

I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COUNCIL

Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 16 May 2007 on implementing the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people

(2008/C 241/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

WHEREAS:

- (1) In its Resolution of 27 June 2002 ⁽¹⁾, the Council adopted the open method of coordination as a new framework for European cooperation in the youth field and endorsed the four thematic priority areas for youth highlighted in the Commission's White Paper of November 2001 entitled 'A new impetus for youth', namely participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth.
- (2) In its Resolution of 25 November 2003 ⁽²⁾, the Council adopted common objectives for the first two priorities, i.e. participation by and information for young people.
- (3) The European Voluntary Service (EVS) has been an Action of the 'Youth' Programme since 1996 and a quality model for transnational voluntary service that allows young people to engage in voluntary service in a variety of areas, thereby encouraging their solidarity, active citizenship and mutual understanding. The current 'Youth in Action' Programme reinforced this Action.
- (4) In its Communication of 30 April 2004 ⁽³⁾, the Commission proposed common objectives for voluntary activities of young people, based on the replies of the Member States to a Commission questionnaire and after consulting young people.
- (5) In its Resolution of 15 November 2004 ⁽⁴⁾, the Council adopted the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people, i.e. to develop, facilitate, promote and recognise voluntary activities, and agreed to report on the implementation of those objectives by the end of 2006.
- (6) In its Resolution of 15 November 2004, the Council adopted common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth which also tackled voluntary activities. Member States agreed to identify existing knowledge related to voluntary activities at local and national levels.
- (7) In its Resolution of 20 July 2006 ⁽⁵⁾, the Council recognised the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field.
- (8) In its Resolution of 31 October 2006 ⁽⁶⁾, on participation by and information for young people, the Council also reinforced the open method of coordination, building on the Commission Communication of 20 July 2006 ⁽⁷⁾.
- (9) The 2007 Eurobarometer survey on youth ⁽⁸⁾, indicates that the large majority of young people have a positive view of volunteering programmes as means of increasing their participation in society.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 168, 13.7.2002, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 295, 5.12.2003, p. 6.

⁽³⁾ Doc. 9182/04 (COM(2004) 337 final).

⁽⁴⁾ Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 15 November 2004 on common objectives for voluntary activities of young people, doc. 13996/04.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 168, 20.7.2006, p. 1.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ C 297, 7.12.2006, p. 6.

⁽⁷⁾ COM(2006) 417 final.

⁽⁸⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.html

(10) In its Communication of 5 September 2007 ⁽¹⁾, the Commission proposed to confirm the relevance and validity of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people. The Commission also proposed concrete actions for improved implementation of the common objectives,

EMPHASISE THAT:

1. in its Communication on proposed common objectives for voluntary activities among young people of 30 April 2004 ⁽²⁾, the Commission defines voluntary activities as all kinds of voluntary engagement. They are characterised by the following aspects: open to all, non-remunerated, undertaken of own free will, educational (non-formal learning aspect) and added social value;
2. voluntary activities need to be clearly distinguished from employment and should by no means replace it;
3. it is important to preserve the different forms of voluntary activities that exist in Member States;
4. the Commission's analysis of the Member State's reports on the implementation of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people confirms the validity of the adopted common objectives as they have provided an impetus for developing these activities further in a more structured way;
5. the open method of coordination in the youth field should be reinforced as a means of better implementing the common objectives;
6. volunteering by young people should be promoted and celebrated. This will demonstrate that many young people do get involved as volunteers in their schools and local communities in ways that help others.

NOTE THAT:

1. in order to make it easier to carry out voluntary activities by removing existing obstacles, Member States should 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;
2. it is important that voluntary activities are promoted and recognised as ways of acquiring personal, social and professional skills and competences by various actors, i.e. public and private employers, social partners, civil society, schools, young people themselves and their families;

3. the skills and competences acquired through voluntary activities at local, regional, national and European levels can contribute to increasing employment opportunities for young people and developing their sense of initiative, their creative and entrepreneurial spirit and, as such, represent an important aspect of the Lisbon Strategy;
4. voluntary activities play an important role in empowering a young person which leads to his or her more active social participation, inter-generational cooperation, a general feeling of solidarity in society and better social inclusion and cohesion, in particular regarding young people with fewer opportunities; furthermore, voluntary activities can facilitate the transition of young people from education to employment;
5. all young people should be able to benefit from high quality opportunities in volunteering. The initiatives must reach young people, especially those with fewer opportunities and offer them the possibilities to mix with others and gain a sense of achievement. This is particularly important since for young people and youth workers voluntary activities are means of social recognition and continuous self-development;
6. in many countries civil-society organisations are the key actors in the voluntary activities of young people;
7. voluntary activities support the values of democracy and solidarity and can help strengthen intercultural dialogue and active citizenship by reinforcing the mobility of young people. They already play an important role in European policies such as external relations and cooperation policy.

