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Analysis of the replies of the Member States of the European Union and the acceding countries to the Commission questionnaire on voluntary activities of young people

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	4
1.1.	Procedural and political background.....	4
1.2.	Consultation of young people and other actors for the purposes of the questionnaire	5
1.3.	Basic considerations.....	6
2.	ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION BY THE MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES.....	6
2.1.	General information on voluntary activities of young people	6
2.1.1.	Data quality	6
2.1.2.	Legal basis.....	6
2.1.3.	Main actors.....	7
2.1.4.	Finances	8
2.1.5.	Management, supervision, evaluation and monitoring	8
2.2.	Young people in voluntary activities	8
2.3.	Voluntary service	9
3.	CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES	10
3.1.	Development of voluntary activities of young people.....	10
3.1.1.	Analysis of the situation in the Member States and acceding countries.....	10
3.1.2.	Expectations in terms of European common objectives	11
3.1.3.	Good practices.....	12
3.2.	Facilitating voluntary activities of young people.....	13
3.2.1.	Analysis of the situation in the Member States and acceding countries.....	14
3.2.2.	Expectations in terms of European common objectives	15
3.2.3.	Good practices.....	16
3.3.	Promotion of voluntary activities of young people.....	16
3.3.1.	Analysis of the situation the Member States and acceding countries	17
3.3.2.	Expectations in terms of European common objectives	18
3.3.3.	Good practices.....	18
3.4.	Recognition of voluntary activities of young people	19
3.4.1.	Analysis of the situation in the Member States and acceding countries	19
3.4.2.	Expectations in terms of European common objectives	20
3.4.3.	Good practices.....	21
4.	COOPERATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL	22

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Procedural and political background

The Commission White Paper “A new impetus for European Youth”, adopted in November 2001¹, identifies several priorities for action in the youth field amongst which participation, information, voluntary activities and a better knowledge and understanding of youth. In its Resolution of 27 June 2002 setting a new framework for co-operation in the youth field², the Council called for an open method of co-ordination to be applied to the above priorities and gave mandate to the Commission to draft common objectives for those priorities on the basis of reports on the situation in all Member States.

In accordance with its mandate, and on the basis of questionnaires sent to the Member States and candidate countries, the Commission first drafted reports and proposed common objectives for participation by and information of young people. These common objectives were presented to the Council on 11 April 2003. In its Resolution of 25 November 2003³, the Council adopted those proposed common objectives.

Pursuant to this same mandate, and as it has done for participation and information, the Commission drew up questionnaires in consultation with the Member States and the European Youth Forum for the two following priorities i.e. voluntary activities and a greater knowledge and understanding of youth. These questionnaires were sent to the Member States, acceding countries and candidate countries. Both questionnaires were drawn up using the same approach as for the questionnaires on participation and information, with the same general structure, thereby first gathering basic information, then outlining the current policy with examples of best practice, and, finally, describing the expectations at European level. Countries were also asked to specify the channels used nationally for consulting young people.

While the way in which the questions were handled differed from one country to another depending on the national situation of youth policy and voluntary activities, the replies in terms of information supplied, ideas, proposals and examples of good practice put forward provided a fertile and interesting basis for reflection.

The purpose of this report is to present a synoptic analysis of the replies given by the Member States and the acceding countries to the questionnaire on voluntary activities of young people, which will serve as a basis for proposing common objectives in that area for adoption by the Council.

For the purpose of this analysis, the present report purports to describe, as a first step, the situation with regards to voluntary activities of young people such as acknowledged by the Member States and acceding countries. To this end this analysis report will first of all depict the data quality, the legal basis, the main actors,

¹ COM (2001) 681 final

² OJ C 168, 13.07.2002

³ Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation and information for young people, OJ C295, p. 9.

the finances as well as management, supervision, evaluation and monitoring. Then it will refer to specific information given by Member States and acceding countries on young people in voluntary activities and will treat voluntary service in particular.

After concluding on this first point, this analysis report will describe the challenges identified by the Member States and acceding countries for voluntary activities of young people, at national as well as at European level, giving examples of good practices for each of the identified challenges. Four challenges, covered each one by a chapter, have been identified about voluntary activities of young people:

- Development of voluntary activities
- Facilitating voluntary activities
- Promotion of voluntary activities
- Recognition of voluntary activities

Each of these chapters starts with an analysis of the situation in the Member States and acceding countries, outlines key-points and good practices and refers to the expectations in terms of European common objectives.

1.2. Consultation of young people and other actors for the purposes of the questionnaire

The Member States used various channels for consulting young people when preparing their replies to the questionnaires.

In some cases, this was done formally by addressing the questionnaire to various youth and voluntary organisations. In others, the authorities responsible for youth affairs set up specific national consultation bodies bringing together representatives of youth organisations with young people who were not members of an organisation.

Finally, in certain cases, specific consultation events were organised (conferences, seminars, discussion forums, etc...) bringing together representatives of various youth and voluntary organisations and young people who were not members of an organisation.

