



## **VOLUNTARY ACTION IN PORTUGAL**

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Written by Patrícia Abreu, CEV Intern

Edited by Markus Held, CEV Coordinator

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This study aims to provide comprehensive information as well as statistics and data on volunteering in Portugal. First of all, it gives an overview of the historical, political and social framework regarding volunteering in Portugal as well as an approach to the general understanding of the attitude towards volunteering in the national context. Secondly, it explores the volunteering infrastructure and describes the actors involved in volunteering at all levels (local, regional and national). Furthermore, the study provides broad data on features of the volunteer population and the sectors in which volunteers are active. Finally, concluding remarks on recent developments, weaknesses and challenges of volunteering in Portugal are given.

### **1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS VOLUNTEERING**

#### **1.1 Social and historical context**

"The origin of the voluntary work in Portugal can be found before the Modern State and even before the establishment of the Portuguese state in 1135."<sup>1</sup>

The first Mutualism Associations appeared 700 years ago. In 1297 the king *D.Dinis* founded an organization called Good Man from *Beja (Homens-Bons de Beja)*, mainly involved in beneficent activities. Their values were based on solidarity, freedom, independence and democracy. During the Middle Age volunteering tried to solve social problems through the creation of institutions, named Mercy Institutions (*Misericórdias*), which developed a true social protection system. On those days volunteering was deeply rooted in religion (Catholic Church) and related to charity activities<sup>2</sup>

Also the first fire brigades appeared several centuries ago. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century a strongly social and political movement arose, which resulted in the formation of the trade unions, cooperatives, and associations. It was the voluntary work that allowed these organizations to survive and grow.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century new kinds of volunteering organizations promoting human rights, environmental issues, cooperation for development, local development, culture and sport appeared. Another important fact is the emergence of Non Governmental Organizations for Development (NGOD). NGODs, organizations for cooperation with developing countries appeared at an international level with the creation of United Nations (UN) in the sixties. In Portugal only after the establishment of democracy in Portugal, after the fall of the "*Estado Novo*" dictatorship on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 1974 the first NGOD started to arise. These were concerned about the effects of the colonial war on the

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<sup>1</sup> *Speech of the President of the Portuguese Republic for the International Year for Volunteering*

Portuguese African possessions during the dictatorship period. Twenty-nine years later (in March 2003) 88 NGOs were registered at the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs and 45 of them are members of the Social Platform for NGOs.<sup>3</sup> It was only on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1994 that the Portuguese State recognized the statute of NGOs defining their principles, ways of action and organization.

Following the International Year of Volunteering promoted by UN in 2001, Portuguese Government constituted the National Commission for the International Year of Volunteering, which conducted several studies about volunteering in Portugal.

In following years the National Commission for the International Year of Volunteering was renamed to "National Council for Volunteer Promotion" and since 2003 has been creating several local volunteer centers all over the country.

## **1.2 Definition of the nonprofit sector**

Portugal follows the wide-spread definition that a nonprofit organization is a private self-governed organization independent from the government whose eventual profits are not shared between its members, but reinvested on the organization itself. They are mainly focused in the conception, execution and support of social, cultural, environmental, civic and/or economical projects.

## **1.3. Definition of volunteer work**

From the legal point of view, volunteer work was defined on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1998<sup>4</sup> as "*The actions of social and civic interest carried through non-paid persons who offer their time to non-profit organizations.*"

Another classification of volunteering, presented by the National Council for Volunteer Promotion refers to an activity done of one's free will for the benefit of others.

## **2. THIRD SECTOR**

### **2.1 Nonprofit sector**

A study conducted in 2000 called "The Third Sector in Portugal"<sup>5</sup> revealed the number of Portuguese organizations by sector. This study showed that the Third Sector represented 100.000 jobs in the country, which corresponded to 2.2% of the active population. However this study does not provide any estimation for the number of volunteers.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <http://www.uniaomutualidadesportuguesas.pt/ump.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [www.platformaongd.pt](http://www.platformaongd.pt)

<sup>4</sup> Art.º 2º da Lei n.º 71/98, de 3 de Novembro

<sup>5</sup> "O Terceiro Sector em Portugal: Delimitação, Caracterização e Potencialidades"

## **2.2 Non Governmental Organizations for Development**

*In the following, a special focus will be given to the NGOD. This is due to the fact that most of the facts and figures available in Portugal relate to this area. Notably the Portuguese Social Platform for NGOD provides many data in this respect, which can be accessed at [www.platformaongd.pt](http://www.platformaongd.pt). It is clearly understood that they represent only one area of the volunteering sector in Portugal.*

The Social Platform for the Non Governmental Organizations for Development (NGOD) was created on 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1985 and serves as a link between NGOD, civil society, public authorities and other organizations.

