

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society - Analysis of national reports from the Member States of the European Union concerning the implementation of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people {COM(2007) 498 final} {SEC(2007) 1093} /* SEC/2007/1084 final */

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INTRODUCTION

Background

On 15 November 2004 the Council of Youth Ministers adopted common objectives for voluntary activities of young people[1]. In this Resolution the Member States committed themselves to submitting reports on the national contributions to the implementation of these common objectives by the end of 2006. Furthermore, on 15 November 2004 the Council of Youth Ministers adopted common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth[2] which also tackled voluntary activities and on which Member States agreed to report to the Commission.

The national reports on the implementation of the common objectives for these priorities allow the Commission to evaluate the achievements of the Member States in this context, compared to the starting point – the adoption of the common objectives in 2004. It is on the basis of the Member States' reports that the Commission has drawn up this synthesis report,

which is one of the documents complementing the Commission Communication on young people's full participation in society, a strengthened partnership between Young People and the EU[3]. At the request of the Member States the Commission had proposed a common structure for the national reports which was endorsed by all parties. The structure provided the overall framework for the reports, but in fact the reports differ from one country to another, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Due to the differences between the various contributions a detailed comparative approach was not possible.

Bulgaria and Romania, which were not yet members of the EU when the report was due, were invited to send reports, but decided not to at this stage. The shadow report on volunteering produced in 2006 by the European Youth Forum was also used as a source of information.

This analysis report, which is strictly based on the Member States' reports, starts by describing the state of implementation of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people, continues with an outline of the implementation of each of the common objectives and presents a selection of good practices. It also reports on greater understanding and better knowledge in relation to volunteering of young people, informs on the consultation of young people and finishes by drawing conclusions with proposals on how voluntary activities of young people could be developed further. Sometimes references to individual Member States are made in the text and in the best practices. These references are to be understood as examples, not as an element of ranking or comparison. They might not cover all Member States having similar practices.

Definitions

The 2004 Resolution does not contain definitions of volunteering but it makes a clear distinction between volunteering and employment. However, it is useful in this context to recall the Commission definition as set out in its Communication on proposed common objectives for voluntary activities of young people of 30 April 2004[4]:

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, content, 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, e.g. in the social field or in civil protection.

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

The 2004 Resolution contains common objectives which are reflected in action lines that serve as guiding principles for the implementation of the common objectives. Some action lines call for the implementation of the common objectives at local and regional level.

COMMON OBJECTIVE 1: DEVELOPING VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Encourage the development of voluntary activities of young people with the aim of enhancing awareness of the existing possibilities, enlarging their scope and improving their quality

Action lines

Six action lines have been agreed upon for the implementation of this objective, three of which address the national, regional and local level, and three address the European level.

Those referring to the national, regional and local level relate to the identification of existing models of voluntary activities and organisations, the development of categories and the broadening of the range, as well as the support of activities of particular interest to young people and civil society organisations, including the development of voluntary services and,

last but not least, the improvement of the quality of voluntary activities and their organisational framework.

The European level action lines encourage a better coordination of trans-national civic service cooperation, an enhanced exchange of young volunteers and of information on national voluntary programmes as well as the development and promotion of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and possible extension to worldwide actions of solidarity.

Measures taken by the Member States

Identification of existing models

As far as the identification of existing models of voluntary activities are concerned, no clear picture emerges, despite various studies, surveys and overviews of different Member States. A variety of voluntary activities exist throughout the EU, ranging from organised voluntary activities including voluntary service and different forms of bénévolat, to informal forms of volunteering.

As far as the number of young volunteers in the EU is concerned, it is difficult to say how many young people volunteer in Europe, as Member States count differently, at different times and according to different criteria, or not at all. Despite these difficulties in presenting an overview, the number of young volunteers seems in general to be constantly rising with the demand among young people wishing to volunteer sometimes exceeding the possibilities available.

Strategies and laws for volunteering of young people

The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Denmark, France, Hungary and Italy have a youth volunteering strategy in place, the UK and Ireland are currently preparing one. Spain has a strategy for volunteers of all age groups. Belgium has issued a federal law paving the way for a strategy. The government of the German speaking community of Belgium has made volunteering a political priority.

All countries that have a strategy also have a volunteering law. Slovenia has a law but not yet a strategy. The Czech Republic regulates its voluntary service for young people also by law. France recently adopted a new law adapting voluntary activities to the specific needs of young people. Malta is seeking to develop legislative measures in order to strengthen the voluntary activities of young people.