Often, specific Internet sites were set up to provide young people with information on the questionnaire, sometimes even with the questionnaire adapted to young people's "language", and to ask them, in particular those who were not members of an organisation, for their views.

Consultation did not only involve young people, but also, in many cases, other government departments, regional and local administrative bodies responsible for youth, researchers, experts on the ground and others working in the field (youth centres, town councils, youth services, national agencies for the Youth programme, associations engaged in voluntary activities etc...).

Some shared the answers to the questionnaires with the young people and their organisations, others did not.

1.3. Basic considerations

Due to the fact that there is a variety of traditions and practices of voluntary activities in the different states and in order to allow for clarity the following definitions are used in this context:

Voluntary activities: are all kinds of voluntary engagement. They are characterised by the following aspects: open to all, unpaid, undertaken by own free will, educational (non-formal learning aspect) and added social value.

Voluntary service: is part of voluntary activities and is characterised by the following additional aspects: fixed period; clear objectives, contents, tasks, structure and framework; appropriate support and legal and social protection.

Civic service: is a voluntary service managed by the State or on behalf of the State.

Civilian service⁴: is an alternative to compulsory military service in some countries, but not voluntary.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION BY THE MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES

2.1. General information on voluntary activities of young people

2.1.1. Data quality

There are various approaches to gain knowledge on young people's voluntary activities in the different countries. All countries have a certain number of data, but their focus, their nature and the means and frequency of their collection differ largely, making it difficult to compare them. Also, their sources vary greatly. Sources mentioned are reports, surveys, studies, questionnaires, etc....collected by public authorities, NGOs, in particular youth and voluntary organisations, associations, universities, research institutes and young people themselves.

2.1.2. Legal basis

Concerning the legal basis of voluntary activities we have to distinguish between the European and the national level.

At international level some States refer to the Convention on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-term Voluntary Service for Young People of the Council of Europe⁵.

At the European level a very limited number of States refer to the European Parliament and Council Recommendation of 10 July 2001 on mobility⁶ within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and

⁴ Sometimes the civilian service is also referred to as «community service»

⁵ Council of Europe, ETS.no. 175, to be found on <http://conventions.coe.int>

⁶ Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers (2001/613/CE)

trainers which contains measures that specifically concern volunteers. In a recent report⁷ on the follow-up to this Recommendation the Commission concluded that a lot still needs to be done to implement the Recommendation in the Member States.

At national level States rarely have a specific legal basis for voluntary activities of young people. Those who have specific laws are mostly those which have a voluntary or civic service. Some regulate specific sectors of voluntary activities, as e.g. development cooperation, civil protection, social voluntary activities, etc...Others invoke a number of laws that resort to other domains but cover certain aspects of voluntary activities, as e.g. laws on associations, social care, child protection, safety and health, rescue services, etc...

Reference is often made to the fact that volunteering is based on individual agreements and contracts, written and even oral, and is therefore subject to general provisions of law and jurisprudence.

Most countries do not have a specific legal status for the protection of their volunteers. Some informed about initiatives to create a more stable legal basis for volunteering. Sometimes work related provisions also apply to volunteers. This is also the case concerning taxation, where quite a number of States treat volunteers like employees and consequently tax their pocket money. Some States have tax reductions or exemptions for volunteer organisations and for the reimbursement of costs of individual volunteers. However, these tax reductions and exemptions are sometimes bound to certain conditions, as e.g. their limitation to a certain amount of money, or the condition that a voluntary organisation is only reimbursed if it qualifies as a charity.⁸

Concluding it can be stated that the legal situation of young volunteers is quite precarious, as Member States and acceding countries do not have, or only rarely have, laws regulating their status, and sometimes only covering certain aspects.

2.1.3. *Main actors*

Actors in the field of voluntary activities of young people which were expressly mentioned are: national governments, regional and local authorities, international organisations, voluntary and youth organisations, Youth Councils, youth work organisations, the National Agencies of the YOUTH Programme, voluntary centres and agencies, associations and particular bodies, mostly set up by the State, like councils, committees or commissions on volunteering.

Other actors sometimes quoted were political parties, social partners, schools, colleges and universities, federations, the private economic sector, funds, foundations, churches and religious groups.

⁷ Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Report on the follow-up to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community of students, persons undergoing training, volunteers and teachers and trainers, COM(2004)21final of 23 January 2004

⁸ See also study on “Legal Status of Volunteers – Country Reports” by the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations (AVSO) on <http://www.avso.org>

While the role of the public authorities is mainly funding, defining the conditions and limits, and in some cases certification, the role of the other actors lies rather on the operational side. Altogether there is a mix of tasks and responsibilities among all actors. As far as the role of youth and voluntary organisations is concerned, it can be said that they have a wide range of tasks that include coordination, recruitment, assignment and training of volunteers, contacts with public authorities and those benefiting from voluntary activities, development and innovation of projects, as well as fundraising and networking with other organisations.

The main actors of voluntary activities are therefore public authorities and NGOs. While the public authorities are mainly engaged in setting the conditions and limits for voluntary activities, NGOs are mostly in charge of organising them.

