

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

European Conference on Youth: Mobility of Young Volunteers across Europe

Prague, March 12 and 13, 2009

This conference was organised by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the National Institute of Children and Youth, on the occasion of the Czech Presidency of the European Union. The European Commission was an important partner in both setting objectives and providing the financial support of the conference. It brought together 125 specialists, politicians, non-profit and non-governmental organisations, governmental organisations and bodies, volunteers and young people working in the field of education and volunteering, with the concept of volunteering and cross border cooperation in 29 countries in order to:

- Review existing offers and opportunities for young people to volunteer on national and international levels, with a special focus on cross-border volunteering within the Youth in Action programme of the European Commission;
- Analyse existing needs for further development and improvement of volunteering for young people and volunteer programmes in terms of quality and recognition;
- Find ways of promoting volunteering beyond the spheres of the non-profit sector, at the national and international levels and explore new opportunities for young people and volunteers;
- Review non-formal education and its value within the context of volunteering;
- Discuss ways of supporting cross-border volunteering and increasing participation of young people in volunteer programmes;
- Formulate proposals for the European documents and instruments on volunteering and draw up concrete key action plans suggesting further improvement and development of volunteer programmes;
- Exchange and discuss projects for implementing volunteer programmes as good practices.

The key working document was the *Council Recommendation on Mobility of Young Volunteers across the EU*. The structure of the conference in order to reach its aims was stretched into 5 two-day workshops with specific topics: New opportunities, Quality, Recognition, Promotion and Capacity-building. The working groups of the workshops drew up some 55 key action plans that were presented to the European Commission, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and to all stakeholders and participants in the conference. The European Commission will establish a special working group for monitoring the results and the key findings of the conference. The European Commission and the member states will be working further with the key findings in order to implement them in the European instruments promoting non-formal education and volunteering.

Results and conclusions

1. The conference analysed past and current offers for volunteering across Europe on the basis of evaluation of the Youth in Action Programme 2000 – 2006, and its impact on young people, looking into the Youth in Action Programme for the period 2007 - 2013. The year 2011 has been declared by the European Commission as the European Year of volunteering. It is a remarkable opportunity to raise awareness about volunteering, provide opportunities for self-education and personal development, and promote volunteer programmes and activities.
2. Obstacles in national laws limit the applicability and recognition of European volunteer programmes. National policy-makers should put all their efforts into promoting volunteer programmes to all, and making them accessible to everybody. It is not the responsibility of the European Commission to change national policies, visa relations between states, or social security for young volunteers. This is the duty of each member state.
3. Young people are vulnerable, especially at this time of the global economic downturn; they are more than twice as likely to be unemployed. The challenge is to succeed once the crisis is past. Therefore, we need to keep investing, and invest even more in young people to support them in developing their skills and competences through non-formal education and volunteer programmes.
4. Volunteering builds networks and supports collaboration and cross-border cooperation, which is one of the strongest elements in bringing about respect, tolerance, support and cooperation among different states and cultures. The European Commission is planning to launch the European

Youth Volunteer Portal in order to support cross-border cooperation and volunteering *per se*.

5. The European instruments, the *European Voluntary Service Charter* and the *Quality Charter for Mobility*, are crucial legal documents assuring the quality standards of volunteering, and recognition of volunteering at the European level. The European-wide effort is to multiply youth volunteering opportunities, increase cross-border volunteering, and ensure recognition of volunteers' skills and learning experience. The *Europass* and *Youthpass* are essential self-assessment tools recognising skills and learning experience. Hence, these instruments should be widely promoted and implemented in all member states.

6. Support for the mobility of young volunteers across Europe and across borders is explicitly stated in the *Council Recommendation on Mobility of Young Volunteers across the EU* with the vision that all member states continue the implementation of the Recommendation. The European Commission will assist and support the implementation of the Council Recommendation in member states. In June 2009, a *Green Paper* on promoting the learning mobility of young people will be published. The Paper aims to encourage a new partnership for mobility, involving all stakeholders so that every young European has the opportunity to benefit from learning mobility. The new policy framework will aim to create more opportunities for young people in education and employment; improve young people's access to quality social services and civic participation; and foster youth solidarity with society and the world.