



PORTUGAL 2007



Portuguese Youth Event

“Volunteering: A Challenge for Youth Empowerment in the 21st Century“

Lisbon, 15 – 17 September 2007

CONCLUSIONS

The Youth Event of the Portuguese Presidency was held in Lisbon from 15 to 17 September 2007, hosted by the Portuguese Government and organised in close cooperation between the Portuguese Youth Institute (IPJ) and the Portuguese National Youth Council (CNJ), with the participation of the European Youth Forum (YFJ). Participants in the event were representatives of the National Youth Councils of EU Member States, candidate countries and EFTA countries, as well as a range of International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations. The event, which followed the publication of the European Commission Communication on “Promoting young people’s full participation in education, employment and society” and precedes the adoption of a Council resolution on voluntary activities of young people, focussed especially on the theme of volunteering. Furthermore, in six working groups, more in depth debates were held on the following six sub-themes:

- The Role of Young People in the European Construction
- Employment and Entrepreneurship
- Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities for All
- Youth Participation and Structured Dialogue
- Non Formal Education
- Volunteering

Participants at the Youth Event underlined as a best practice the importance of the organisational aspect of the event in what concerns the involvement of the National Youth Council of the Presidency country and the European Youth Forum and their leading role in organising the event.

Conclusions of the Working Groups

The Role of Young People in the European Construction

While looking forward to the closing of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), which will hopefully end with the new Reform Treaty being ratified, young Europeans consider that this is a milestone in the process of the creation of the European Constitution. The Constitution will then be a cornerstone in the creation of European citizenship, which will reinforce the European identity, based on the common values of peace, diversity and tolerance.

Mobility

Mobility makes a significant contribution to the European construction, because it allows for a greater synergy of cultures and people and in turn fosters an environment of respect and understanding, through intercultural learning and dialogue. Mobility allows a greater opportunity to exchange ideas, and increase interaction between the many of people of Europe.

In order to overcome barriers to mobility (with the most prominent being that of visa constraints) visas need to be granted to all volunteers, youth workers, students and researchers, at no cost, across the whole of Europe.

Volunteering must be given an official status, allowing it to be recognised amongst governments and measures be adopted within the school system to facilitate exchange programmes and encourage greater mobility, through cultural and geographical learning.

Youth Participation and Active Citizenship

Volunteers are active citizens, and through volunteering we can forge common values, which can help to contribute to a European identity. In order to enhance and further active citizenship amongst young people we believe that the channels of information for young people need to be improved and that greater participation through the democratic process should be improved.

Young people should be recognised as global citizens by actively participating at a local level. Volunteering, citizenship and diversity should be a prominent feature within national curricula.

Intercultural Learning and Dialogue

Intercultural dialogue exists among European Youth Organisations, and platforms as European Youth Events help to foster this interaction. Through formal and non-formal methodologies, more can be done to encourage intercultural dialogue amongst young people in order to further contribute to the EU construction.

Existing exchange programmes should be further promoted and encouraged and to help create a greater awareness of different cultures and value systems, and create a more tolerant understanding of Europe for all young people.

Employment and Entrepreneurship

Employment and the labour market

1. National authorities' analyses on labour market trends need to be publicised more as such information would help young people choosing their career in full knowledge of existing opportunities while it would allow the better adaptation of educational programmes to the needs present in the labour market
2. Youth organisations and social partners should work together to improve the situation of youth in the labour market, with a special focus on disadvantaged groups, because youth organisations are better equipped to reach excluded youth, while social partners are experts on employment issues.
3. In order to put the European Youth Pact into reality and tackle youth unemployment, the EU and Member States need to establish cross-sector monitoring strategies on European and national levels.
4. The EU and European States need to urgently enforce existing legislation on gender equality at work especially on gender pay gap. In addition social partners need to adopt agreements establishing new instruments such as equally accessible parental leaves in order to progress towards and equal sharing of family responsibilities.
5. Volunteering is at the bases of competences skills and expertise which are greatly needed in labour market, youth organisations and social partners need to cooperate more to improve recognition of volunteering in labour market.