2.1.4. Finances

As for the financial sources of voluntary activities, some States indicated public funding at all levels (local, regional, national), as well as private funding via foundations, sponsorship and donations, membership and other fees, etc.... Some referred to the national lottery.

The amount of the money available for voluntary activities is difficult to identify, due to the various forms of funding and the widespread recipients. However, the need for more funding is widely recognised.

2.1.5. Management, supervision, evaluation and monitoring

Very few answers related to management and supervision structures. Those countries that replied referred mainly to controlling mechanisms in the context of funding.

Few confirmed having voluntary activities evaluated and monitored. Methods vary and include studies, surveys, questionnaires, but also follow-up, reporting and indicators, etc... In many cases evaluation and monitoring takes place within the voluntary organisations.

It can be stated that much still needs to be done to improve the evaluation and monitoring of voluntary activities in order to make their value and benefit more visible and to assure as well as increase the quality of voluntary activities.

2.2. Young people in voluntary activities

All States give young people the opportunity to carry out voluntary activities. However, the definitions, forms, possibilities and organisational approaches are many and diverse, sometimes even within one and the same State, which adds to the complexity of the issue.

The number of young people rendering voluntary activities is not always known and, where indicated, is not always calculated in the same way. It also refers to different age groups. However, it can be said that in all States young people commit themselves on a voluntary basis and seem to find it a valuable experience.

Some States pointed to the fact that all voluntary activities were open to young people. The following areas of voluntary activities in which young people engage

themselves were frequently quoted: sports, environment, nature- and animal protection, culture, social sector, school or university, youth organisations, scouts, neighbourhood help, religious service, fire-fighters, civil protection, development aid, political parties and trade unions.

The activities that young people undertake in these areas can be quite different, but sometimes comprise also, among others, organisational, management and administrative tasks. The areas, activities and tasks are often subject to change according to the growing age of the young volunteer (e.g. engagement in school matters to be replaced by university related activities).

The following reasons for young people to commit themselves to voluntary activities were mentioned, among others: defending a cause, being of use to others, meeting other people, using one's time and one's competencies and improve them, to bridge a waiting gap, enhance one's employability, training opportunities, fun, etc...

In all Member States and acceding countries young people are committed to voluntary activities. Even if their exact number is difficult to identify, there is information about the areas they engage in, about the tasks they take over and about their motivations.

2.3. Voluntary service

Only a minority of States has a civic service in place (Germany, France, Italy, Luxemburg and Czech Republic). All of these countries have legal provisions for it, or at least for some kinds of voluntary service. The forms, the age limits, the duration as well as the organisations allowed to organise voluntary service differ. Restrictions to State run service can be found as well as a strict limitation to NGO run service. Sometimes the areas in which the voluntary service can be carried out, are a priori defined.

A number of other countries are clearly not in favour of establishing such a civic service and prefer promoting voluntary activities or voluntary services through NGOs.

Quite a number of countries referred to the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which is Action 2 of the YOUTH Programme and which offers transnational voluntary service and aims at developing the solidarity of young people, thereby promoting their citizenship and supporting the mutual understanding of young people⁹.

As far as the relationship between military service and the various forms of voluntary service are concerned the picture is quite manifold and varied. Of those countries that have a military service in place most also offer the possibility to carry out a civilian service instead. In a few countries a tendency to progressively replace the military service by civic service can be observed.

⁹ More information on the YOUTH Programme and EVS can be found on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth>

3. CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES

Member States and acceding countries have highlighted the following challenges, entailing action not only at national but also at European level:

3.1. Development of voluntary activities of young people

The possibilities for young people to engage in voluntary activities vary considerably in the different countries. Even if a wide range of voluntary activities is available for young people, they are not always transparent and easily accessible and should be developed.

Key points:

- Voluntary activities of young people are an expression of active citizenship and solidarity and therefore need to be enhanced.
- The voluntary activities landscape in each Member State and in Europe is quite a patchwork.
- There is a need for more transparency of the existing possibilities.
- Voluntary activities should be developed, within and beyond the existing categories and scopes.
- Organisations play a key role in voluntary activities. In order to be able to carry out their role they need support.
- Training of volunteers and their managers and supervisors is important to improve the quality of voluntary activities.
- At European level the exchange of information, experience and best practices need to be enhanced.
- The European Voluntary Service (EVS) should be reinforced.
- A closer cooperation between civic services is desirable.

3.1.1. *Analysis of the situation in the Member States and acceding countries*

According to the replies to the questionnaire there is agreement that voluntary engagement of young people is an expression of active citizenship and solidarity and therefore needs to be enhanced. All replies underline the high value of voluntarism for society.

It can be stated that the situation of voluntary activities in Europe is quite complex. There is a wide range of activities, sometimes even within one and the same country.

Some countries have a voluntary service in place in addition to other possibilities of voluntarism, others consider setting one up. Those that already have a voluntary service sometimes know more than one form of it (e.g. Voluntary Ecological Year

and Voluntary Social Year, Civic Service, European Voluntary Service, etc...). Organisers and domains of the voluntary services differ, as well as the duration and the responsibilities and tasks of the volunteers. The services can be carried out within or outside the country, either in another EU country, another European country or in a non-European third country.