Broadening possibilities

All Member States have increased the possibilities for short-term volunteering. Short-term volunteering targets mainly young people with fewer opportunities, but also offers a first concrete experience to all young people who have never volunteered before and wish to know what volunteering is about without having to make a long-term commitment.

Support

All Member States support voluntary activities of young people. The support can be political, legal or financial. France, Luxembourg, Belgium and the UK have made it a political priority of the government. Those countries that have a voluntary service in place also have a legal basis. All Member States have increased financial support for volunteering. The financial support takes the form either of support for voluntary organisations and their networks, for volunteering programmes or for specific measures like training.

New Member States

The situation in the 10 new Member States (Bulgaria and Romania are not covered by this report) was quite extensively influenced by the common objectives. These countries, as one of them put it, "are slowly embracing the European concept of volunteering with a higher level of responsibility of all actors". New Member States have adopted or are adopting new youth policy concepts, which provide the framework within which they tackle volunteering. The Czech Republic and Lithuania have a voluntary service in place.

Local level

Local authorities have an important role to play. They manage funds (e.g. the Netherlands), they establish local youth councils with a view to enhancing participation via volunteering (e.g. Greece), and they launch pilot projects in volunteering (e.g. Slovenia). They also have a particular responsibility for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in voluntary activities.

Quality and training

Improving the quality of voluntary activities and their organisational framework is another support measure. Training can be embedded in a broader approach, as in Denmark, where it forms part of a Quality Reform Programme or it can aim at improving knowledge about the new organisational framework for volunteering, as in the Flemish community of Belgium. The National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme play a constructive and supportive role, as in Estonia, where the Agency organises courses on volunteering. In Spain universities are active in training volunteers.

Voluntary services

The Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and Luxembourg have a voluntary service in place. Since the adoption of the common objectives, new voluntary services have been created, as in Lithuania, or have been reinforced, as in France, where a civic service of 6, 9 or 12 months has been established for 16-25 year olds.

Measures at European level

Better coordination and exchange

The European level action lines encourage a better coordination of the trans-national cooperation of civic services, where they exist, an enhanced exchange of young volunteers in various domains as well as of information on national voluntary programmes and their European dimension.

An engaged and useful first step in this direction was undertaken by the Italian EU Presidency in 2003, which, with the support of the Commission, organised the first European Conference on Civic Service and Youth. However, some Member States expressed reservations with such an approach due to the fact that they do not have such a national civic service.

Irrespective of whether they have a civic service in place or not, Member States are encouraged to exchange information, experience and best practices. This exchange can be stimulated by the Youth in Action Programme, which foresees the possibility of supporting political cooperation.

Develop and promote EVS

The European level action lines encourage further development and promotion of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and the consideration of its possible extension to solidarity actions. These action lines were tackled in the EVS reform under the YOUTH Programme and taken further in the Youth in Action Programme.

In the YOUTH Programme "group EVS" was developed and pilot projects were launched. New practical arrangements like new accreditation of host organisations and new certificates were agreed. Ex-volunteer structures were created and consolidated in order to raise quality support for the EVS. The Youth in Action Programme, that started at the beginning of 2007 consolidates these developments and takes them further.

As far as a possible extension of the EVS to solidarity actions is concerned, reflections took place in cooperation with the Commission services in charge of external affairs, development cooperation and regional support. A cooperation agreement with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) was concluded. The first joint action was a pilot project in the Balkan region.

Conclusions

A variety of different forms of youth volunteering exist in the Member States and it is important to respect this diversity. However, a stronger commitment to establishing national strategies for voluntary activities of young people would be beneficial. Continued European level support and continued efforts by the Member States are necessary to advance the implementation of this common objective of developing voluntary activities of young people.

Good practice examples

In Belgium , prior to the adoption of a new law on volunteers by the Federal State, the government of the German speaking community decided in 2004 to make volunteering one of four priorities for the new legislative period. This priority comprised specific actions for young people.

Slovenia, where volunteering has been deeply rooted for a long time, decided to develop – for the first time – a national programme on volunteering with a strong youth component. Slovenia reported that this was inspired by the Commission's White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" and by the Resolution on the common objectives. To this end a survey was carried out to identify the existing possibilities for volunteering among young people. The results contributed to a law for the establishment of a national volunteering programme for the period 2006-2010.

The UK set up the Russell Commission with a mandate to elaborate recommendations for the development of voluntary activities of young people. This Commission took the views of young people into account when it presented recommendations covering all four common objectives. A specific new body entitled "v" is in charge of implementing the recommendations.

