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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 3.7.2008
COM(2008) 424 final

Proposal for a

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

on mobility of young volunteers across Europe

{SEC(2008) 2174}

{SEC(2008) 2175}

(presented by the Commission)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

Grounds for and objectives of the proposal

This initiative aims to promote the mobility of young volunteers in Europe and is a component of the EU's "Renewed Social Agenda: Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in 21st century Europe". It seeks to open up new opportunities for mobility of young volunteers across Member States, and contribute to the development and accessibility of youth education, given that volunteering is an important form of non-formal learning. It will also help build solidarity between individuals and communities.

Youth mobility will be promoted by inviting Member States to further develop the interoperability of their national schemes for voluntary activities, whether organised by civil society and/or public authorities, and address remaining obstacles to cross-border volunteering. Trans-national mobility of volunteers raises citizens' knowledge of other EU countries and labour markets and promotes social inclusion and employability. Cross-border mobility for youth volunteers can strongly contribute to Europe's competitiveness and solidarity, and enhance, in particular, a sense of European citizenship.

Obstacles to trans-national mobility of youth volunteers waste human resources. Through non-formal learning, cross-border volunteering can lead to enhanced skills and competences which increase youth employability. With high youth unemployment in many parts of the EU, volunteering is a means to bridge the gap between school education and employment. Today's globalising marketplace puts a premium on people who are multilingual and multicultural. For creativity and innovation to flourish, the EU's youth should have the widest of opportunities to broaden their horizons and realise their potential. Opening up more cross-border volunteering opportunities for all youth across Europe would contribute to the implementation of the European Youth Pact and help achieve the Lisbon strategy goals.

Youth volunteering can help strengthen social solidarity in Europe but such activity could also be put to the service of other common policy goals such as civil protection, social inclusion, cultural preservation, regional development and the environment. The EU also needs to raise awareness of its value among young Europeans for the European project as a whole to move forward. In this initiative, EU intervention would help lift the technical and administrative barriers that prevent citizens from making their own contribution to the cause of solidarity—something which many youth feel strongly about—while at the same time protecting and valorising the rich diversity of schemes and traditions that exist and continue to develop in Europe.

General context

Voluntary activities of young people have gained importance at national and European level in recent years. There is general agreement on the fact that volunteering plays a significant role in the social, professional and economic integration of young people (particularly young people with fewer opportunities) and also benefits the communities in which they serve.

These benefits are even greater in the case of cross-border volunteering. Experience shows that voluntary engagement in another country impacts strongly on a young person and his/her personal and professional development. In fact, the benefits of cross-border volunteering are clear to those who are engaged in it: 62% of former volunteers under the European Voluntary

Service (EVS), an Action of the Youth in Action Programme¹, consider that this experience has changed for the better their career possibilities. The cross-border community in which the youth volunteers engage is also enriched, both culturally and economically, by the volunteer's participation and activity in that particular community.

Demand for volunteering opportunities is also expanding: a 2008 survey by the Association of Voluntary Organisations (AVSO) of 138 volunteer organisations estimates that the number of their volunteers has grown from 2007 to 2008². In 2007, approximately 4000 cross-border youth volunteers were financed under the EVS, meeting 74% of the number of requests. In that particular year it was necessary to raise the EVS budget to the detriment of other actions in the 'Youth in Action' Programme. EVS requests have further increased by 17% so far this year.

As for *potential* demand, a 2007 Eurobarometer³ survey of youth in the Member States found that while only 16% of the interviewed young people participate in a voluntary activity, 74% would be interested in a volunteering experience if there were more programmes encouraging it. There are currently 96 million young people between the age of 15 and 29 in the European Union. Even if only 1% of all young people in the age group wished to participate in a cross-border volunteering project, this would still represent 64 000 young volunteers abroad per year.

Key issue limiting cross-border volunteering between Member States in the EU

Despite such interest, there is a serious dearth of opportunities for trans-European volunteering and national schemes (whether civil society or public authorities) alone can not meet this specific demand. Lack of *interoperability* between the different national schemes and the scarcity of the information available entail that, apart from the limited possibilities offered by EVS, it is often the case that doing a spell of voluntary work outside Europe in the framework of development aid is easier than volunteering in another EU country.