Countries which base their approach on more informal voluntary activities, allow for long or short term activities; often both are possible in one and the same country. Sometimes the voluntary activities are organised, with clear structures and rules, sometimes they are occasional and flexible and self-organised.

This patchwork of possibilities add to a risk of lack of transparency which sometimes makes it difficult for young people to get the information they need about possibilities to volunteer. (See point 3.3. "Promotion of voluntary activities" for more details.)

It is equally difficult for voluntary or youth organisations which wish to network to identify appropriate partners, inside and outside their home country. There is some networking going on, but there is an interest in more exchange, at all levels.

Almost all States seem to be ready to develop further voluntary activities, at least within the existing categories and scopes. Some are also considering to extend or are already extending them beyond the possibilities currently existing in their countries.

Different kind of organisations play a major part in voluntary activities. In many countries they organise most of the voluntary activities. The support that they receive from the State mostly consists of financial support, sometimes of training, and in a very few cases of protective legal regulations. Sometimes support is given to the recruitment of volunteers. Another form of support is recognition, rarely formal recognition, but more often social recognition. The need for more funding of voluntary activities is widely recognised.

Many States underline the importance of fostering training of young volunteers and those managing and supervising them, with a view to capacity-building and in order to assure and improve the quality of voluntary activities and organisations, but also as a means of recognition.

3.1.2. Expectations in terms of European common objectives

There is broad agreement that exchange of information, experience and good practices on voluntary activities should be encouraged at European level.

As far as an enhanced cooperation is concerned, some countries wish for a better coordination, others propose that the EU should facilitate networking.

Cooperation and networking were also the subjects of the first European Conference on Civic Service and Youth, which was organised by the Italian Presidency, with support of the European Commission, in Rome in November 2003. This conference aimed at allowing an exchange of views, activities and national practices on the civic service of young people. Another aim of the conference was to identify ways of a

closer cooperation between civic services at European level, including the European Voluntary Service (EVS).

In the conclusions¹⁰ of the President of the conference¹¹ it is suggested to further discuss, follow up and monitor the cooperation among civic services in the framework of the open method of coordination in the youth field. A reinforced participation of young people in these activities with a view to strengthening their citizenship and solidarity is proposed as well as the reinforcement of the transnational cooperation. It is also suggested to enhance the exchange of young volunteers in a number of domains, to recognise their civic service experience and to exchange information and good practices on a systematic and regular basis.¹²

In their replies to the Commission questionnaire on voluntary activities many countries comment on the YOUTH Programme, and in particular on the European Voluntary Service (EVS). They underline the importance of the YOUTH Programme and of the EVS and draw attention to the fact that it is often only in this framework that young people can carry out a voluntary service in another than their own country. A number of proposals point towards the reinforcement of this service, also with a view to extending it. Many wish for more funding for the EVS.

There is a demand for a greater flexibility of volunteering opportunities in the framework of the EVS, for easier and shorter procedures and for reinforcement of the tutor concept. Some countries wish to expand the possibility of a short-term EVS, others want it to be more accessible, but also more varied and enlarged in scope. There is a proposal that the EVS as such should be reinforced and developed by national experiences and should allow for the combination of national and EVS projects.

Most Member States refer to the draft Constitution of the Convention on the future of Europe¹³ a Voluntary Corps of Young People is suggested and show a certain openness for considerations about possible links with the EVS at the appropriate time and by appropriate means, if it is ensured that the specific nature of the EVS and in particular its prevailing non-formal learning aspect will be kept.

3.1.3. *Good practices*

Of the various examples of good practices in the field, the following could be singled out:

- In **Flanders** a high number of young people are involved in youth work on a voluntary basis. An example is the scout movement where each local scout

¹⁰ The full text of the Conclusions of the conference can be found on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth>
¹¹ The conference was chaired by the Italian Minister responsible for the contacts with the Parliament, Mr Carlo Giovanardi
¹² In view of an enhanced cooperation among the Member States, acceding countries and the European Commission a joint meeting of all agencies involved in the YOUTH Programme and all national voluntary civic service bodies is envisaged for spring 2004.
¹³ Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe: draft articles on external action in the Constitutional Treaty, CONV 685/03 of 23 April 2003

group is supported at least by 10-20 young volunteers and where voluntary activities follow the approach: “by young people for young people”.