NGOD are one of the most important and structured organizations of the third sector in Portugal. In 2003, a total of 88 NGOD were registered in Portugal. The number of NGOD registered at the Platform slightly increased from 45 in 2003 to 49 in 2005.

## **2.3 Basic facts on the Portuguese NGOD**

The Portuguese Platform for NGOD has conducted a study in 2002 for their 45 NGODs members in order to characterize the human resources involved on those organizations:

- There were 1782 workers.
- 994 of those workers were volunteers.
- 788 were paid staff.
- Among the volunteers, 254 were working outside of Portugal and 740 in Portugal.
- Among paid staff, 225 were working outside of Portugal and 563 in Portugal.

### *Interventional areas of NGODs*

In Portugal the interventional areas of NGODs are fundamentally the national territory, the Portuguese Official Language Africans Countries and East-Timor.

Their acting areas are essentially:

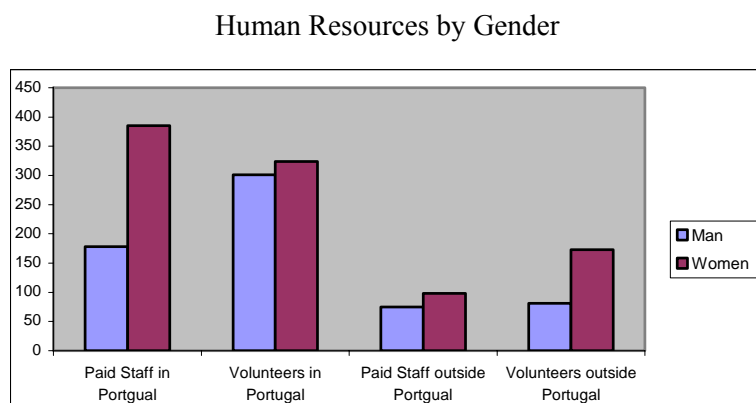
- Emergency Help, which answers immediately to non-predictable events in a short time period.
- Humanitarian Help, that aims to minor the suffering and poverty of millions of human being, victimized by hunger, war, social injustice, and other human and natural catastrophe.
- Cooperation for Development is a long time project, which aims to create a social structure for a problematic population in order to establish a sustainable society.

- Education for Development consists of projects and initiatives designed to mobilize public opinion, as well as specific sectors of society, for the understanding of development issues and promotion of the change of attitudes towards it.

*Human resources profile of NGODs:*

- 56,6% women.
- 43,4% man.
- 55.8% volunteers.
- 44.2% paid staff.
- 73.1% work in Portugal.
- 26.9% work outside of Portugal.
- Considering the age groups, young people aged 25-30 and adult people aged 31-45 constitute the main group of human resources. People aged 46-65 represent the smaller group of human resources.

Graph 1



Source: NGODs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGOD.

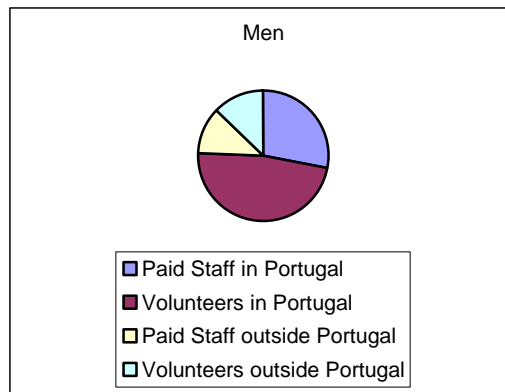
Table 1

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Paid Staff in Portugal</b>	178	385
<b>Volunteers in Portugal</b>	301	324
<b>Paid Staff outside Portugal</b>	75	98
<b>Volunteers outside Portugal</b>	81	173

Source: NGODs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGOD.