Transition from education to the labour market

1. Member States should reinforce existing services for professional guidance and provide advise in career planning and developing to all young people;
2. The EU and Member States should promote and facilitate geographical mobility in labour market for young people;
3. Governments should integrate working experience into school curricula;
4. The public authorities and the civil society need to jointly create, reinforce and provide alternative paths into participating and contributing to the society for school dropouts.

Entrepreneurship

1. Entrepreneurship should be taught in schools to promote the attitude of taking responsibility for one's own life and enhance creativity amongst young people.

2. Member States should establish Entrepreneurs centres to help young people in setting up and developing their own business, provide micro loans, grants and premises.
3. Member States should adopt common, simple, short procedures for registering a company and also to review tax/social benefit systems to support young people in the first *years* of business.
4. European governments should facilitate the exchange of good practices on youth entrepreneurship.
5. Youth organisations should promote entrepreneurship by providing information on schemes available to youth and organising seminars and conferences on business training.

Flexicurity

1. Youth organisations should be given an active role in the flexicurity debate, especially on the occasion of the adoption of national strategies on flexicurity in 2008.
2. The European Commission needs to develop a study on the financing of flexicurity in different national contexts.
3. Public authorities at all levels should spread accessible and clear information on flexicurity.

Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities for All

Recommendations on the Education system

- 1) Policymakers, teachers and civil servants need to be aware of and have compulsory training on equality issues.
- 2) Teachers' education needs to be reconstructed: the values of democracy, participation, volunteering (also through the involvement of voluntary organisations) and diversity need to be implemented in the curricula. Furthermore, before qualifying as a teacher, potential teachers need to be evaluated in soft skills, awareness for equality and motivation.
- 3) Methodology needs to be changed in manifold non-normative ways in regard to learning environment (e.g. accessibility for students with disabilities), teaching material (e.g. working in projects, discussion-methods, availability of books that consider diversity) and the measurement of school achievements (e.g. teachers evaluation, explanations to grades, integration of social competences). Schools need to be provided with equipment for multi-media education on equality issues and issues of diversity.

- 4) Students need to be empowered to participate in decision-making on all levels of the education system.

Recommendations to the European Commission and Governments

- 1) Diversity needs an inter-departmental approach. It furthermore needs to be a priority on the political agenda. Diversity needs to exist in the constitution of the government and the decision-making bodies.
- 2) Decisions need to include the bottom-up view – an integrated method of approach is needed on all levels of government and society. Those who are at risk of being excluded need to be involved into the decision-making process.
- 3) Mass-media needs to be non-discriminative: countries need to develop standard regulations that break up stereotypical attitudes and media portrayal.
- 4) Layers of bureaucracy within governmental and European level need to be tackled: the decision-making process needs to be shorter in order not to lose sight of the aim.
- 5) Ensure direct and understandable communication from the governments to the society; also ensure greater consultation of society and the groups concerned (for example NGOs) to tackle social exclusion.
- 6) A long-term strategy needs to be adopted to ensure sustainable development of policy tackling the problem of social exclusion. Groups concerned need to be involved in planning and implementing such strategies.
- 7) A proper evaluation of current state policies and strategies relating to social inclusion need to be done now in order to see their weaknesses and find ways of improvement. Such changes made to policies and strategies need to be properly assessed every three years.
- 8) Research is an important practical tool to combat various forms of social exclusion and new factors of causes. Cooperation between all stakeholders of the research (researchers, politicians, NGOs and practitioners etc.) is essential. Funding needs to be provided on all levels: local, national and international.