- In **Hungary** voluntary activities are developed at local level by students in the Debrecen Volunteers Team. The students use the knowledge from their university studies for programmes useful for their local community in the environmental, social and educational field.
- **Italy** has set up a civic service that is constantly developing further. It started originally as alternative to the military service, and was later opened also for young women and now evolving to a full voluntary service for all young people. Italy is also playing an active role in the cooperation with the civic services of other countries (see also Rome Conference in chapter 3.2.2.above).
- **Lithuania** has recently established a national voluntary service, the “Youth Social Year”, based on German experience, and initiated and implemented by the youth organisation A.C. Patria and its partner organisations. The target group are young people between the age of 15 and 23.
- **Luxembourg** developed in cooperation with the Red Cross for Youth a specific training for young volunteers who wish to carry out a voluntary activity for the benefit of other young people in so-called Youth Houses.
- In the **Netherlands** the project “The neighbourhood for all ages” (“De Buurt voor alle leeftidjen”) was geared towards a greater social cohesion and solidarity. The idea is to develop voluntary activities further, in the sense of inciting voluntary activities at local level, e.g. by young people engaging for senior citizens, and thereby bringing together people living in the same community.
- **Poland** is developing voluntary activities of young people in the framework of its new Youth Strategy. It is a political objective of this Strategy which also refers to instruments and tools, like a database for voluntary activities.
- **Scotland** is in the process of taking a more strategic approach to the voluntary engagement of young people. Further to the evaluation of the Scottish Executive Millenium Volunteers Programme it is planning to develop a scheme, provisionally called “Scotscorps” that will encourage young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to volunteer full time during a gap year. Accreditation is also being considered. Even, if this new scheme is still in the preparatory phase, it seems to be a good example for developing young people’s voluntary activities.

3.2. Facilitating voluntary activities of young people

Member States and acceding countries acknowledge in their replies that young people who wish to engage in voluntary activities often meet a number of difficulties which represent real obstacles to their exercise of voluntary activities and sometimes limit their access to these activities. The nature of these obstacles as well as approaches to overcome them are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Key points: The main obstacles to the voluntary activities of young people are still of legal, administrative, fiscal and social nature (exclusion of certain groups of young people, lack of language skills, and lack of training, e.g.).

- When carrying out their voluntary service in another country young people often do not receive the visas and residence permits they need.
- Another obstacle is the lack of funds.
- Exchange of information, experience and good practice at European level between all relevant actors can help remove the obstacles.
- Legal means and instruments could be considered at national and European level.
- Member States should start implementing first the Recommendation on mobility that they approved at European level in 2001.

3.2.1. *Analysis of the situation in the Member States and acceding countries*

There are numerous obstacles to voluntary activities of young people. Member States and acceding countries refer to the following obstacles:

Legal obstacles to the voluntary activities of young people are e.g. the lack of a specific statute for volunteers, which leads to problems in terms of recognition, of social protection, of taxation... The lack of minimum standards as well as of provisions on social protection is certainly a major issue for young volunteers.

The lack of rules and instruments recognising voluntary activities in the framework of formal education, e.g. in high schools or at university, by enterprises and employers or by society in general is another factor for young people being reluctant to participate in voluntary activities.

The treatment of volunteers as employees leads to the taxation of their pocket money. Only a few countries have tax reductions or exemptions for volunteers and voluntary organisations. Where they exist, they are sometimes limited to certain amounts or to the reimbursement of costs only, or they are only accessible for certain kinds of voluntary activities (e.g. those that qualify as charities).

Another important obstacle mentioned quite frequently is the lack of funds for voluntary services or activities. A lack of funds often leads to long waiting periods for young volunteers incompatible with their expectations or does not allow all young people interested in volunteering to indeed carry out a voluntary activity.

Administrative obstacles are e.g. long and tedious procedures for the individual volunteer, certain requirements imposed to voluntary organisations, the lack of appropriate housing, the lack of language courses for those who wish to carry out voluntary activities abroad and the lack of training.

As far as voluntary activities in third countries or of third country nationals in EU countries is concerned, the refusal of visas and residence permits creates a major problem for young volunteers.

In order to overcome these obstacles countries have different approaches. Very few countries have adopted laws, and those that have, have done so in the context of voluntary service, or regulating only certain aspects relating to volunteering.

There are examples of countries where minimum standards or codes of good practice exist. In most cases they are rather set up by voluntary organisations than by public authorities. One possible approach could be to progressively replace control-based by trust-based approaches, which would be characterized by more confidence in the individual volunteer and less controls. Such a system can only function if responsibility is assumed on the side of the volunteer but also of the body organising the voluntary activity.

Some countries mentioned that, in order to overcome the obstacles, they had signed or were in the process of signing the Council of Europe's Convention on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-Term Voluntary service¹⁴.

3.2.2. *Expectations in terms of European common objectives*

As far as the role of the EU in removing obstacles to voluntary activities is concerned, Member States and acceding countries propose a regular exchange of information, experience and good practices in order to enhance the removal of obstacles.

Some countries see a role for the EU in removing obstacles to cross-border voluntary activities, others call for classifying volunteers as a specific category at EU level, which sets them apart from employees. One Member State proposed that the EU should incite Member States to ensure health insurance and social protection in general for volunteers. In this context it should be mentioned that volunteers are subject to Community rules on free movement of people and should in principle be covered by Directive 90/364 of 28 June 1990 on the right of residence (OJ L 180 of 13.7.1990). This directive provides that EU nationals who do not enjoy the right of residence under any other provisions of Community law shall be granted the right of residence in other Member States provided they are covered by sickness insurance in respect of all risks in the host Member State and have sufficient resources to avoid becoming a burden on the social assistance system of the host Member State during their period of residence.