France adopted a new law on voluntary activities thereby revising the civic service and adapting it to the needs of young people with fewer opportunities. It includes a range of programmes, e.g. " Défense 2ième chance " ("Defending a 2nd chance"), a programme combining professional training and physical activities. A national agency for social cohesion and equal opportunities, created in 2006, manages the new civic service.

Hungary in 2005 adopted an Act introducing voluntary activity in public interest as a legal category. This law creates a framework for organisations, as well as for volunteers, in which they receive stronger protection, and reliable relations can be established among them with clear conditions. The act on volunteering defines special rules for the voluntary activity of youth under 18.

The Netherlands , in the Social Support Act of 2007, invited municipalities to elaborate local volunteering strategies in accordance with local priorities and needs. The municipalities must involve the citizens in the development of these strategies. Youth was particularly tackled by an initiative of schools that included volunteering at local level in the school curricula.

Also in Denmark young people have the possibility to integrate volunteering in their education. This is one opportunity under the national Quality Reform Programme, which aims at enhancing coherence in existing voluntary activities.

Germany launched a series of new initiatives to broaden existing possibilities for volunteering. It started a pilot programme on intergenerational voluntary services. The regional and local level supported the objective of establishing multigenerational houses ("Mehrgenerationenhäuser") in every rural district by 2010.

Lithuania launched a long-term project to develop voluntary activities entitled "Volunteering – Sowed and Picked Up". In cooperation with municipalities this project aims at training local and international volunteers, awareness-raising, promotion and methodological help for voluntary organisations. This project was supported by a German foundation and the EU YOUTH Programme.

In the Slovak Republic the NGO "People in Need" organises language and professional training for volunteers working with refugees. This project is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF).

COMMON OBJECTIVE 2: FACILITATING VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Make it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities by removing existing obstacles

Action lines

All four action lines for the implementation of this objective address all levels of governance.

Two action lines refer to the removal of legal and administrative barriers on the one hand and to the reinforcement of the cooperation between the relevant authorities to facilitate the issuing of visas and residence permits on the other hand.

The other two action lines cover the exchange of information, experiences and good practice as well as consideration of means and instruments (including legal means) that could help make it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities.

Measures taken by the Member States

In order to put national developments in context, it might be useful to first outline the obstacles to volunteering which young people face.

Obstacles to volunteering of young people

Obstacles to volunteering referred to in the reports can be summarised as administrative obstacles; lack of resources, support or information; incompatibility with benefits and socio-economic obstacles.

With regard to administrative obstacles, the following have been mentioned repeatedly: lack of clarity about the social status of volunteers, difficulties with visa and application forms, lack of insurance and social protection, lack of certificates and lack of coordination, accompaniment, training and infrastructure.

Concerning the lack of resources, support and information, these include shortage of time and financial resources. Some young people need to work to be able to finance their studies, which means they do not have the time to undertake voluntary activities in addition. Lack of awareness and information, and sometimes a negative perception of volunteering, can also hold back young people.

As regards the question of social benefits, unemployed young people who engage in volunteering can sometimes risk losing their unemployment benefits. Socio-economic obstacles can in general prevent young people with fewer opportunities from volunteering.

Measures

The scope of measures taken by Member States to facilitate volunteering of young people can be described as follows: political, legal, administrative, information, awareness-raising and training.

Political measures have been tackled in chapter 2 under common objective 1. Legal measures can include comprehensive laws regulating volunteering as in France, as well as laws regulating certain aspects of it, as in Spain, where tax allocations for social interest purposes exist when a part of the money goes to a Volunteer Work Plan (2005-2009). Portugal supports volunteering – among other measures - via the support of youth organisations. To this end it adopted a law on active participation in youth and student organisations in 2006.

Administrative measures, sometimes combined with information and awareness-raising measures, seek to harmonise the receipt of social benefits with volunteering activities. A good practice from the UK in this respect is set out in the box below. The Flemish community of Belgium focuses on cooperation between the government and civil society organisations.

Measures at European level

The EU Directive on the admission of certain third country nationals[5] adopted in December 2004 was a step in the right direction towards helping young volunteers obtain visas more easily. The European Youth Pact[6] calls for "encouraging mobility of young people by removing obstacles for trainees, volunteers and workers and for their families". In the framework of the European Knowledge Centre (EKCYP)[7] the Commission and the Council of Europe created the possibility for Member States to exchange good policy practices on the voluntary activities of young people.