Existing provisions in the area of the proposal

The proposed Recommendation belongs to a series of initiatives at European level aimed at enhancing mobility. The Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2001 and 2006⁴ on transversal mobility are two important references, but these focus primarily on students and teachers and to a much lesser extent on volunteers. They deal with general issues such as recognition, obstacles and the conditions of mobility, but lack tailored proposals that adequately address the particular needs of young volunteers.

¹ Decision No 1719/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing the "Youth in Action" programme for the period 2007 to 2013, OJ L 327 of 24.11.2006, p.30.

² Survey of AVSO and Youthnetworks; NoBorders Foundation, Netherlands, 28 February 2008; <http://www.avso.org/>

³ "Looking Behind the Figures: The main results of the Eurobarometer 2007 survey on youth", Office of Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2007, ISBN 978-92-79-05540-9, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

⁴ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001 on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers, OJ L 215/30 of 9.8.2001, p. 30., and Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility, OJ L 394 of 30.12.2006, p. 5.

The European Parliament recognised the problem of lack of interoperability of national systems for volunteering of young people at European level, and proposed some preparatory measures in the 2008 budget for improving the situation through a project called Amicus. In April 2008 the European Parliament adopted the report on the "Role of Volunteering in Contributing to Economic and Social Cohesion"⁵, prepared by MEP Marian Harkin. The report encourages Member States and regional and local authorities to recognise the value of volunteering in promoting social and economic cohesion, and recommends the promotion of cross-border voluntary projects.

The conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service are set out by Council Directive 2004/114/EC⁶, which provides the possibility of granting special residence permits issued to third-country nationals who apply to be admitted to the territory of a Member State for the purpose of volunteering.

The European Voluntary Service (EVS) has been an integral part of the Union's youth programmes since 1996, and is constantly being developed further. It thus could provide an example when it comes to trans-national volunteering. EVS, however, has yet to achieve wide brand recognition as, for example, the ERASMUS program and remains—and will remain—quantitatively limited.

The launch of the open method of coordination on youth policies in 2002 has greatly contributed to keeping youth volunteering on the political agenda, and has led to the adoption of common objectives in 2004 and of a Council Resolution in 2007. Throughout these initiatives, volunteering is increasingly seen as a valuable opportunity for the personal development and the employability of young people, and constitutes an effective and concrete way to "invest in youth" in an ageing society.

Despite all these positive outcomes, the trans-national dimension of volunteering of young people in Europe is still limited and there is definitely room for further progress.

Consistency with other policies and objectives of the Union

The objectives of this recommendation are in line with those underpinning European action in the areas of education and training, the principles of lifelong learning as well as those of the European Employment strategy. They are also fully consistent with the EU strategy for social inclusion and would enhance a sense of European citizenship. Positive spill-over effects could also be expected in the area of external relations as better interoperability of national schemes and more information sharing may stimulate young Europeans to volunteer more in third countries and allow more exchanges with third countries. This would enhance the EU's profile as a global actor.

Stakeholders' Consultation

In February 2008, a stakeholder consultation of the European level umbrella youth and volunteering organisations and national youth and volunteering organisations took place. At this meeting, it became clear that civil society counts on the Commission to take action in

⁵ REGI/6/50546, 2007/2149, of 21 April 2008

⁶ Council Directive 2004/114/EC of 13 December 2004 on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service, OJ L 375, 23.12.2004, p.12.

order to facilitate and improve the situation of young volunteers. The youth and voluntary organisations support the Commission's trans-European approach, and welcome the intention of enhancing mobility. They also confirm the challenges identified by the Commission. Following this meeting, some of the organisations present, such as the Association of Voluntary Organisations (AVSO) and the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) delivered their comments in writing to the Commission. The recognition of volunteering through EU instruments was strongly supported by both NGOs. The European Youth Forum (EYF) also supports the Commission's proposal to add European value to the voluntary activities of young people. They insisted that the new initiative should cover all kinds of national schemes and not only national civic services, and provide a framework for the rights of volunteers. They also suggested that the need for quality assurance could be addressed with a self-assessment tool.