Volunteers under the European Voluntary Service¹⁵ scheme enjoy full insurance coverage under a group insurance scheme, receive full board, lodging and allowances as well as travel costs.

This is a demand of a few countries, and by a number of NGOs and other organisations in charge of voluntary activities, for laying down the rights and obligations of volunteers at EU level. Some countries express it as "setting out common rules or standards" or propose that the EU should set minimum standards.

¹⁴ Convention of the Council of Europe of 11 May 2000 on the Promotion of a Transnational Long-Term Voluntary service; <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/html/175.htm>

¹⁵ Decision no. 1031/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 establishing the "Youth Community Action Programme", published in OJ L 117 of 18.5.2000 p. 1ff

The Commission is ready to consider if legal means and instruments could help reach the aim of making it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities.

In the context of facilitating voluntary activities, reference should again be made to the European Parliament and Council Recommendation on 10 July 2001 on Mobility¹⁶ within the Community for Students, Persons undergoing Training, Volunteers, Teachers and Trainers. By this Recommendation measures which specifically concern volunteers were adopted.

In a recent report on the follow-up to the Recommendation on mobility the Commission found that there are still big gaps in the transposition of the Recommendation in the Member States¹⁷. The first step of actions to be implemented at European level by Member States should be those actions recommended and accepted by Member States.

3.2.3. *Good practices*

Of the various examples of good practices in the field, the following could be singled out:

- **Finland** recognises young people's efforts in voluntary activities by the International Award for Young People. Young people participating in this scheme acquire certificates for their achievements. These certificates exist at various levels.
- In **Germany** the project – within the Voluntary Social Training Year - “Environment and Cleanliness in the city quarter of Boy/Welheim” (Bottrop) aimed at motivating young people with less opportunities to engage in environmental protection and cleaning up their local community in Boy/Welheim in the Ruhr area. The young people were involved in the planning and carrying out of the project. Their voluntary engagement for their area was recognised by a social event with the participation of high-ranking politicians.
- In the **United Kingdom** (UK) the Year Out Group, an association of independent UK-registered organisations of various sizes, has developed a Code of Practice that provides guidelines in standards for services for its members to follow. The member organisations involved have adopted the Code of Practice as their operational standard. Operational standards have equally been created to assist in monitoring placements and measuring satisfaction.
- In **Wallonia** a Higher Council for Voluntary Activities was recently put in place (“Conseil supérieur du Volontariat”) as a measure of recognition of the

¹⁶ See footnote 5.

¹⁷ Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Report on the follow-up to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community of students, persons undergoing training, volunteers and teachers and trainers, COM(2004)21final of 23 January 2004

voluntary sector. This Council brings together the social partners and aims at supporting voluntary activities.

3.3. Promotion of voluntary activities of young people

Even if all Member States and acceding countries agree that voluntary activities of young people should be promoted, the engagement in actually promoting them has to be reinforced, as well as the means vary from one country to the other. The aims of promoting voluntary activities among young people are quite manifold and include amongst others which are outlined below, the inclusion of young people with less opportunities in voluntary activities as well as networking of voluntary organisations.

Key points:

- Member States and acceding countries agree that voluntary activities of young people should be promoted.
- A number of Member States feel that they could do more to promote the voluntary activities of young people.
- Promotion is up to now mainly done by voluntary organisations themselves.
- The means of promotion are quite varied. However, word of mouth still seems to be an important means of information and promotion.
- Young people with fewer opportunities need to be addressed by promotional measures particularly.
- Networking of voluntary organisations at all levels and cooperation between all relevant actors are judged as important.
- At European level, it would be useful to contribute to the promotion of voluntary activities for young people.

3.3.1. *Analysis of the situation the Member States and acceding countries*

There seems to be widespread agreement about the aims of promoting voluntary activities as means of reinforcing the solidarity of young people and their engagement as citizens. The aim of promoting voluntary activities is in fact manifold and should inform young people about possibilities to volunteer, provide advice and support, raise young people's awareness about volunteering, increase the number of young volunteers.

However, the degree of State involvement in promotion measures varies considerably. While some are quite active, others leave promotion measures to voluntary organisations themselves and limit their support to financial support of these organisations.

In general the actors promoting young people's voluntary activities are mainly the voluntary organisations themselves, but also young people, public authorities, youth organisations and centres, schools, churches, religious groups, etc... Places where information about volunteering is distributed are libraries, job offices, universities,

etc... The means of promotion are quite varied and cover media, websites, action and information days, public awareness campaigns, subsidies, leaflets, booklets, newsletters, gatherings, forums, seminars, etc...even if a very important means of promotion is still the word of mouth.

Among the public authorities some Ministries in charge of youth affairs play an active role in voluntary activities of young people.

Quite a number of States referred to the YOUTH Programme as promoter of voluntary activities.