Youth Participation and Structured Dialogue

1. Structured dialogue promoting greater youth participation should be considered a tool to improve young people's living conditions. This demands strong commitment from the decision-makers, the youth organisations and all other stakeholders.
2. There is a need for stable and sustainable co-management structure on mainstreamed youth policy, where the agenda is set, the decisions are made and the implementation is monitored in an equal partnership.

3. The cross-sector nature of youth policy must be taken into account by involving all the relevant stakeholders dealing with issues affecting youth in the structured dialogue. A dialogue with the leadership of the European institutions in order to widen the scope of the youth mainstreaming needs to be established.
4. The youth councils and youth organisations need to be recognised and have the sufficient and legally secured core-funding and resources to function as independent and strong partners in the dialogue. The European Commission should promote and the Member States should ensure organisational rights in the EU.
5. This dialogue has to become a transparent bottom-up process from the local, regional and national to the European level, where the independent youth organisations are the main partners – the European Youth Forum, the National Youth Councils and the International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations. All young people have to be enabled and encouraged to participate. This requires that policy-makers are open to innovative working methods of youth organisations.
6. The voting age must be lowered to 16 in elections at European, national and local levels, as it has been requested for in the Vienna, Cologne and Rome Declarations.
7. The public communication of the European institutions to the EU citizens needs to also improve: technocratic language should be avoided.
8. There also need to be additional grants for youth organisations to engage in the structured dialogue. The Action 5.1 in the Youth Programme needs more resources and must also include more flexibility in order to meet the needs of youth organisations running the activities. The youth organisations have problems in co-financing the projects. The National Agencies must provide the National Youth Councils with assistance regarding the implementation of the structured dialogue. The role of the National Agencies has to be a technical one.
9. Millions of young people live in the European Union with no legal status and thus do not have the possibility to democratic participation in the society. The European Commission and the Member States must seriously work on models how to grant legal status to undocumented migrants.

Non-Formal Education

Non-formal education should be recognised as an important dimension of the volunteering experience, which prepares young people for active citizenship, youth participation and life-long learning. Therefore the main stakeholders should achieve common acknowledgment of non-formal education. Some of the recommendations were demanded already in the past¹. Nevertheless, it is still a big challenge to put them into practice and to implement them in the minds of the decision-makers.

¹ e.g. in COMEM 0716-05, Conclusions of the Working Groups and Action Plan of Youth Event of the German Presidency, Cologne, April 2007

Requests to the European Commission:

1) Draft Charter on common goals, aims and objectives of non-formal education to:

1. State common understanding of non-formal education;
2. Increase the effectiveness and coherence in which the common objectives of the European Commission's "White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth" are put into practice;
3. Highlight the importance of non-formal education for the development of a knowledge-based European society;

The content of the Charter must engage Member States to:

- Acknowledge the significance of non-formal education as a tool to develop essential attitudes, knowledge and skills;
- Include all stakeholders especially employers, youth organisations and formal education institutions in the process of dialogue and cooperation;
- Stress the added values that are specific to European youth work and undertake joint measures to promote non-formal education;

The content of the Charter must engage the European Commission to:

- Develop current European programme of non-formal education to foster European youth work;
- Strengthen the structured dialogue with the European Youth Forum, other youth platforms and specifically employers and formal education institutions;
- Provide an appropriate framework for training, especially by dealing with the shortage of youth accessible training materials and tools.

2) Proclaim a year of non-formal education and volunteering and launch a promotional campaign.

Requests to the National Governments

1. Strongly promote the added value and benefits of non-formal education and volunteering by adopting a Charter on non-formal education, implementing a year of non-formal education and volunteering, and launch a promotional campaign²;
2. Provide and create better opportunities to volunteers, especially in the fields of mobility, discounts and recognition;

2 Review Request to the European Commission point 1

3. Strengthen a cross-sectorial approach in the field of non-formal education;
4. Improve communication and cooperation with the National Youth Councils and youth NGOs through the structured dialogue;
5. Concretise the request to involve employers more in the structured dialogue about non-formal education and volunteering;³
6. Provide sustainable financial support to the youth-structures as a proof of political commitment;⁴

Requests to Youth Organisations:

1. Lobby governments and the European Commission to implement a year of non-formal education and volunteering and launch a joint promotional campaign;
2. Communicate benefits and added value of volunteering to the society;
3. Strengthen the complementarity and cooperation between youth NGO's and formal educational institutions;
4. Be aware of their role as main providers of non-formal education in order to assume their responsibilities and defend their rights to be involved in all political decision making processes.