Graph 2

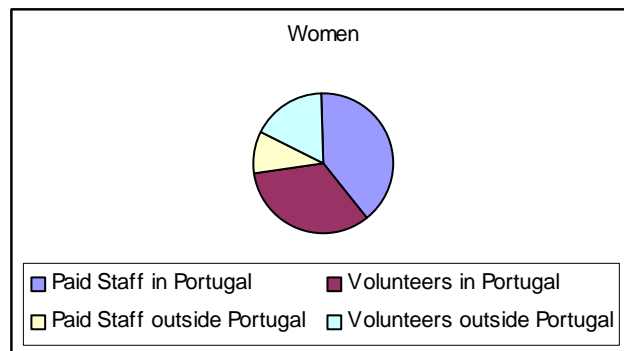
Proportion of Men



Source: NGOs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGOD.

Graph 3

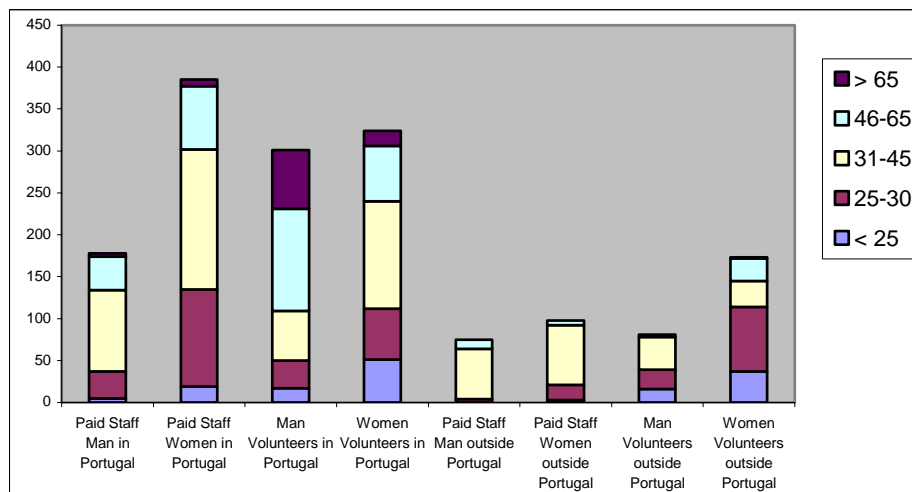
Proportion of Women



Source: NGOs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGOD.

Graph 4

Human Resources by Age Distribution

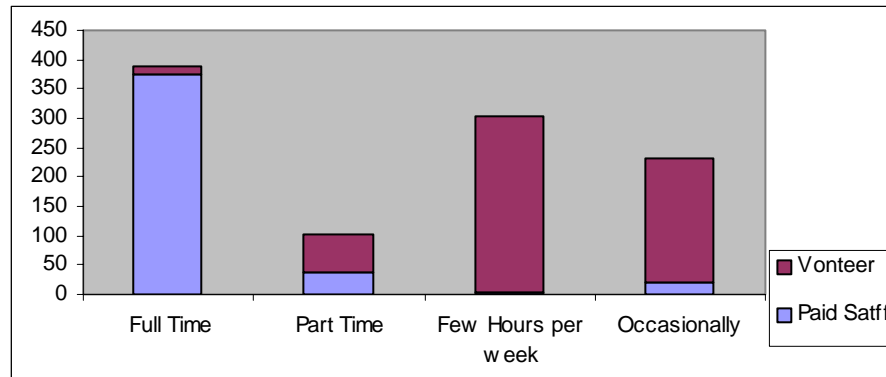


Source: NGOs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGOD.

In respect to the age distribution by sex, women are comparatively younger, both as paid staff in Portugal and as volunteers outside Portugal. The oldest segments of Human Resources are the volunteering men in Portugal. Young women tend to go easily to work outside of Portugal while men start to work later and prefer to stay in the country.