AGREE THAT:

1. the relevance and validity of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people adopted in 2004 are confirmed and these objectives need to be further implemented;
2. the lines of action for voluntary activities of young people as agreed in 2004, will be adapted and reinforced, taking into account recent developments in order to increase their efficiency, as described in the Annex hereto;
3. improving the image of volunteering would encourage young people to further engage in volunteering;
4. in order to raise the profile and increase the social recognition of voluntary activities, the means of raising awareness of the public in general, and of young people in particular, of the institutions from the local to European level, and of other relevant stakeholders should be strengthened;
5. reinforcement of cross-sectoral co-ordination between different policy fields is crucial given the transversal nature of voluntary activities and the positive impact this would have on the involvement of young people in voluntary activities.

⁽¹⁾ Doc. 12772/07 (COM(2007) 498 final).

⁽²⁾ Doc. 9182/04 (COM(2004) 337 final).

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES TO:

1. establish national strategies for or integrate voluntary activities of young people and youth leaders/workers into their national youth policy plans and develop relevant programmes, where appropriate, in close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders, such as civil-society organisations, youth organisations and voluntary-based organisations;
2. identify, by September 2008, those lines of action for voluntary activities of young people on which they intend to concentrate and define national strategies and/or concrete measures for their implementation;
3. set up preparatory and follow-up mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of the common objectives in cooperation with the relevant actors, *inter alia* young people, youth leaders, workers and their organisations, and voluntary based organisations;
4. involve youth organisations and voluntary based organisations in the definition, development and implementation of policies on youth volunteering;
5. promote the common objectives for voluntary activities for young people amongst regional and local authorities, youth organisations and young people and closely cooperate with regional and local authorities;
6. encourage enterprises to support voluntary youth activities in the framework of their corporate social responsibility schemes including by giving recognition to the skills and competences acquired through voluntary activities in order to facilitate a smooth transition of young people to the labour market;
7. encourage the participation of young volunteers in major international events, in particular taking into account the Commission's White Paper on Sport and its related action plan;
8. agree on the guiding values, principles and ethics of voluntary activities and discuss the need for additional instruments for promoting voluntary activities.

NOTE THAT THE COMMISSION INTENDS TO:

Launch a consultation with a view to possible new measures at EU level to promote and recognise voluntary activities of young people.

INVITE THE COMMISSION TO:

1. in this context make proposals for tools to promote and recognise voluntary activities of young people;
2. in cooperation with other stakeholders, promote the development and recognition of voluntary activities of young people through information about and by making full use of instruments such as this Resolution, the European Voluntary Service, the European Quality Charter on Mobility, the Europass and the planned European Qualifications Framework;
3. consider the opportunity to organise a European Year to promote volunteering in order to improve the image of volunteering in society in general and among young people in particular.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO:

1. reinforce the open method of coordination for voluntary activities by undertaking exchanges of good practice and peer-learning activities to strengthen the implementation of all the common objectives, including the elimination of obstacles and an enhanced recognition of the skills and competences acquired through volunteering;
2. broaden the mandate of the working group set up at European level to consider practical means of measuring progress in participation by and information for young people to include voluntary activities of young people;
3. discuss implementation of the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people at national and European level in the framework of the 2009 evaluation of the open method of co-ordination and the European cooperation in the youth field in general.

ANNEX

MEASURES TO REINFORCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON OBJECTIVES FOR VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Depending on the circumstances and priorities of each Member State, and without prejudice to the different responsibilities of the national, regional and local authorities within the Member States, the following non-exhaustive list of lines of action may be pursued.

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 opportunities, enlarging their scope and improving their quality.

At national, regional and local level

Given that there is a variety of traditions and practices of voluntary activities in the different Member States, establish national strategies for, or integrate voluntary activities of young people and youth leaders/workers into their national youth policy plans and develop relevant programmes in close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders, such as civil-society organisations, youth organisations and voluntary organisations.

- (a) With a view to creating a clear and visible picture of voluntary activities available to young people, continue work on identifying existing models of voluntary activities (e.g. voluntary service, occasional voluntary engagement, etc.) and voluntary organisations.
- (b) Enhance existing voluntary activities of young people by:
 - continuing to develop the different categories of these activities, and in particular broaden their range of possibilities,
 - continuing to support activities of particular interest to young people,
 - continuing to support civil-society organisations active in voluntary engagement of young people,
 - continuing to reinforce voluntary services where they already exist and, where appropriate, encouraging the creation of new ones.
- (c) With a view to improving the quality of voluntary activities and their organisational framework, foster training opportunities for young volunteers and those coordinating and managing such activities.
- (d) Strengthen support for voluntary activities at local level involving local organisations, including youth leaders/workers and their organisations, bearing in mind the role they play in the promotion of active citizenship, in the development of entrepreneurship, in social and cultural participation and in empowering young people.
- (e) Develop voluntary activities in third countries as a way of promoting global youth cooperation, enhancing intercultural dialogue and promoting the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities from different cultures and regions.

