

## **First meeting of the Working group on creating more opportunities for cross-border volunteering within the EU (associated with the Expert group on the Implementation of the Council Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers)**

**Venue: EC Madou, Brussels**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

**Facilitation: Josef Boček (NIDM, Czech Republic)**

**Participants: Lucia Bučková (Iuventa, Slovakia), Gergely Granyak (SZMM, Hungary), Arnas Marcinkus (LIJOT, Lithuania), Popita Pavli (Permanent Representation, Greece), Hilde van Dyck (Youth Division, Flemish community of Belgium), Karin Lopatta-Loibl, Youth Policy Unit of the EC)**

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### **Agenda of the meeting**

- Introduction, motivation, expectations of the participants
- Basis, aims, objectives, priorities
- Activities/actions
- Organisational issues

### **Introduction, motivation, expectations**

An introductory round about personal background, role, motivation and expectations of the participants opened the meeting. Some concrete expectations related to the aims, objectives and activities of the group were mentioned already at this stage: the group is aware of the importance to work towards a consequent implementation of the Recommendation, especially as regards the objective to create more opportunities for cross-border volunteering of young people within the EU. In this context, it seems important to **look for appropriate evaluation approaches** to demonstrate progress and justify the relevance of the implementation. As regards the actions to be taken, a **mapping exercise summing up examples of both existing and potential activities/projects/initiatives** which provide opportunities for cross-border volunteering of youth found general support of the group. It was also stressed that the members of the group shall **commit themselves for a continuous work and follow-up of the agreed activities** on both European and national level.

### **Basis, aims, objectives, priorities**

Creating more opportunities for cross-border volunteering was one of the five essential topics of the Czech Presidency Conference on Youth in March 2009 in Prague (the Conference

was meant as a “kick-off meeting” for the implementation of the *Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union*). The group finds it **important to follow-up on the key messages resulting from the Conference** relevant for the topic of creating more opportunities. The key messages are – in short – following:

- To **identify existing national, regional or local opportunities** (volunteer placements, schemes etc.) suitable for creating new cross-border opportunities by sharing information and good practices.
- To **support networking** in the field of volunteering in Europe (and beyond).
- To work for the **removal of** administrative and any other **obstacles** for cross-border volunteering.
- To **encourage local, regional and national policy makers** and other relevant partners to **create incentives** encouraging young Europeans to participate in cross-border volunteering projects and programmes.
- To **encourage local authorities in particular to facilitate cross-border volunteering** engagement of young people from their communities
- To **develop and promote flagship and pilot projects** in order to enhance innovation and creativity in cross-border volunteering.
- To **support young people with fewer opportunities** to get involved in cross-border volunteering.

Having all these key messages in mind the group opts for the focus on following dimensions:

### **Local dimension**

**Exchange of volunteers within neighbouring regions of different countries** bears a strong potential to generate more space for cross-border voluntary engagement of young people. With relatively **short travel distances** it makes the voluntary experience in a foreign country more accessible and affordable for young people and **cost-effective** for the donors/organisers. As a result, **short term activities** which are especially suitable for first-time volunteers and youngsters with fewer opportunities as well as for young people in education or employment can be realised on regular basis. In addition, a **closer knowledge of the neighbour’s culture and language** can further lower the thresholds for cross-border volunteering of young people in general and for young people with fewer opportunities in particular. However, **investment in networking, training and capacity building** of organisations active in cross-border regions is an important **prerequisite for a successful use of this potential**.

## **Quality dimension**

Creating of as much placements for cross-border volunteering as possible and thus opening up the cross-border mobility opportunities for as many young people as possible are of course meaningful and legitimate goals. However, to ensure **positive impact on both young volunteers and on local communities** in which they are active appropriate quality aspect should be focused on. Hence, the **emphasis** should be put **on learning, support and guidance** of the volunteers helping them to maximise the benefits of voluntary activities for them. In order to make cross-border volunteering more attractive for young people and more effective in terms of impact on the local environment, **creative a innovative approaches** should be developed. Last but not least, **sustainability of the impact** of cross-border volunteering as well as **recognition of the voluntary experience** shall be considered important qualitative aspects.

## **Synergic dimension**

Declaring the year 2011 a **European year of volunteering provides** the efforts to foster cross-border volunteering within the EU with **excellent timing and opportunities for synergic actions**. In all EU countries, national coordination bodies equipped with appropriate competencies, capacities and funds will be operating and their action plans will potentially show significant overlaps with the aims of the Expert group on cross-border volunteering.

Moreover, the **Youth in Action programme** with its actions focused not only on supporting voluntary activities of young people (Actions 1 and 2), but also on networking and cooperation of those active in youth work and those responsible for youth policies (Actions 4 and 5) **disposes of valuable good practices and resources** that can be engaged to create substantial synergic effects.

Apart of these two concrete European synergies, the group shall actively **seek for other synergies at all relevant levels**.

## **Activities/actions**

The available time was not sufficient for a thorough discussion about concrete activities and actions. However, the group identified following needs for actions:

- Launching of a mapping exercise of good practices in order to identify as many existing and potential opportunities for cross-border youth volunteering.
- Establishing a stable platform (formal or informal) for coordination and implementation of the agreed actions/activities at national/regional level.
- Identifying and using synergies at national/regional/local level.

## **Organisational issues**

The group declared its **commitment to follow-up on the outcomes** of the first meeting. Czech Republic offered to host the **next meeting in Prague**. The date and agenda will be specified at a later stage and coordinated with the working schedule of the whole Expert group and other working groups. An **invitation open for interested experts from other countries** participating in the Expert group will be send out in due time. An **informal IT-platform (e.g. blog) will be established** to facilitate communication and follow-up.