Graph 5

Time Offered to NGOs by the Volunteers and the Paid Staff

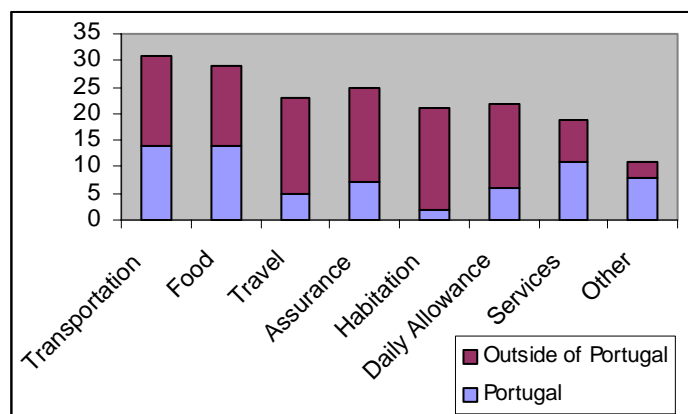


Source: NGOs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGO.

The volunteers in Portugal normally spend their time on an occasional basis or on a more regular basis of collaboration. The main areas of the volunteer work are related to the promotion of culture, environmental issues, work for peace and gender equality.

Graph 6

Benefits and Help Given to Volunteers in their Work

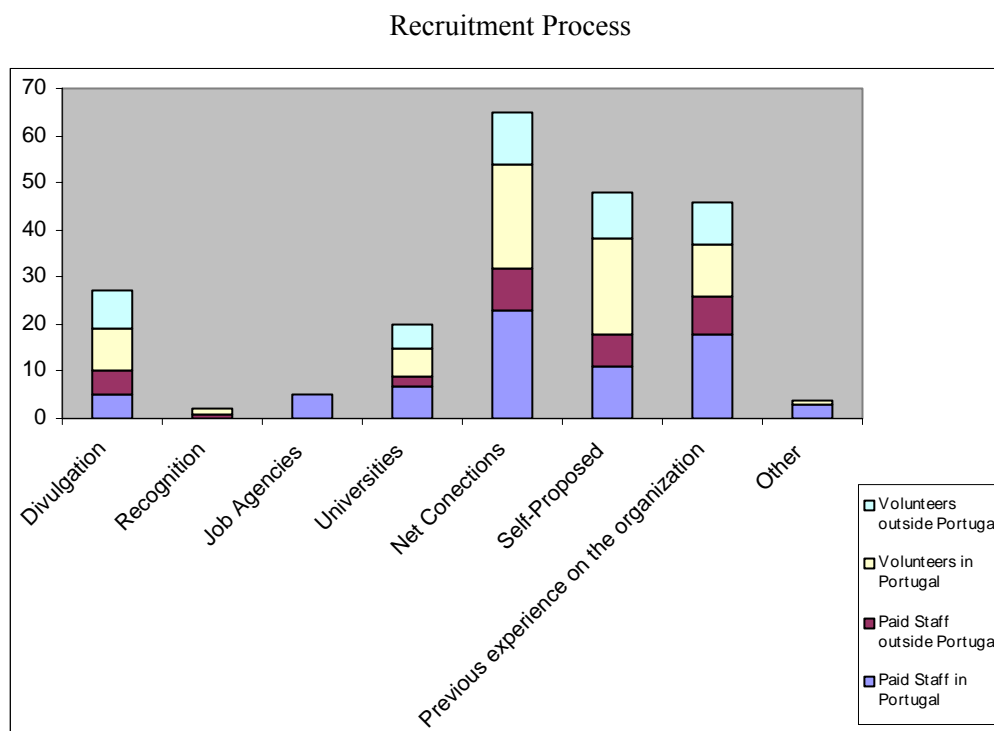


Source: NGOs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGO.

Organizations tend to give more support to the volunteers who are working outside the country.

*Recruitment Process*

Graph 7



Source: NGODs in Portugal – 2002 research results. The Portuguese Platform for NGOD.