Member States' consultation

In preparing this Recommendation the Commission has relied to a great extent on the national reports of Member States on youth volunteering of 2006/2007. The reports show that for many Member States the European Voluntary Service is the main (or the only) tool of trans-European youth volunteering. Member States praise EVS but recognise its limited outreach and budgetary and organisational constraints, as there are many more young people than volunteering opportunities that EVS can provide. As a result, only few Member States have established effective forms of trans-border volunteering. In addition, the Commission organised a consultation meeting with high-level representatives of Member States in March 2008: there was a consensus on the importance among the Member States of the mobility and interoperability concept presented by the Commission. Some preliminary ideas have also been discussed with the Member States' Directors-General for Youth in April 2008: Member States were quite interested by the idea of creating greater interoperability of national youth volunteering schemes and a better mobility for young volunteers. There was also confirmation that it would be important to tackle social and administrative obstacles to youth volunteering.

Member States themselves have reported a number of specific obstacles to the Commission⁷. These in particular include:

- Lack of knowledge, information, support and accessibility: Knowledge of volunteering needs to be deeper and broader, opportunities made more readily accessible and information between stakeholders better exchanged.
- Socio-economic obstacles: incomplete healthcare coverage and possible loss of unemployment and other social security benefits during volunteering spells are an important disincentive; youth with fewer opportunities in particular face additional problems making use of volunteering schemes and require more specific, targeted and tailor-made promotional measures;
- Lack of recognition: Proper acknowledgement and recognition of volunteering spells would facilitate the transition from education to employment and motivate young people to engage more in these activities. Sometimes, a less than positive perception of volunteering, based on

⁷ Commission Staff Working Document "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", SEC(2007)1084 of 5.9.2007

a lack of appreciation by some prospective employers of volunteering cross-border can deter young people from applying to such activities.

Impact assessment

The impact assessment underlines the added value that this recommendation would bring in promoting the mobility of young volunteers in Europe. It defines the problem at stake as well as the rationale for a policy action at EU level. The impact assessment addresses the aims of the initiative in terms of general and specific objectives, analyses the various ways of ensuring the achievement of the proposed objectives, and proposes the most suitable option and choice of legal instrument.

Failure to take any action would allow the present unsatisfactory situation to continue. Obstacles to the trans-national mobility of young volunteers would persist, and the expectations of stakeholders, and many European youth, would not be met.

The option of expanding EVS into a universal service would have the advantage of offering a quality European volunteering opportunity to each young European resident who wishes it, but it is not feasible for both practical and financial reasons: it would require an enormous organisational and administrative body at EU level and need a significantly higher budget incompatible with available financial resources and the budgetary framework for 2007-2013. Another important drawback would be the risk of reducing the diversity of schemes that currently exist in Europe, which is one of the main characteristics of the voluntary sector that should be preserved and valorised.

The harmonisation of national systems in this field is ruled out by the Treaty.

Improving the interoperability of existing schemes in the Member States being put in place by the civil society or public authorities is the option preferred by the Commission. A Recommendation of Council based on Treaty Article 149 (4) would send a strong political message while respecting the subsidiarity principle and diversity of situations in the Member States. In this option, EVS would continue as a stimulating programme of cross-border volunteering and as a laboratory for testing quality, recognition and support improvements.

Value added of the proposal

The proposed Recommendation does not aim at replacing national schemes. On the contrary, the principles and the lines of action proposed in the Recommendation aim at enabling Member States to strengthen their own national systems through the exchange of good practices and to provide a platform on the basis of which the Member States could better develop bilateral or multilateral agreements and partnerships.

2. LEGAL ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Summary of the proposed action

The proposed Recommendation encourages the Member States to improve the interoperability of national youth volunteering schemes in order to make it easier for a volunteer from one country to participate in the volunteering schemes of another.

Member States are asked to make progress in the following areas: gathering knowledge on existing schemes within their territories; disseminating information about available

opportunities; increasing cross-border volunteering opportunities under different national schemes; providing a reasonable level of quality assurance for young volunteers; ensuring appropriate recognition of the learning outcomes of youth volunteering; and providing targeted support to both socio-educational instructors specialised in youth (commonly called 'youth workers') and young people with fewer opportunities.

The Commission will also have a role in enhancing access to volunteering opportunities via the further development of a European Young Volunteers' Portal (as a part of the existing Youth Portal) and through instruments aimed at favouring the recognition of skills and competences such as European Qualification Framework, Europass and Youthpass.

Legal basis

Article 149 of the Treaty provides the legal basis.

Subsidiarity principle

The proposal complies with the subsidiarity principle as the objectives of the proposal cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of scale and effects of this Recommendation, be better achieved at Community level. Improving the transnational dimension of youth volunteering is a difficult task for any national voluntary scheme. Given its knowledge of the problem and needs common to all Member States, the EU is best placed to provide a set of recommendations for better interoperability between national systems.