Young people with fewer opportunities

One of the action lines in the context of the promotion of voluntary activities of young people (common objective 3, following chapter of this report) is in fact linked to obstacles. It calls on Member States to analyse the reasons why certain groups of young people participate less in voluntary activities than others.

More and better knowledge on the volunteering of young people with fewer opportunities in the Member States is needed. Practical steps to enhance the volunteering of this group of young people have been taken by France, Sweden, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK.

The Commission would like to see a greater inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in the EVS. To support this goal and to make voluntary activities more accessible for young people with fewer opportunities, the Commission organised an expert seminar entitled "Young People with Fewer Opportunities and Volunteering"[8] in December 2006 in cooperation with the Council of Europe in the framework of the partnership of these two institutions in the youth field. The results of this seminar, which offer proposals for possible solutions, were published in the report available on the Commission's youth website http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.html

Conclusions

Although good practices have evolved since the adoption of the common objectives, which may serve as an example for other Member States, some significant obstacles to the volunteering of young people persist. There is, however, a commitment by Member States to include more young people with fewer opportunities in volunteering activities.

In addition to good practices, greater efforts are still needed to overcome the most striking obstacles, like the lack of insurance and social protection, visa difficulties and the compatibility of social benefits and volunteering. In this respect the action lines for the implementation of this objective are still valid and should continue to be used to facilitate the volunteering of young people. The implementation of the Mobility Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council[9] is also important in this respect.

Good practice examples

Estonia has set up two inter-ministerial working groups under the chairmanship of the Ministry for Interior Affairs to tackle obstacles to volunteering and the development of voluntary activities. The UK Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Jobcentre Plus launched a series of information measures for benefit recipients but also for their own staff in order to improve knowledge about the compatibility of social benefits and volunteering. In this context they also revised the volunteering registration form accordingly.

In Latvia the Secretariat of the Minister for Special Assignments and for Social Integration Affairs invited young people to make proposals on how to overcome obstacles to volunteering in a specific seminar entitled "Legal Aspects of Voluntary Action – Problems and Solutions" in September 2005.

The government of the Flemish speaking Community of Belgium aims at overcoming obstacles in cooperation with civil society. It concluded a Charter with a civic society organisation and representative structure of club life in Flanders entitled Verengide

Verenigingen (United Associations). The Charter sets out shared values but also mutual commitments and provides for a regular follow-up and evaluation of the cooperation.

In Germany the Federal Ministry for Financial Affairs is working on draft tax regulations that would provide tax advantages for voluntary engagement on an individual or institutional basis.

In the Czech Republic the Ministry for Interior Affairs negotiated the introduction of a new specific insurance package for young volunteers with the Czech Association of Insurance Companies.

Luxembourg developed a new concept for young people with fewer opportunities, the "Service volontaire d'orientation" ("Voluntary Service for personal orientation") for early school leavers who are not registered in employment agencies. This new concept helps these youngsters to reintegrate into society.

In Portugal the Portuguese Youth Institute (IPJ) in cooperation with national committees for the protection of minors, the juvenile courts and social services recruited 100 young people who were in residential care or in private charitable institutions for a volunteer sports project. This enabled them to become more socially included in the community.

In Sweden the National Board for Youth Affairs is actively working to encourage volunteering organisations to use EVS as a tool for recruiting young people with fewer opportunities.

COMMON OBJECTIVE 3: PROMOTING VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Promote voluntary activities with a view to reinforcing young people's solidarity and engagement as responsible citizens

Action lines

Three action lines address the national, regional and local level.

The first of these action lines refers to the dissemination of information on volunteering at all appropriate levels, with the aim of raising young people's awareness of volunteering, informing them of concrete possibilities, providing advice and support and promoting a positive image of volunteering.

The second action line encourages enhanced cooperation between all relevant actors by exchanging information, experience and good practice.

The third action line calls for careful analysis of the phenomena that lead to the exclusion of certain groups of young people from voluntary activities. It also calls for the development of approaches to make these young people, and in particular those with fewer opportunities, participate in voluntary activities.

The final action line addresses the European level. It calls for the launch of appropriate information actions with a view to promoting voluntary activities of young people as well as the values of voluntarism.

Measures taken by the Member States

Member States were in general quite active regarding the dissemination of information on volunteering to young people. A large variety of measures exist, including Volunteer Days, Weeks and Years; events such as conferences, congresses, seminars, fairs and festivals, campaigns, exhibitions, competitions; and information sources including magazines, newspapers and newsletters, bulletins, brochures, websites and web portals. Modern, youth-friendly forms of technology like SMS and video clips are also used to promote volunteering. Some Member States involved the media in the promotion campaigns. TV and radio spots, interviews and competitions were broadcast.