The Internet has clearly become the major tool for recruitment. Another feature seems to be the preference for volunteers or internees that have been in the organization before. However self-proposal assumes a special relevance in the case of volunteers. Nevertheless the selection mechanism is becoming more objective and based on CV (*Curriculum Vitae*) analyses (more often in the case of paid staff) and interviews (more often in the case of volunteers). The main selection criterion has been the candidate identification with the organization philosophy and principles as well as the professional experience of the candidate in the interest area. Age is considered one of the less important recruitment criterion.

### *Qualifications Demand*

Most of NGOD's human resources have a university degree, but this seems not to be enough. Organizations are demanding extra skills covering other domains like English, informatics, project management, project evaluation, financial and administrative management, establishment of international relations and social cultural animation skills. It is imperative that NGODs give special importance to human resources qualifications and are capable of providing them with specific and up to date information on the level of:

- Knowledge about the countries they are going to work to, namely the historical, social, cultural, economical and political atmosphere.
- Formation on community and local development intervention.

- Formation on evaluation systems and empowerment.
- Reinforcement of the communication skills.
- Formation on specific technical skills.

## **2.4 Social acceptance of volunteering**

In Portugal the most recent studies available on voluntary work and the third sector are dated 2001. Obviously this implies a very vague image of volunteering and the nonprofit sector in general.

Traditionally, voluntary work was associated to organizations with a religious basis, mainly focused on charity work. Nowadays volunteering starts to be connected also with social support, solidarity, defense of equal rights and environmental issues. Although the attitude on volunteering in the Portuguese society has been changing in positive terms the country has the lowest rates of voluntary work in Europe. In 2001 only 12.7% of Portuguese population was engaged to volunteering activities. During the period of 1990 to 1999 Portugal was the European country with the lowest level of social engagement. The only positive variation was for organizations related to peace movements (0.5% in 1990 to 0.6% in 1999) and to cooperation for development (0.6% in 1990 to 0.8% in 1999).

This lowest expression of volunteering in Portugal can be explained by the late acquisition of the right for free association and by the fragilities of the political system.

However most of the studies have been showing that volunteering is starting to consolidate in Portugal due to a greater consciousness of people to social problems and to active citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.5 Policy of the government towards volunteering**

The National Council for Volunteering Promotion (CNPV) has the task to promote and support the development of volunteering as well as to engage several actions related to the effectiveness of volunteer rights.

CNPV's president is nominated by the Minister of Social Security and composed of representatives of the Minister of the Foreign Affairs and several social organizations. It also takes part of this National Council representatives of volunteering associations who were assigned by the Government.<sup>7</sup>

## **3. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE**

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<sup>6</sup> *Report about Volunteering in Portugal by ABLA Portugal*

<sup>7</sup> Available at: [www.voluntariado.pt](http://www.voluntariado.pt)

The State is the main actor engaged in promoting and supporting voluntary work and the idea of volunteerism across Portugal. However his initiatives and campaigns are more directed to young people than to other age groups. In spite of this effort only recent national events like the European soccer championship 2004 and Rock in Lisbon manage to mobilized significant number of people for volunteering.

Many local and national organizations, as well as, non-governmental organization play an important role in supporting volunteering and encouraging people to volunteer.

### *Volunteer Organizations in Portugal*

The National Council for Volunteer Promotion has been creating several local volunteer centers all over the country since 2003. The idea of these local volunteer centers is to have a local, flexible and decentralized structure capable of promote volunteerism.

16 volunteer centers have been established so far, some of them still at the implementation phase, located in Arganil, Barreiro, Cascais, Castelo de Vide, Coimbra, Figueira da Foz, Idanha-A-Nova, Lisboa, Lousã, Moimenta da Beira, Oeiras, Região Antónoma da Madeira, Santo Tirso, Tavira, Tomar and Vila Nova de Gaia. All these centers are being promoted and financially supported by their own local government, proving the public sector's interest to promote voluntary work in Portugal is maintained by the State.

Their main goals are to:

- Promote the meeting between volunteer supply and demand.
- Recruit people interested on volunteering and distribute them along volunteering organizations.
- Encourage people to volunteering activities.
- Make public volunteering opportunities and projects.
- Explain the idea of volunteering.
- Coordinate the volunteering activity.

## **4. GENERAL DATA ON VOLUNTEERING**

### **4.1 Volunteer Profile**

The following data stem from a study conducted by the National Commission for the Volunteer International Year in 2001 for 2366 non-profit organizations.