Proportionality principle

The proposal complies with the proportionality principle because it does not replace or define national volunteering schemes. It does not harmonise these and it leaves the implementation of the recommendation to the Member States. It also respects the diversity of the forms of youth volunteering in Europe.

Choice of instruments

Recommendation of the Council

3. BUDGETARY IMPLICATION

The proposal has no implications for the Community budget.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

on mobility of young volunteers across Europe

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission⁸,

Whereas:

- (1) Voluntary activities constitute a rich non-formal learning experience which enhances young people's professional skills and competences, contributes to their employability and sense of solidarity, develops social skills and smoothes integration into society, and fosters active citizenship.
- (2) Trans-national mobility in Europe is highly beneficial to all as it is an essential tool for promoting education, employment and regional and social cohesion, and for helping to improve mutual understanding and active participation in society. This is particularly the case for young people in a labour market which increasingly values adaptability and flexibility.
- (3) Recommendation 2001/613/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, volunteers, teachers and trainers⁹ and Recommendation 2006/961/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes: European Quality Charter for Mobility¹⁰ refer to volunteers.
- (4) Mobility for young volunteers is part of the freedom of movement of people protected by Article 18 of the EC Treaty.
- (5) Local communities hosting young volunteers benefit greatly from their activities, that can take place in a wide array of fields, such as promoting social inclusion, preserving cultural heritage, fostering intergenerational solidarity and protecting the environment, while at the same time enriching the cultural diversity of the hosting communities;
- (6) The European Parliament adopted in April 2008 the report on the "Role of Volunteering in Contributing to Economic and Social Cohesion"¹¹ which encourages Member States and regional and local authorities to recognise the value of volunteering in promoting social and economic cohesion, and recommends the promotion of cross-border voluntary projects.

⁸ OJ C , , p. .

⁹ OJ L 215, 9.8.2001, p. 30.

¹⁰ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 5.

¹¹ REGI/6/50546, 2007/2149, of 21 April 2008

- (7) There exists a large variety of voluntary activities throughout Europe organised by civil society or public authorities and these activities should be preserved, developed further and made interoperable.
- (8) Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 of the Council of 14 June 1971 on the application of social security schemes to employed persons and their families moving within the Community¹² and related provisions only cover those volunteers who are insured under national security legislation, with the consequence that issues related to social protection can sometimes act as a disincentive to engage in voluntary activities in another Member State.
- (9) Recommendation N° 2001/613/EC invited the Member States to take the measures they consider appropriate, in accordance with Community law and in the framework of their national law, so that volunteers and their families are not discriminated against because of their mobility with respect to relevant social protection, such as health care and social welfare policies.
- (10) Resolution of 15 November 2004 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 and Resolution of 19 November 2007 of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on implementing the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people respectively set out common objectives for voluntary activities of young people and proposed exchanges of good practice and peer-learning activities to strengthen their implementation, and invited Member States to consider practical means of measuring progress. The latter Resolution also invited the Commission to make further proposals for the promotion and recognition of voluntary activities of young people.
- (11) Voluntary activities have been a priority of the open method of coordination in the field of youth, which has already identified a great number of good practices. In this context the European Voluntary Service (EVS), an action of the EU Youth Programme since 1996, has allowed young people to engage in voluntary service in a variety of areas. The current Youth in Action Programme reinforces this action.
- (12) Council Directive 2004/114/EC of 13 December 2004 on the conditions of admission of third-country nationals for the purposes of studies, pupil exchange, unremunerated training or voluntary service¹³ provides the possibility of granting special residence permits issued to third-country nationals who apply to be admitted to the territory of a Member State for the purpose of volunteering.
- (13) Despite these efforts, there are still obstacles to the cross-border mobility of young volunteers across Europe and this Recommendation therefore aims primarily at providing a framework for Member States to intensify their cooperation, without prejudice to the diversity of their national schemes.
- (14) In the framework of this Recommendation, cross-border volunteering activities should be defined as a voluntary engagement in which the young volunteer takes part in a non-profit making unpaid activity to the benefit of the general public in a country other than his or her country of residence. Such an activity is characterised by the following aspects: open to all, young people under 30 years of age, undertaken by own

¹² OJ L 149, 5.7.1971, p. 2.

