

Volunteering: Commission proposes a boost for the mobility of young people

The European Commission today proposed the launch of an initiative to create more opportunities for young people to volunteer across Europe. Young people who wish to volunteer in another Member State currently do not have enough opportunities to do so. With this proposal, the Commission is putting forward a solution that respects Europe's diversity of volunteering schemes and allows them to better inter-operate and open up to volunteers from other EU countries.

As Mr Ján Figel', Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, put it on the occasion of the adoption of the Commission's proposal, "*This is the first Recommendation that the Commission has ever made in the area of youth policy. With this proposal, the Commission now invites the Member States to change the European youth volunteering landscape by **giving young people more opportunities for cross-border volunteering.***"

Youth volunteering

The initiative concerns young people in the European Union under the age of 30 who wish to volunteer in a country other than their own. Such voluntary activities differ from formal employment, since they are usually unpaid (except for some pocket money and expenses) and cover a limited period of time, typically several months. Volunteers are active in a whole range of areas, from civil protection and social inclusion to cultural preservation and the environment.

Cross-border volunteering **offers young people a special experience** that can have strong beneficial effects on their personal development. This kind of 'non-formal education' — learning outside the classroom — can improve young people's employability and career prospects while at the same time strengthen their sense of solidarity with, and active citizenship of, the society of which they are a part.

The current situation

Youth volunteering differs widely across Europe, and there are many schemes. While these may be based on civic services organised by public authorities in one country, they may be run by non-governmental organisations in another.

At the European level, there is the EU's Youth in Action programme, which offers opportunities for volunteering, among them the **European Voluntary Service (EVS)**. This enables young people to be full-time volunteers for up to one year in another country participating in the programme. However, the demand for cross-border volunteering among youth in Europe exceeds by far the capacities of the EVS alone.

The proposal

The Commission is encouraging 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.

Actions proposed to Member States include:

- gathering knowledge on existing schemes within their territories
- disseminating information about available opportunities
- increasing the number of cross-border volunteering opportunities under different national schemes
- providing a reasonable level of quality assurance of volunteering activities
- ensuring appropriate recognition of the learning outcomes from volunteering
- providing targeted support to socio-educational instructors specialised in youth (commonly called 'youth workers') and young people with fewer opportunities.

These efforts would be supported through the *Europass* and *Youthpass* services, and the promotion of trans-European youth volunteering towards employers, authorities and institutions. The Commission would support the use of these instruments and continue to develop the *European Young Volunteers' Portal* as part of the existing *Youth Portal*.

The ambition of the proposal is not to bring about radical change but rather an **evolution of mechanisms already existing within Member States**. Based on existing Resolutions on youth volunteering and Recommendations on mobility, the goal is to propose operative recommendations towards improved mobility of young volunteers in Europe.

The proposal is part of the EU's "**Renewed Social Agenda: Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in 21st century Europe**". It contributes to the agenda's objectives by opening up access to new opportunities for mobility, non-formal education and solidarity across borders.

To know more:

European Commission: Youth: Volunteering:

http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-policies/doc30_en.htm

European Youth Portal: Volunteering:

http://europa.eu/youth/volunteering_exchanges/index_eu_en.html