Institutions:

- 34% of the organizations do not work with volunteers.
- 27% of the organizations have volunteers involved only with secretariat.
- 39% of the organizations have also volunteers involved with work camp.
- 50% of the organizations have a procedure to recruit volunteers.

Volunteers:

- There were 50.000 volunteers, most of them associated to youth associations and volunteers fire brigades.
- 25% are occasional volunteers.
- 75% participate at least once per month.
- 53% offer between 5 to 10 hours per week.
- 61% are associated to the same institution for more than 2 years.
- 53% of the volunteers are men.
- 17% are less than 20 years old.
- 68% are between 20 and 65 years old.
- 54% have a profession.
- 19% are pensioner.
- 75% of the volunteers do it to feel useful.
- 70% are married.
- 16% have a university degree.
- 33% have less than secondary studies.
- 50% are not Christians.
- 37.5% are Protestants.
- 37.5% are other Christians.
- 12.4% are Catholics.
- 12.2% are agnostics.

### **4.2 Economic value of volunteering**

The National Council for Volunteering Promotion has no information about the economic value of volunteering in Portugal because of the recent development of volunteering in the country.

It is also not possible to find related data at the National Institute of Statistic.

## **5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The lack of qualified human and financial resources is a common problem in Portugal having a great impact on the progress of voluntary work and Third Sector. Volunteers complain about the scarce benefits and financial help given to them in their work. They also ask for a more favourable volunteering legislation, including fiscal exemptions, medical insurance, and time counting for retirement.

Paid staff at voluntary organizations has to face a significantly lower level of salaries as well as sometimes difficulties with career prospective.

The lack of financial resources that these organizations suffer continuously leads them to recruit more volunteers than permanent staff, a problematic development as clearly volunteering should not be seen to replace paid labour. The permanent struggle for founding also limits and narrows the scope of their activities, specially concerning with the design of long-term work strategies.

Volunteering is still an evolving phenomenon in Portugal and there is therefore still a lot of work to be done in this field. More research needs to be conducted in order to update facts and figures on volunteering in Portugal, since the last national study is related to 2001.

There is no information about the economic value of volunteering in the country and it is not possible to find the financial contribution made by volunteers to the gross domestic product (GDP).

Volunteering has no strong tradition in Portugal and the Portuguese population still seems to be rather reluctant and not enthusiastic about joining organized groups in order to participate in an active way on the society. . Volunteer Centres themselves are only an emerging reality. This movement shall be strengthened and will surely lead to a better promotion and visibility of volunteering and a higher effectiveness. The example of Portugal shows very well that a lacking volunteering infrastructure leads to a relatively weak interest and participation of citizens in volunteering. The potential of volunteering when it comes to social inclusion, social cohesion, the acquisition of skills and the promotion of active citizen's participation is still not tapped sufficiently and the newly created volunteer centres will most certainly play a crucial role in this. The creation of a volunteer infrastructure will hopefully lead as well to more and updated data on the volunteering landscape in Portugal: This report is based mainly on figures of 2001 or earlier – but to understand and effectively support volunteer reliable and up to date data is needed.

Due to the very recent development of this infrastructure, it is not surprising that at a European level, Portuguese participation in volunteer networks is still weak – but is bound to grow with the infrastructure that is emerging now.

These are some of challenges the volunteer landscape in Portugal currently faces:

- The reinforcement of local intervention and citizen participation via local volunteer centers.
- The development of a network between volunteer centers and volunteer involving organizations and NGOs throughout Portugal.
- The implication of Portuguese volunteer centres at European level
- A strategy of auto-sustainability for all organizations.
- A new approach relating to human resources specially giving more support to volunteers and strength contractual tie with paid staff.
- A more favorable legal framework for volunteering
- Promoting a discussion platform between all organizations and the Portuguese State.
- A more pro-active recognition by the state of the important role volunteering plays in society and its promotion with Portuguese citizens

## **6. REFERENCES**

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Report about Portuguese ONGDs by Mário Ribeiro e Sofia Marques. Available at: <http://www.lusotopie.sciencespobordeaux.fr/ribeiro-marques.rtf>

Report about Volunteering in Portugal by ABLA Portugal.

