

Creating new Opportunities for Cross-border Voluntary Activities for Young People

Proposal for a multilateral approach

1. Background

a) Recommendation of the Council

On November 20, 2008 the Council of the European Union accepted Recommendations on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union¹. The conditions for the mobility of young volunteers inside Europe are to be improved by the cooperation of those civil or public agencies organizing and promoting voluntary activities in the various countries in order to give all young people the opportunity to take part in voluntary activities in Europe.

The EU Commission established an informal EU Working Group between interested Member States in order to facilitate the implementation of the Council Recommendation by identifying ways and means of cooperation and through the exchange of information and best practices. This group of experts includes representatives from interested Member States, NGOs, relevant European umbrella organisations (European Youth Forum etc.), and the EU Commission (chair). The group has met three times so far.

b) European Quality Charter for Mobility

On December 18, 2006 the European Quality Charter for Mobility was accepted as Recommendation (EG) Nr. 2006/961 of the European Parliament and of the Council for transnational mobility within the community for purposes of education and training (OJ 394 from 30.12.2006). The European Quality Charter for Mobility is aimed at qualitative aspects of mobility and constitutes a document of reference which is meant to help juvenile and adult participants to gain positive experience. The scope of the charter covers stays abroad of youths or adults for formal and non-formal learning activities and thus their personal and professional development. The charter offers guidelines which should come up to the participants' expectations and the legitimate demands of the educational institutions. Consequently, the charter improves the freedom of movement in the field of (continuing) education, promoting, above all, the setting-up of a genuine European region for lifelong learning and for economic, social and regional solidarity.

c) European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011)

With decision from November 27, 2009 the Council declared the year 2011 to be the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship². The European Year aims to encourage and support — notably through the exchange of experience and good practices — the efforts of the Commu-

¹ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union (2008/C 319/03)

² COUNCIL DECISION of 27 November 2009 on the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011) (2010/37/EC)

nity, the Member States, local and regional authorities to create the conditions for civil society conducive to volunteering and to increase the visibility of voluntary activities in the European Union. As such it provides a boost for joint Member States activities implementing the above mentioned Council Recommendation.

2. Initiative of the participating countries

The first European conference on implementing the Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers took place during the Czech EU Council Presidency in Prague in March 2009. The event was organised by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in cooperation with the National Institute of Children and Youth and the EU Commission (DG Education and Culture). It brought together about 120 public and civil stakeholders from the fields of voluntary commitment, youth and education.

The Czech Republic continues to have great interest in implementing the Recommendation and is also responsible for the working group "Creating New Opportunities of Cross-border Youth Volunteering" within the EU Commission's informal expert group.

During a meeting of the Directors General responsible for youth in Jerez, Spain, in April 2010 Germany introduced the idea of a multilateral approach on *Creating new Opportunities for Cross-border Voluntary Activities for Young People*. A number of Member States are initiating a close cooperation to implement practical steps in the multilateral approach. A first meeting tackling the preconditions of such an initiative will be hosted by the Czech Republic in September 2010.

3. Aim of the approach

The initiative of the participating Member States aims to take a lead on a specific part of the Council Recommendation by creating new opportunities, develop a broader variety of opportunities and expand existing voluntary activities for young people in Europe on the basis of jointly developed and supported projects. The multilateral setting allows for removing obstacles, increasing hosting capacities and fostering of reliable, sustained and transferable conditions in the field of young people's voluntary activities in Europe.

4. Objectives

A multilateral approach for the development of new opportunities for cross-border voluntary activities may, above all, serve to:

- exchange information about opportunities for voluntary activities in the participating countries, thus improving the mutual state of knowledge as a basis for further work;
- bring up ideas on how new opportunities of cross-border voluntary activities can be developed based on existing activities and national and European standards by using a flexible and multilateral approach, eventually in order to increase hosting capacities;
- consider how national and European mechanisms can be further developed and applied in order to make the existing national systems more compatible, thus allowing easier access and better recognition of learning outcomes for all young people;

- discuss how to facilitate the access to cross-border voluntary activities, in particular for the target group of young people with fewer opportunities.

5. Implementation

The initial meeting for the initiative is hosted by the Czech Republic on 23/24 September 2010 in Prague. Germany will host a second meeting at the beginning of 2011 in Berlin.

Participants in the meetings are representatives of the responsible ministries and institutions of the Member States, the National Agencies for the YOUTH IN ACTION programme of the participating Member States, representatives of the respective bilateral youth offices (Jugendwerke) as well as other relevant NGOs and, where appropriate, the national coordination bodies for the European Year 2011.

Results of the first meeting will be presented at the meeting of the EU Commission's informal expert group in October 2010.