/case-stories)



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# VERSO AT OPEN DAYS I BRUXELLES

**VERSO participated in the 10th European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels, the 8th - 11th of October 2012. The INTERREG IVC programme organised two workshops, which were followed by cross-sectorial networking sessions.**

'It's an excellent way to exchange ideas and experiences on project findings, good practices and results among the INTERREG IVC project partners', says Anette Eriksen VERSO Project Manager, who found it very inspiring to be part of the Open Days.

The VERSO project participated in two official INTERREG IVC workshops: 1) "INTERREG IVC capitalisation initiative: How EU regions can benefit?" and 2) "Towards Europe 2020 aims: inter-regional solutions for smart specialisation".

The networking sessions with other INTERREG IVC projects offered an opportunity to promote "Volunteers for European Employment" – the VERSO project and distribute more than

300 invitations to the upcoming VERSO Political Briefing: "Understanding the Economic & Social Context of Volunteering and its importance in the Current Climate", which will be shown online on the 22nd of November 2012, at 13.30-16.45 GMT.

Helena Moss and Claire Watts from East Riding of Yorkshire Council, the VERSO project's British partner, explain that the Online Political Briefing will involve several external guest speakers, who will provide an overview of the European social and economic context of volunteering. The titles of the presentations "Rethinking Volunteering", "Priceless but not free - case for Voluntary Sector Infrastructure", and "On European Volunteer Measurement Project", promise an interesting and thought-provoking afternoon. We expect the presentations to be exciting for the 12 VERSO Partners and help them better understand the identified 24 good practices on volunteering and employment.

Read more at [www.versonet.eu/events](http://www.versonet.eu/events)

## PARTICIPANTS IN THE VERSO-PROJECT:

### KNOWLEDGE PARTNERS

Aarhus University  
[www.au.dk](http://www.au.dk)

University of Ioannina  
[www.uoi.gr/en](http://www.uoi.gr/en)

Budapest Business School  
[www.gkz.bgf.hu](http://www.gkz.bgf.hu)

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona  
[www.uab.cat](http://www.uab.cat)

### PUBLIC AUTHORITY PARTNERS

East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
[www.eastriding.gov.uk](http://www.eastriding.gov.uk)

Generalitat de Catalunya  
[www.gencat.cat](http://www.gencat.cat)

Municipality of Middelfart  
[www.middelfart.dk](http://www.middelfart.dk)

Municipality of Zalaegerszeg  
[www.zalaegerszeg.hu](http://www.zalaegerszeg.hu)

Municipality of Coevorden  
[www.coevorden.nl](http://www.coevorden.nl)

Municipality of Sofia  
[www.sofia.bg](http://www.sofia.bg)

Netzwerk Lippe  
[www.netzwerk-lippe.de](http://www.netzwerk-lippe.de)

Region of Epirus  
[www.php.gov.gr](http://www.php.gov.gr)

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# LIVE WEBCAST: VERSO POLITICAL BRIEFING 22 NOVEMBER 2012

## UNDERSTANDING THE ECONOMIC & SOCIAL CONTEXT OF VOLUNTEERING AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE

The next VERSO Interregional workshop takes place in East Riding Yorkshire in November 2012 with the participation of representatives from all of the 12 VERSO Partners.

In connection with the meeting, a Political Briefing will take place the 22nd of November with the theme "Understanding the economic & social context of volunteering and its importance in the current climate".

The keynote speakers at the Political Briefing are:

- Robert Beard from the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)
- Nick Stanhope from We Are What We Do

- Daniela Bosioc from the European Centre for Volunteering, Brussels

The Political Briefing will be shown online as a live webcast on the Internet. This will enable as many interested parties as possible across Europe to watch the keynote speakers. VERSO will be able to take questions live over a Twitterfeed at the event.

For more information and how to register interest in the live webcast please visit

<http://verso.eventbrite.co.uk/>

Read more about the Political Briefing and the speakers at:

[www.versonet.eu/events](http://www.versonet.eu/events)