Many States underline the importance of promoting voluntary activities in particular among young people with fewer opportunities. The reasons these States mention are the low involvement of these young people in voluntary activities, giving those who have failed or done less well in formal education a “second educational chance”, and offering them opportunities of mobility they might not have otherwise. However, indication was made that language might be a barrier for these young people in international voluntary activities and that promotion measures should take this aspect into account.

In general, networking of voluntary organisations was judged important and some networks already exist. However the need to encourage an enhanced cooperation between all relevant actors in the field of voluntary activities in view to exchanging information, experience and good practice would be beneficial to the promotion of voluntary activities among young people.

It should also be mentioned that some States referred to the International Year of the Volunteer, proclaimed by the UN in 2001, as having boosted promotion activities about volunteering.

3.3.2. Expectations in terms of European common objectives

Many States wish for the promotion of voluntary activities of young people at the European level by appropriate information actions. Some countries underline in particular the awareness-raising aspect in this context. There are proposals for actions around the European Volunteer Day or in the framework of the European Youth Week. Another proposal is to create a European Youth Voluntary Service Day. Some countries would like to see voluntary activities promoted in the framework of the life-long learning strategy. Another proposal, either creating a European voluntary activities portal or promoting voluntary activities via a youth portal, has already been taken on board in the framework of the development of the European Youth Portal.

Majority of Member States and acceding countries could also agree on European objectives for increasing at national level information on volunteering, enhancing cooperation of all actors and for developing approaches focused on some target groups for which it is more difficult to participate in voluntary activities.

3.3.3. Good practices

Of the various examples of good practices in the field, the following could be singled out: The **Czech Republic** developed a peer training programme entitled “One-to-One” that promotes voluntary activities among young people by peer support from young volunteers. This programme is carried out in 15 regions of the Czech Republic.

- In **Denmark** the Danish Youth Council (DUF) has developed materials on volunteering that help youth organisations to inform young people about voluntary activities.
- In **Greece** the ONG “Bridges of Friendship – Institute of Social Solidarity” organises an annual national exhibition on volunteerism. This exhibition gives about 100 NGOs, including those giving young people the opportunity to carry out voluntary activities, the possibility to promote their activities, to recruit volunteers and donors, to raise public awareness and to network.
- In **Latvia** the bringing together of young local volunteers with young international volunteers in voluntary camps helps promoting voluntary activities at local and international level.
- **Malta** has a specific broadcasting station, “Education Channel 22”, that promotes voluntary activities free of charge.
- **Northern Ireland** offers a free telephone number that links members of the public to their local Volunteer Bureau from anywhere in the country. It gives everyone free access to local volunteering opportunities free of charge.
- In **Portugal** a website has been created for young people interested in volunteering, www.voluntariadojovem.pt. Promotion is done by mailing-lists and sometimes by media campaigns.
- **Slovakia** states that the organisation of a big public event, the visit of the Pope in Slovakia, gave rise to voluntary engagement, knowledge about it and its acknowledgement.
- **Sweden’s** National Forum started an Internet platform for voluntary activities at local level, in a part of Stockholm named Volontärbyrån, which informs about possibilities for volunteering in this area. Most of the users of the website are young people. The Ministry of Justice recently decided to support an extension of this activity at national level.

3.4. Recognition of voluntary activities of young people

Young people’s commitment to voluntary activities is often not or not properly recognised and validated. Formal and social recognition is about acknowledging the young people’s voluntary engagement for society, their educational experience as well as their social, cultural and personal competencies, professional skills and employability that derive from the voluntary activities. Another important issue in this context is who should recognise the voluntary experience of young people.

Key points:

- Formal and social recognition of the voluntary engagement of young people is important.
- Some forms of recognition exist but are not sufficient.
- What needs to be recognised are the personal, cultural and social competencies and professional skills acquired through voluntary activities as well as the added value of voluntary activities for society.
- Recognition of young people’s voluntary activities needs to be ensured by public authorities, the private economic sector and civil society.

3.4.1. Analysis of the situation in the Member States and acceding countries

In their replies the Member States and acceding countries inform the Commission that young people confirmed in the consultations on the questionnaire that voluntary activities are a rewarding experience for them and that recognition of these activities is important to them.

There is agreement that measures need to be taken to properly acknowledge and validate the personal competencies, professional skills and the added value that evolve from the voluntary engagement of young people. The measures to be developed should be appropriate to the nature of the voluntary activity carried out.

If recognition takes place, it is often of social nature and takes only place within the organisation in which the young volunteer is engaged. It then takes the form of celebrations, small gifts, thanking letters, memberships of honour, higher ranks within the organisations, etc...

At a more visible level, social recognition is sometimes given either by organisations, umbrella organisations or public authorities through awards, cards that offer reductions, access to sports events, concerts, travels, etc...

Formal recognition is mentioned rather rarely and takes the form of references, testimonials and certificates, or advantages in formal education. As far as certificates are concerned, they are very rare, often limited to voluntary service and issued only upon request either by the voluntary organisation, or by public authorities. Another example for a certificate is a regional “passport of voluntary activities” which is mentioned by one country.