Speech of the President of the Portuguese Republic for the International Year for Volunteering. Available at: <http://www.presidencia-republica.pt/pt/cgi/noticias.pl?ver=discursos&id=740>

## **7. USEFUL CONTACTS**

[www.voluntariado.pt](http://www.voluntariado.pt) (official homepage of the National Council for Volunteer Promotion)

[www.platformaongd.pt](http://www.platformaongd.pt) (official homepage of the Portuguese Social Platform for the NGOD)

[www.ipad.mne.gov.pt](http://www.ipad.mne.gov.pt) (official Homepage of the Development and Portuguese Institute for Development Support)

[www.socialgest.pt/](http://www.socialgest.pt/) (website of Luis Jacob related to social economy and social action)

[www.voluntariadojovem.pt](http://www.voluntariadojovem.pt) (website of youth volunteering)

#### Volunteer Centres in Portugal:

Name	Adress	Contacts
Agência de Voluntariado Social do Barreiro	Rua Miguel Bombarda 2830-320 Barreiro	Telephone: 212 068 222 Fax: 21 206 82 22 e-mail:div.ass.sociais@iol.pt
Banco de Voluntariado de Cascais	Praça 5º de Outubro 2754-501 Cascais	Telephone: 214 825 000 Fax: 214 837 714 e-mail: Esmeralda.Ferreira@cm-cascais.pt
Banco de Voluntariado de Castelo de Vide	Rua de Santo Amaro, 23/25 7320 Castelo de Vide	Telephone: 245 908 175 Fax: 245 908 176 e-mail: bancovoluntariado_cv@hotmail.com
Banco de Voluntariado de Coimbra	Praça 8 de Maio 3000-3000 Coimbra	Telephone: 239 828 220 Fax: 239 820 11 e-mail: geral@cm-coimbra.pt
Bolsa de Voluntariado da Figueira da Foz	Av. Saraiva de Carvalho 3084-501 Figueira da Foz	Telephone: 233 403 316 Fax: 233 403 316 e-mail: bolsa.voluntariado@cm-figfoz.pt
Banco de Voluntariado de Idanha-A-Nova	Largo Senhora do Rosário 6060-145 Idanha-A-Nova	Telephone:277 201 100 Fax: 277 201 101 e-mail:Gab_social_cmin@hotmail.com
Banco de Voluntariado de Lisboa	Rua Projectada Á Rua Sousa Lopes, 10 A 1600-207 Lisboa	Telephone: 217 931 759 Fax: 217 931 7 61 e-mail:Rosa.Sampaio@cm-lisboa.pt
Banco de Voluntariado da Lousã	Rua Dr. João Santos 3200-953 Lousã	Telephone:239 990 370 Fax: 239 990 379 e-mail: geral@cm-lousa.pt
Casa do Voluntário da Madeira	Rua dos Barreiros, 26 9050-033 Funchal	Telephone: 291 281 938 Fax: e-mail:M.Carmo.Freitas@seg-social.pt
Bolsa de Voluntariado de Oeiras	Largo Marquês de Pombal 2780 Oeiras	Telephone: 214 408 504/4467570 Fax: 214 408 568 e-mail: das@cm-oeiras.pt
Banco de Voluntariado de Odivelas	Rua Guilherme Gomes Fernandes – Quinta a Memória 2675 – 372 Odivelas	
Banco de Voluntariado de Ponte da Barca	Rua Conselheiro Rocha Peixoto 4980-626 Ponte da Barca	Telephone: 258 455 976 Fax:258 455 976 voluntariado@cm-pontedabarca.pt
Banco de Voluntariado de Tavira	Divisão de Assuntos Sociais da CM Rua da Liberdade, Edifício Irene Rolo, 62 8800 Tavira	Telephone: 281 320 859 Fax: 281 322 888 e-mail:banco.voluntariado@-tavira.pt
Banco de Voluntariado de Vila Nova de Gaia	Rua Alvares Cabral 4400-017 Vila Nova	Telephone: 223 742 915 Fax:223 742 917 e-mail:Asocial-saude@cm-gaia.pt

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