The YOUTH and Youth in Action Programmes were used as well as Eurodesk, the network of Youth Information Centres, to promote volunteering. Ex-volunteer structures, like FREX in Belgium, helped to promote voluntary activities among other young people through experience sharing.

A recurring experience is that events with high public visibility can bring about a boost in volunteering. Recent examples are the Olympic Games and the Para-Olympics in Greece in 2004 as well as Luxembourg as European Capital of Culture 2007.

When it comes to encouraging cooperation between relevant actors, committed and coherent approaches are needed[10]. Cyprus, Greece and Italy strengthened cooperation with schools and Spain has traditionally had good cooperation with universities on volunteering. Finland sought to develop a tripartite dialogue model including decision-makers, youth workers and researchers.

However, according to the national reports, the image of volunteering has not improved much among young people. It seems that many young people still do not view it as fashionable. Youth organisations could help to promote a more positive image.

Voluntary activities of young people with fewer opportunities were tackled under the second common objective in the framework of obstacles to volunteering in the chapter above. However, in this context it should be underlined that more specific, targeted and tailor-made promotional measures need to be developed for this category of young people.

Measures at European level

Numerous information activities promoting volunteering and its values were launched or supported. A prominent measure is the European Youth Week. Volunteering has been an issue of each Youth Week so far. At the European Youth Week in 2005 and 2007 youth volunteer projects received a European level award in Brussels. At the European Youth Week in 2007 young people also discussed how volunteering can enhance their professional career and in particular young entrepreneurship. Other European level events supported by the Commission were Eurofestation, a side event on volunteering of the Dutch EU Presidency that took place in November 2004, or a workshop on voluntary activities at the Youth Event to celebrate the 10 years of existence of the Committee of the Regions in April 2005. In December 2005 the Luxembourg EU Presidency dedicated its youth event to the implementation of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people as one of two main topics (the other one being the European Youth Pact). This event was supported by the Commission. Volunteering of young people was also strongly promoted in the framework of the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which celebrated its 10 year anniversary in November 2006 in Brussels.

Conclusions

Member States are quite active in the promotion of voluntary activities of young people. A positive trend is that the information has become more extensive and targeted at a broader audience. New, modern, youth-friendly communication tools are being used. Schools and municipalities are being involved more. Major events like the Olympic Games, the Paralympics and the European Capitals of Culture also attract and promote volunteering. However, improvements could be made to promote promotional measures with a more coordinated and coherent involvement of all relevant actors, and a better image of volunteering among young people. Last but not least, more specific, targeted and tailor-made promotional measures need to be developed for young people with fewer opportunities.

Good practice examples

In a cross-border effort the French and the German speaking communities of Belgium, Luxembourg, and in Germany the Länder of Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland promoted voluntary activities of young people. They organised a "Youthforum For Volunteers" between the age of 16 and 25 years with the aim of establishing networks and exchanging experience. Poland launched a promotional campaign called "Mixer" in 2004 with exhibitions and performances of young volunteers. This campaign travelled all over Poland, reaching out to remote and rural areas. This campaign was followed-up in 2005 by a similar action focusing on EVS and in 2006 by an event in Krakow targeting young people with disabilities.

Germany found new ways of financing the promotion of voluntary activities of young people. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and some Länder decided to use the European Social Fund for the period 2007-2013 to promote voluntary activities of young people.

Portugal established a National Council for the Promotion of Voluntary Activities (CNPV). It has worked on standardising training as well as the formal structure of projects with the aim of improving the status of volunteering and informal education.

Finland is seeking to develop a tripartite model of dialogue in youth policy between decision-makers, youth work (including youth workers, young people and youth organisations) and youth researchers. One topic of this dialogue is volunteering.

Cyprus is trying to promote volunteering in schools. To this end the Ministry for Education and Culture, further to an initiative of the Cyprus Youth Board, prepared an official circular encouraging public educational institutions to promote the values of volunteering, social welfare and solidarity among pupils and students by creating social welfare clubs.

Italy developed a trend of involving schools in the promotion of volunteering by establishing networks between voluntary organisations, formal and non-formal learning institutions and authorities of local communities. An example is "Sportelli Scuola e Volontariato" ("Info desk on school and volunteering"), which serves as a tool for promoting volunteering inside and outside of schools.