At European level

- (f) Encourage:
 - a better coordination of the transnational cooperation of civic services, where they exist,
 - an enhanced exchange of young volunteers in various domains,
 - an enhanced exchange of information on national voluntary programmes and their European dimension by elaborating peer-learning activities and ways to exchange best practices, taking into account the diversity of voluntary activities in the different Member States.
- (g) Continue developing and promoting the European Voluntary Service (EVS) further within the framework of the 'Youth in Action' Programme.
- (h) Take into consideration the feasibility of extending EVS to a wider range of actions with a view to giving young people the possibility to participate in solidarity-related activities of the European Union.

2. Facilitating voluntary activities of young people

Make it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities by removing existing obstacles whilst respecting immigration controls, visa and entry requirements of Member States.

At all levels

- (a) Take further measures considered appropriate to remove the legal and administrative obstacles to the mobility of persons undertaking a voluntary activity, as set out in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on Mobility ⁽¹⁾.
- (b) Reinforce cross-sectoral cooperation between the relevant authorities in order to facilitate the issue of visas and residence permits to young volunteers when and where appropriate.
- (c) Enhance the exchange of information, experience and good practice of all relevant actors in the field of voluntary activities of young people with the aim of removing all kinds of obstacles and developing simplified procedures.
- (d) Consider which legal frameworks and instruments can be improved to make it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities and for organisations to develop quality activities, paying particular attention to young people with fewer opportunities and to the gender balance.

3. Promoting voluntary activities of young people

Promote voluntary activities with a view to reinforcing young people's solidarity and engagement as responsible citizens whilst combating all forms of discrimination and stereotyping, promoting equality, social inclusion, and intergenerational cooperation.

At national, regional and local level

- (a) Disseminate information on volunteering at all appropriate levels, with the aim of raising young people's awareness about volunteering, informing them about concrete possibilities to volunteer, providing advice and support and promoting a positive image of volunteering.
- (b) Make efforts to encourage an enhanced cooperation between all relevant actors (young people, those active in youth work and youth organisations, public authorities, private economic sector, schools, etc.) on the promotion of voluntary activities, by exchanging information, experience and good practice.
- (c) Together with youth and voluntary organisations and other relevant actors analyse more carefully the phenomena that lead to the exclusion of certain groups of young people from voluntary activities and develop specific, targeted and tailor-made approaches focused on encouraging them to participate in voluntary activities, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities.
- (d) Encourage youth organisations and other voluntary organisations to organise and provide information on voluntary activities and to promote them among their peers.
- (e) Encourage enterprises to support voluntary youth activities in their social responsibility schemes.

At European level

- (f) Launch appropriate information actions with a view to promoting voluntary activities of young people and the values of volunteering.

At all levels

- (g) Reinforce the participation of young volunteers in the context of major international events, in particular taking into account the Commission's White Paper on Sport and its related action plan.

4. Recognising voluntary activities of young people

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

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 215, 9.8.2001, p. 30.

At national, regional and local level

- (a) Acknowledge young people's voluntary involvement, acquired individual skills, knowledge and competences, by supporting measures that lead to an enhanced recognition of voluntary activities at all levels, by various actors, e.g. public and private employers, social partners, civil society and young people themselves, and in the appropriate form, taking into account the needs of young people, including young people with fewer opportunities.
- (b) Acknowledge the added social value that the voluntary sector offers to society by developing actions such as awareness-raising campaigns that lead to an enhanced recognition by society of voluntary activities.
- (c) With a view to enhancing recognition and, where appropriate, developing certification of the competences acquired through voluntary activities, involve the relevant representatives of voluntary and other youth organisations, social partners, educational institutions and national authorities in facilitating this certification.
- (d) Encourage enterprises to support volunteering activities in the framework of their corporate social responsibility schemes including by giving recognition to the skills and competences acquired through voluntary activities in order to facilitate a smooth transition of young people to the labour market.

At European level

- (e) Develop a coherent approach to better recognition at work and in the knowledge-based society of skills, knowledge and competences gained through volunteering in the framework of ongoing processes and by existing means in other policy fields, such as the open method of coordination in the education field, the life-long learning strategy, the social dialogue, corporate social responsibility, and in particular building on the planned Europass-Youth instrument.
-