¹³ OJ L 375, 23.12.2004, p. 12.

free will, fixed period, with clear objectives, structure and framework, unpaid but pocket money and coverage of expenses.

- (15) Special attention should be paid to young people with fewer opportunities as volunteering constitutes a particularly valuable possibility of mobility for those young people who otherwise would benefit less, or not at all, of mobility schemes. These young people have specific training and mentoring needs that should be taken into account. Support to the training and mobility of socio-educational instructors specialised in youth and youth leaders will be very useful in this context.
- (16) Better interoperability of national schemes and more information sharing may stimulate all young Europeans whatever their nationality to engage more in volunteering in third countries.
- (17) Since the objectives of this Recommendation cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of scale and effects of this Recommendation, be better achieved at Community level, the Community may adopt measures in order to promote mobility of young volunteers through interoperability of national schemes, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in that article, the present Recommendation does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives.

HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT THE MEMBER STATES:

- A Promote the mobility of young volunteers across Europe by enhancing the interoperability of national schemes for volunteering whether organised by civil society or public authorities, so that every young person shall have the opportunity to volunteer in Europe if she or he wishes to do so.
- B Develop to that purpose the following lines of action:
 - (1) improve the level of knowledge of volunteering schemes within their national territories and transfer this information to the European Commission for further dissemination;
 - (2) make information about opportunities for volunteering abroad easily accessible to young people, socio-educational instructors specialised in youth and youth leaders;
 - (3) disseminate information to all those concerned (public authorities, civil society organisations, prospective employers and young people including third country nationals who are legally resident in the EU) of the rights and opportunities that arise from existing provisions at European and national level on trans-national volunteering;
 - (4) share the information on opportunities for volunteering with other Member States and simplify as far as possible the application process in order to make it easier for young volunteers of a Member State to access and apply to the national schemes of other Member States;
 - (5) develop opportunities for trans-national European volunteering according to a flexible approach; develop support to the hosting capacity for trans-European volunteers in the country wherever needed; create contact points for young European volunteers according to a 'one-stop shop' approach, in connection, where appropriate, with National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme;

and promote the use of existing European mechanisms that can help youth mobility such as mobility cards;

- (6) reduce linguistic barriers to the cross-border mobility of young volunteers by encouraging language learning by volunteers;
- (7) develop basic quality standards in order to promote a reasonable level of quality assurance to reassure and protect volunteers going cross-border and to build confidence and encourage participation in cross-border schemes; these could relate to the level of training of volunteers and staff, activity preparation, mentoring, tracking and follow-up;
- (8) disseminate information about such quality standards to hosting and sending organisations, as well as to volunteers, and ensure the respect of those standards by the organisations;
- (9) examine further relevant social protection provisions with a view to making full use of the possibilities under EU and national legislation, and examine, in particular, the remaining situations where volunteers are not adequately covered;
- (10) take measures in order to ensure the appropriate recognition of learning outcomes of youth volunteering, within the respective national frameworks for qualifications and in line with Community provisions, where existing;
- (11) promote the use of instruments at EU level that can facilitate cross-border volunteering by ensuring the transparency of qualifications, such as Europass, and give appropriate recognition of the skills and competences acquired through volunteering, preferably in a comparable, certified form based on Youthpass or equivalent;
- (12) reinforce the trans-European mobility of socio-educational instructors specialised in youth and youth leaders active in cross-border volunteering;
- (13) develop information and training of socio-educational instructors specialised in youth and youth leaders in organisations, local authorities, civic services about trans-European volunteering of young people;
- (14) give particular attention and provide tailored approaches to young people with fewer opportunities in order to enhance their access to voluntary activities and especially to trans-European types of volunteering, and take the specific training and support needs of these young people into account;

HEREBY ENDORSES THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO

- (1) support the Member States in the above tasks by using the EU cooperation framework in the field of youth and in particular the open method of coordination and the Youth in Action programme;
- (2) encourage and organise, in liaison with Member States, a systematic exchange of information and experiences about the interoperability of national volunteering schemes organised by civil society or public authorities;
- (3) develop a European Youth Volunteer Portal on volunteering based on national youth volunteering portals, databases or specific websites.

- (4) report to the Council four years after the adoption of this Recommendation to determine whether the measures proposed are working effectively and to assess the need for further actions.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council

The President