In Spain universities are actively engaged in promoting volunteering. Some universities have created offices for volunteering on their campuses (e.g. the Autonomous Universities of Barcelona and Madrid).

In Belgium the Flemish speaking community seeks to give volunteering support structures a stronger role in promoting voluntary activities. The partnership between Brussels and the provincial voluntary support structures has produced various guides such as "Attracting Volunteers is an Art" and "Motivating Volunteers is an Art".

Greece aims at promoting the values of volunteering by distributing a volunteer kit to young people in schools and universities. This kit contains basic information about volunteering, a handbook, a DVD and best practice examples of the participative empowerment of young people via volunteering. This practical approach is accompanied by strategic cooperation with the Secretary for Youth, for whom the promotion of voluntary activities of young people is a priority objective with regard to the mass media.

Estonia organised an essay competition on the topic "Volunteers Change the World" as part of the Year of the Citizen. A children's creative competition, "I too, want to help" was also organised, along with courses related to different aspects of voluntary work (Open Estonia Foundation).

In Austria the Caritas organisation promotes volunteering of young migrants in street work, learning aid and caretaking.

COMMON OBJECTIVE 4: RECOGNISING VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Recognise voluntary activities of young people with a view to acknowledging the value of their personal skills thus acquired and their engagement for society and the role that voluntary activities play in terms of facilitating the transition from education to work and adult life.

Action lines

Two action lines address the national, regional and local level, and one addresses the European level. By the first action line the national, regional and local levels are invited to acknowledge the voluntary commitment, as well as the individual skills, knowledge and competences acquired by a young person through volunteering. Important in this context is enhanced and appropriate recognition by various actors. The action line mentions public and private employers, social partners, civil society and young people themselves as examples.

The second action line calls for the recognition of the added social value of volunteering. The third action line addresses the European level and suggests that a better recognition of voluntary experience be ensured in the framework of ongoing processes and by existing means in other policy fields.

Measures taken by the Member States

The recognition of individual skills and competence acquired through volunteering takes the form of documents such as "passports of commitment" (France), "Volunteer's Pass" (Austria) or "Studybook" (Finland). Certificates are handed out by the volunteering organisations or specialised bodies like national volunteer centres or national councils for the promotion of volunteering. In some cases public authorities issue them. Universities give educational credits for volunteering, for example in Spain, Finland, France and Estonia. As far as cooperation with employers is concerned, Latvia announced an awareness-raising campaign among employers on volunteering. Germany has developed what it calls a "culture of recognition" with certificates, references and records at different levels. The UK referred to its current reform of its qualifications framework.

The recognition of the added value to society takes the form of awards, which are attributed by either high-ranking authorities, such as the President of a country or by Ministries, foundations or voluntary organisations and in one case by local authorities. "Volunteers" of the years are nominated, fairs and other festivities are organised. Europass and the Youthpass, tools developed at European level for recognising young peoples' competences acquired by formal or non-formal learning, are referred to by Belgium, Germany, Poland and Slovakia.

Member States set up consultative bodies, launched surveys and reports, organised seminars, roundtables and discussions, and started pilot projects seeking to improve the recognition of voluntary activities.

Measures at European level

The Commission supports the work of SALTO-Youth.net[11] in developing a Youthpass for participants in projects financed under the Youth in Action Programme. In 2005 the Commission supported the conference "Bridges for Recognition" organised by SALTO-Youth.net in cooperation with the Flemish speaking community of Belgium, the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum. The Commission's youth and education sectors cooperate on the integration of youth-specific tools into Europass and the Commission contributes also to the Council of Europe's expert group on the development of a validation instrument for a youth work entitled portfolio.

Conclusions

Although progress has been made, and despite the fact that Member States are conscious that the voluntary activities of young people need to be recognised in order to facilitate the transition from education to employment, to motivate young people and to acknowledge their involvement in society, more coherent approaches could be beneficial.

Cooperation with various actors and in particular with employers and educational institutions needs to be stepped up. Existing mechanisms, instruments and tools need to be used to a much greater extent.

A committed effort to ensure the recognition of skills, knowledge and competences gained by young people in volunteering needs to be made. This should be a joint effort to guarantee mutual recognition all over the EU – Europass-Youth should be the instrument. This effort needs to be accompanied by broad awareness-raising campaigns among employers and educational institutions.

Good practice examples

In Italy the national observatory for volunteering organised the 5th national conference on volunteering in April 2007 in Naples. At this conference a Charter on Young People and Active

Citizenship was presented. Having been prepared by young people themselves, the Charter focused on how voluntary activities of young people could be better recognised and promoted.