Advantages in formal education are that the recognition of the time spent with voluntary activities as waiting period for studies or diplomas. Sometimes this time counts as practical experience within a formal study.

Advantages in the labour market are sometimes granted because employers more and more recognise the value of voluntary commitment of young people, their experiences gained abroad or in diverse social environments. Nowadays it is largely undisputed that intercultural and social key competencies are an integral part of learning and employability.

The issuing of a certificate at the end of the European Voluntary Service is recognised as a useful first step for recognition of European voluntary activities. The EVS certificate consists of two parts, one confirming the participation, and the other one describing the voluntary activity carried out as well as the learning experience acquired.

Other forms of recognition quoted are monetary recognition understood as reimbursement of costs, insurances and financial support of projects, as well as training.

Member States and acceding countries agree largely that the current validation and recognition of young people's voluntary activities is not sufficient and needs to be enhanced and propose to strengthen the formal recognition, by e.g. certificates, training, advantages in formal education and in employment, etc... This implies a stronger involvement of other stakeholders, in particular in the field of education and training, but also of social partners in order to develop appropriate strategies and tools at national level.

As means of social recognition they propose a National Volunteer's Day, a National Volunteers Action Week, awards to groups of volunteers, awareness-raising campaigns, etc...

3.4.2. *Expectations in terms of European common objectives*

Most countries also wish for an enhanced formal and social recognition of voluntary activities at the European level. Member States and acceding countries also expect to link strategies for a better recognition of non-formal learning and informal learning experience in the youth field at national level to the initiatives and development at European level. As means of formal recognition they propose to make use of ongoing processes or existing means in the education field, as e.g. the Europass, and as means of social recognition they suggest to reinforce actions on European Volunteer's Day, in the framework of the European Youth Week, etc....

The common European principles on validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, which are currently in preparation aiming at ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels could be used as a way of recognising voluntary activities of young people.

Another means of recognition that is currently being developed and that integrates some specific certification instruments, such as the European CV format, is the *Europass*. It could be used to develop other instruments within its framework with a view to improving the transparency of qualifications and competencies acquired in voluntary activities.

3.4.3. Good practices

Of the various examples of good practices in the field, the following could be singled out:

- **Austria** organises a yearly election of the “Volunteer of the Year”, which has advanced to a fixed event in the agenda of policy-makers and media. A call for proposals and a festive event guarantee for visibility. Each year a focus is put on a particular theme. In 2002 it was “Volunteers Against the Floods” and in 2003 engagement for citizens with disabilities.
- The **German speaking community of Belgium** celebrates each year the Day of the Voluntary Activity, which was developed from the Day of the Social Voluntary Activity and which allows for social recognition and appreciation of those carrying out voluntary activities.
- **Cyprus** honours its volunteers on 5 December, the International Volunteer’s Day, with a dinner with the President and the First Lady at the Presidential Palace. At this occasion the volunteers receive diplomas and commemorative presents.
- In **France** the departmental Council for Youth in the Territory of Belfort has developed a passport of voluntary activities (“passeport du bénévole”) which will serve as basis for a future “passport of engagement”. This document will allow to trace back the voluntary pathway of young people and allow for recognising their personal experience and professional skills. In order for this passport to be developed in the entire region it will be adapted to the specific needs at local level.
- **Ireland’s** annual Foróige Citizenship Award forms part of its Citizenship Programme. This is an out-of-school education programme which aims to involve young people in the protection and development of the environment in their own community areas.
- **Spain** offers the Voluntary Work Award, which is promoted by several enterprises from the private economic sector in cooperation between the Platform for Promoting Voluntary Activities and the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs. The prize offers recognition by a financial contribution to the voluntary organisation at which the volunteer who received the award is engaged.
- In **Slovenia** the project NEFIKS aims at recognising young people’s non-formal learning experience through voluntary activities. This project is carried out by the Youth Guild (“Mladinski ceh”) with financial support of the Youth Office of Slovenia.
- **Wales** holds a National Volunteering Week each year that highlights achievements of volunteers and encourages others to engage in voluntary activities, and is thus an example for recognition and promotion.

4. COOPERATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

The open method of coordination, as set out in the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework for European cooperation in the youth field¹⁸, provides for common objectives to be defined and followed-up.

This procedure was already applied to the two first priorities of the White Paper on youth, participation and information, for which the Council adopted common objectives on the basis of the Commission's proposal¹⁹.

The priority of voluntary activities follows the same procedure. In the questionnaire, the Commission therefore asked the Member States and acceding countries to propose common objectives and to specify their expectations to the European level.

Based on the answers of the Member States and acceding countries which are presented in this analysis report the Commission proposes common objectives for voluntary activities of young people. The common goal is to develop, facilitate, recognise and promote the voluntary activities of young people with a view to enhancing their active citizenship and solidarity.

The Commission informed the European Youth Forum of its analysis of the Member States' and acceding countries' replies and consulted it on the common objectives that it intended to propose, based on this analysis report.

¹⁸ See footnote 3

¹⁹ See page 4 of this analysis report for references