Volunteering

A European charter on volunteering is needed for young Europeans. The following recommendations need to be taken into consideration.

Four dimensions of volunteering were discussed: **Legal Status, Recognition & Visibility, Obstacles and Empowerment.**

Legal Status

1. Member States and the European Commission must use the following definition of volunteering:
 - an activity undertaken of a person's own free will and involves the commitment of time and energy to actions of benefit to others and to society as a whole;
 - the activity is unpaid but can include reimbursement of expenses directly related to the voluntary activity;

3 As already demanded from the participants of the Youth Event in Cologne;

4 COMEM 0716-05, page 4

- it is for a non-profit cause and is primarily undertaken within a non-governmental organisation and therefore cannot be motivated by material or financial gain;
 - volunteering should not be used to substitute or replace paid employment.
2. Social laws must not prevent people from volunteering (e.g. people should not lose their unemployment allowance if they are doing voluntary activities).
 3. Volunteering must not cause any disadvantage with regard to the social security of a volunteer (e.g. public pension schemes should take volunteering into account).
 4. Health and liability insurance should be mandatory for all volunteers, paid by the organisation they are volunteering for, or by the government.
 5. Tax laws should provide tax exemptions for reimbursements paid to a volunteer. Tax laws should also exempt income from fundraising activities.

Empowerment

1. Corporate-sponsored volunteering: Companies must be encouraged to include support for volunteering activities and volunteer organisations within their Corporate Social Responsibility schemes. We suggest fiscal/financial benefits to companies who:
 - donate their resources towards volunteering (i.e. getting a bookkeeping company to do a NGO's bookkeeping). This allows the volunteers to allocate more of their attention/resources towards concrete actions;
 - allow employees extra leave (holidays) in order to partake in volunteering activities.
2. Enable National Youth Councils (NYCs) and youth NGOs to create a Code of Conduct on volunteering, which organisations can become accredited with adhering to. The NYCs and NGOs will also be involved in deciding which organisations qualify for accreditation. Amongst other things, this Code will ensure that volunteers receive:
 - full reimbursement for all expenses incurred in relation to participating in the voluntary activity;
 - preparation/briefing, personal guidance/assistance throughout the entire process, support during the voluntary activity, evaluation/debriefing following an activity and full support in the realisation of the required follow up activities.

Obstacles

1. We demand the adoption of the Community Code on Visas as discussed by the European Parliament and ask Member States to adopt and implement it. In addition:

- visas for volunteers should be free of charge;
 - income and/or employment status of volunteers should not be a condition to get a visa.
2. Lack of sustainable funding prevents youth NGOs from properly supporting their volunteers. Therefore, the following is recommended:
- sustainable sources of administrative funding for youth NGOs should be provided in every European State and reinforced at European level;
 - representatives of youth NGOs should be consulted concerning public funding systems;
 - voluntary work must be counted as a contribution in kind to reflect the social and economic contribution of volunteers to society.

Recognition & Visibility

1. Social partners should be involved in the development of tools for the recognition of voluntary work.
2. Creation of an internationally recognised symbol for volunteering.
3. With support from the EU, every Government must develop a strategy on volunteering, which utilises both existing tools (i.e. Europass) alongside newly developed ones.
4. The EU institutions need to declare a year of volunteering within the next 5 years and to give more attention to the 5th December, the International Day of Volunteers.