France developed in 2005 the " Passeport de l'engagement " ("passport of commitment") in the framework of its programme " Envie d'agir ". Its purpose is to serve as a certificate in interviews for an employment. It can also be integrated into the " Validation des acquis de l'expérience - VAE " ("validation of acquired experience entitled VAE").

Sweden granted funds to the Centre for International Youth Exchange (CIU) in 2005 for the development of a method entitled ELD (Experience, Learning, Description) to recognise international experience acquired by young people. The aim is to draw up general and explicit tools to identify and document informal learning and intercultural competence.

In Germany the " Nachweise International " ("International Certificates") are a declared part of a European process to raise recognition of non-formal learning and in particular of volunteering in the youth field and at the same time to make a contribution to the European Youth Pact and the Lisbon objectives.

In Finland the Recreational Activity Study Book of the Youth Academy is a summary of recreational and voluntary activities that gives an overview of a young person's skills and learning experiences. Participation in all forms of recreational activities can be recorded in the book.

Austria has developed a Volunteering Pass. It recognises the acquired skills and competences of young volunteers. It is supported by the Chamber of Commerce and the Employment Office.

Spain developed a volunteer award in an initiative of various companies in cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs.

Ireland recognises its young volunteers' efforts by the Young Citizen Award that is handed over by the President of the Republic.

Malta seeks to involve young people in the development of recognition instruments. The Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment in cooperation with the National Youth Council held a consultation meeting with young people on the certification of non-formal and informal education with a focus on volunteering.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING AND BETTER KNOWLEDGE OF YOUTH ON VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

In the Resolution of 15 November 2004 the Council of Youth Ministers agreed on the following common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth concerning voluntary activities of young people[12]:

- To inform the Commission of the concrete achievements resulting from the implementation of the two first common objectives[13] of a greater understanding and knowledge of youth concerning voluntary activities of young people by the end of 2006.

- To inform within these reports of the steps taken in order to fulfil the third and fourth common objectives[14] of a greater understanding and knowledge of youth in the context of voluntary activities.

Member States reported about actions taken in order to identify existing knowledge on the voluntary activities of young people at national, regional and local level. They established lists of research and surveys undertaken, which tackle various aspects of volunteering, sometimes of all age groups, sometimes only of young people.

France launched a survey of the voluntary engagement of students with the participation of the Conference of the University Presidents[15]. The Netherlands is developing a regular survey with information on young people's living conditions, called "Youth Monitor", which is available in printed form and on the Internet and which aims at informing policy-makers, youth workers and educators at national, regional and local level. In Sweden two reports on

voluntary activities and on citizens' activities and involvement in civic society, brought about a significant addition to the existing knowledge of voluntary and volunteer activities[16].

Replies about measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to knowledge at national level and via the European Knowledge Centre (EKCYP) at European level are rather modest. The same is true for ensuring quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge by using appropriate methods and tools.

When it comes to facilitating and promoting exchange as well as dialogue and networks in order to ensure visibility of knowledge and anticipation of future needs, some Member States refer to consultations of young volunteers, voluntary organisations, researchers and experts. However, active national networks of policy-makers, youth researchers and NGOs on volunteering which meet on a regular basis, appear to be rather rare. The overall impression which emerges is that knowledge of volunteering could be considerably extended and deepened. At European level greater use could be made of the possibility to exchange information on existing research via the EKCYP.

OBSTACLES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON OBJECTIVES

No major obstacles to the implementation of the common objectives were reported. Sometimes Member States used this chapter to refer to more general obstacles to voluntary activities of young people. These were taken into account in the framework of the second objectives, facilitating of voluntary activities, above.

CONSULTATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Within the open method of coordination in the youth field, the intention is for young people and youth organisations to be consulted on the national reports. However, it is not clear from some reports to what extent such consultation has indeed been carried out. What is, however, apparent is that the degree, the methods and the young people reached by the consultations vary from one Member State to another.

With regard to policy-making more generally, the reports show that Member States have not consulted young people and their organisations in a systematic way. In line with the Commission's proposal in the Communication on European policies concerning youth participation and information[17] and taken up by the Council Resolution of December 2006[18] for a structured dialogue with young people, more therefore needs to be done to make young people and their organisations real partners in policy making in the youth field, including volunteering, at all levels.

The European Youth Forum's Shadow Report[19] that covers the consultation of young people in the implementation of the common objectives as well as in the establishment of the national reports in some of the Member States provided useful and interesting complementary information.

