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NOTE

from : The Presidency
to : The Working Party on Social Questions
on : 11 July 2011

Subject : The role of voluntary work in social policy
- Draft Council Conclusions

Delegations will find attached the above mentioned draft Council Conclusions as prepared by the Presidency with a view to the meeting of the Social Questions Working Party, on 11 July 2011.

The role of voluntary activities in social policy

Draft Council Conclusions

The Council of the European Union,

Considering that:

1. "Voluntary activities" means all types of voluntary activity undertaken of a person's own free will, choice and motivation without concern for financial gain: voluntary activity is multi-dimensional and has potential significance for many EU policies, in particular: employment and social policy, equal opportunities, social care, education and youth, cultural policy, regional policy, research and development, sport and health policy, environmental protection, consumer protection, humanitarian aid and development policy including their external dimensions;
2. Voluntary activities cannot replace paid employment;
3. Volunteering creates opportunities for learning, and engaging in voluntary activities provides citizens with new skills and strengthens their sense of belonging to the society;
4. Voluntary activities contribute to the growth and strengthening of social capital through development of a social network based on trust and cooperation and by encouraging behavioural attitudes based on engagement for the common good;
5. Voluntary activity contributes to the development of European identity and active citizenship, which constitute key elements for the development of democracy and social cohesion and for the implementation of the basic values and principles of the European Union, namely: solidarity, sustainable development, human dignity, subsidiarity and equality;
6. Volunteering, as a form of active citizenship, takes place in all areas of social life contributing e.g. to combating poverty and social exclusion, strengthening social integration and supporting active and dignified ageing, as well as to economic growth;

7. Promotion of the development of voluntary activities constitute a continuation of the implementation of the assumptions of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) and is in line with the objectives of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012)¹ at once constituting an overarching element of those two initiatives and helping consolidate their results;
8. Volunteering contributes to the achievement of the "Europe 2020" strategy objectives by developing people's employment capacity and mobility, as well as through activities supporting social inclusion and learning;

The Council underlines the importance of voluntary activities:

9. For the growth of civil society, activating citizens (including those from disadvantaged groups), social cohesion, solidarity between generations, inter-cultural dialogue, improvement of professional qualifications and key competences, self-improvement, addressing gender inequalities and reducing existing social barriers and intolerance;
10. For the development of a European identity, the integration among European nations and the promotion of EU values, especially democracy, beyond EU borders;
11. As one of the tools for limiting the effects of economic crisis by contributing to raising skills levels and providing experience, in particular for persons most disadvantaged on the labour market;
12. As a tool to overcome the social crisis and the crisis of values, because it can be instrumental in raising social integration and solidarity;
13. As a tool for raising competences and building the career paths of young people, which contributes to improving their opportunities on the labour market e.g. by facilitating a smooth transition from school to working life and maintaining activity in the event of unemployment;

¹ COM(2010) 462 final.

14. As a tool for gaining competences, for achieving social inclusion and development and for benefiting from the knowledge, skills and experience of older people;
15. As a factor for developing sport and physical activity at the level which is closest to the citizens;

At the same time, **the Council** points at the existence of barriers limiting the voluntary activity and the full use of its potential, and in particular:

- Unequally developed voluntary activities infrastructures at local and national level,
- Undervaluing of voluntary activities,
- Dispersed information on voluntary activities, their value, possibilities and importance for individuals and the society;

The Council therefore invites the Member States and the European Commission to take the following actions within the framework of their competences and in compliance with the subsidiarity principle, given their institutional structure:

16. Take into account these conclusions in the implementation of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and its flagship initiatives;
17. Take actions aimed at eliminating barriers to the development of voluntary activities within the European Union and in the European Neighbourhood Policy countries, which will contribute to promoting EU values. This may be achieved through volunteer exchange programmes between the European Union and the European Neighbourhood Policy countries;
18. Encourage collaboration, joint projects and sharing of experience and good practices among the different levels of public authorities, including at European level, among those involved in

social, economic, cultural, educational and youth work, and between them and public authorities²;

19. Support the development of civil society organisations (as important promoters of voluntary activities) at local, national and European levels and their cooperation at European level;
20. Publish and share research results concerning voluntary activities and active citizenship, along with statistical data including studies on the impact of voluntary activities on the economic and social condition of the state and social well-being;
21. Promote the importance of volunteering as a form of non-formal and informal education contributing to obtaining new skills and competences in each and every age and social group;
22. Discuss the development of a unified framework for the recognition of professional qualifications and competences gained through voluntary activities e.g. similar to the existing Europass and Youthpass formulas;
23. Give financial support to long-term voluntary programmes and introduce solutions which promote the transition from campaign volunteering to long-term voluntary activities;
24. Use the potential of people experiencing exclusion who can be active citizens through voluntary activities, increase their sense of efficacy and change the stereotypical image in society which reduces them to aid beneficiaries;
25. Promote e-volunteering as an innovative form of voluntary activity, which is a positive aspect of the virtual activity of internet users;
26. Develop the volunteering infrastructure using all instruments which may prove necessary, including legal and institutional instruments, strategies for the promotion and development of voluntary activities and support for those who organise voluntary activities;

² From the Council conclusions on the role of culture in combating poverty and social exclusion (15448/10).

27. Promote employee volunteering;

The Council invites the **European Commission** to:

28. Ensure that the development of voluntary activity becomes a part of future proposals concerning EU programmes (so-called new generation programmes) on social policy, education, youth, culture and sport;
29. Take into account the development of voluntary activities in programmes implemented under the European Cohesion Policy, e.g. through the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund and under other programmes planned for the implementation in the new Multi-annual Financial Perspective;
30. Take actions aimed at the creation of a system, which would allow voluntary activities to be included as a contribution to the co-financing of projects subsidised from EU funds and develop mechanisms to allow for appropriate appraisal of voluntary activities;
31. Consider the possibility of preparing a white paper on volunteering presenting coherent measures aimed at supporting and creating favourable conditions for further development of volunteering in the European Union;
32. Analyse the system of indicators concerning voluntary activity and its role in relevant EU policies to ensure comparable data and indicate existing or new areas of voluntary activities which require closer cooperation within the EU;
33. Develop the concept of volunteering within the context of the European Quality Charter for Mobility.