CONCLUSION

The open method of coordination in the field of active citizenship of young people is confirmed by the Member States, as well as the common objectives for volunteering of young people. Some countries strengthened already existing trends towards enhancing volunteering while for others the common objectives allowed the volunteering of young people to be tackled in a more structured way for the first time. There are differences in the importance that each Member State attributes to the individual common objectives. It is rare for a Member State to focus equally on all common objectives. Member States flagged the need for more time to achieve a thorough implementation of the common objectives.

There exist a variety of different forms of volunteering. It is important to preserve this diversity. National strategies for youth volunteering, where they exist, prove to be useful.

Member States are undertaking efforts to include more young people with fewer opportunities in volunteering activities. However, although there are many good practices,

some significant obstacles still remain to voluntary activities of all young people. The existence of legal frameworks can help to facilitate voluntary activities of young people.

Member States are quite active in promoting voluntary activities of young people. However, the image of volunteering still needs to be improved, and so too cooperation among relevant actors to promote voluntary activities of young people in a coordinated, coherent and sustainable way. Last but not least, more specific, targeted and tailor-made promotional measures need to be developed for young people with fewer opportunities. Recognition is important, as voluntary activities of young people can be a useful bridge between education and employment. Existing mechanisms, like Europass and Youth Pass should be developed to become more useful for youth volunteering.

Member States and young people agree that voluntary activities should be developed further as they are a major expression of young people's active citizenship and can assist them in the sometimes difficult transition towards autonomy.

A coordinated, joint effort at European level through a shared framework would therefore appear to be beneficial as it could assist the evolution of voluntary activities for young people at the national level. As a consequence, the Commission suggests continuing the implementation of the common objectives. To this end the Commission makes concrete proposals on how to further proceed in the Communication[20] that this document accompanies.

[1] Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on common objectives for voluntary activities of young people, 13996/04, 15 November 2004.

[2] Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, 13997/04, 15 November 2004.

[3] Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society.

[4] Communication from the Commission to the Council: Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives for voluntary activities among young people in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field - COM(2004) 337, 30.4.2004.

[5] Council Directive on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service of 13 December 2004.

[6] The European Youth Pact was adopted by the Spring 2005 European Council as part of the revised Lisbon Strategy and aims at improving education, training, mobility, vocational training and social inclusion of young people while facilitating the reconciliation of working life and family life. In this context the European Council called on the Union and the Member States to encourage the mobility of young people by removing obstacles for trainees, volunteers as well as workers and for their families. Annex 1 of Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, Brussels, 22-23 March 2005 (7619/05).

[7] <http://www.youth-knowledge.net/INTEGRATION/EKC/Intro/index.html>

[8] This seminar took place on 11-12 December 2006 in Strasbourg; Information can be found on http://www.youth-partnership.net/INTEGRATION/Overall_Portal/Intro/index.html

[9] Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers - OJ L 215, 10.7.2001, p. 30.

[10] In line with the Resolution, these can include young people, voluntary organisations, public authorities, the private economic sector and schools.

- [11] SALTO is a resource structure of the European Youth in Action Programme. More information on http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/program/index_en.html
- [12] Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, 13997/04, 15 November 2004.
- [13] Identify existing knowledge at national, local and regional level and measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to this knowledge. In a second stage identify - including at local and regional level - existing knowledge in further priority areas of interest to the youth field such as autonomy, non-formal learning, the fight against discrimination, education & training, employment, entrepreneurship, creativity, transition from education to employment, social inclusion and health, and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it.
- [14] Ensure quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge by using appropriate methods and tools. Facilitate and promote exchange, dialogue and networks to ensure visibility of knowledge and to anticipate future needs.
- [15] Observatoire national de la vie étudiante and organisation of a Journée d'étude sur les engagements bénévoles des étudiants.
- [16] Olsson, Svedberg och Jeppsson Grassman 2005: Medborgarnas insatser och engagemang i ivilsamhället – några grundläggande uppgifter från en ny befolkningsstudie, Ersta Sköndal University College. Grosse 2006: Volontärprogram riktade till ungdomar – kartläggning och analys, Ersta Sköndal University College.
- [17] Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth: Implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active citizenship - SEC(2006) 1006, COM(2006) 417, 20.7.2006.
- [18] Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on implementing the common objectives for participation and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship, 2006/C 297/02, 7 December 2006.
- [19] Shadow Report on the implementation of the third priority of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field, Voluntary Activities, European Youth Forum, 5 December 2006.
- [20] See footnote 3 above.