



Answer on the Greenpaper consultation “Promoting the learning mobility of young people” (COM(2009)329final), Commission of the European Communities

Joint answer by CSC, EYCE, WSCF-E and AGDF

1. Introduction of the organisations

CSC

The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) links CEC’s 125 member churches from all over Europe and its associated organisations with the EU institutions, the Council of Europe, OSCE and other European organisations. It engages its member churches and associated organisations in studies and projects relevant to church and society and thus supports and strengthens the common witness of European churches. The CSC has secretariats in Brussels and Strasbourg and maintaining strong links with the headquarters at the ecumenical centre in Geneva.

EYCE

The Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe is a strong network of young Christians promoting the unity of Christianity throughout all of Europe. It is an umbrella organisation with 26 members throughout Europe, including national ecumenical youth councils, denominational youth councils and bodies representing Church youth in Europe. EYCE organises several thematic trainings each year and currently runs a Campaign to Overcome Fundamentalism. EYCE has an office based in Brussels.

WSCF-E

WSCF Europe (WSCF-E) is an ecumenical student network exploring a vision of Christianity that celebrates our diversity and creates a community of dialogue and action. WSCF-E has 20 national Student Christian Movements (SCMs) in 25 countries and is one of the the six regions of World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), a global fellowship of Christian students in over 100 countries. There are three subregional structures within WSCF Europe: the Central European Sub-region (CESR), the Nordic Cooperation Council (NCC) and the Western European Sub-Region (WESR). The regional office is in Budapest.

EYCE as well as WSCF-E are associated youth organisations of CEC.

AGDF (Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden)

The AGDF is an umbrella organisation of 35 organisations and institutions, all of which provide peace services focussing on various work areas and programmes in Germany and abroad. Their peace services are open to everyone: Each year, about 5000 junior and senior volunteers render short-term, middle-term and long-term voluntary peace services. People dedicated to working for the AGDF are disinclined to accept the dichotomy of an imagined world of peace and a real world of war and injustice. AGDF’s and its member organisation’s work is about promoting understanding and reconciliation, it is about helping fight against unjust conditions.

AGDF has an administrative office in Bonn, Germany, and a representative office based in Brussels.

We thank the European Commission for having invited us to share our views on learning mobility of young people. We highly welcome the Greenpaper on learning mobility of young people and the general aim to increase learning mobility/experiences. The EC initiative in the field of youth and youth mobility demonstrates the growing political relevance of learning experiences through mobility within the European Union.

2. Principles

Our organisations stand for **ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural understanding**. As Christian organisations we are deeply committed to the dignity of the human individual and the concept of global solidarity.

Twenty years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, there are still gaps – new and old – in Europe. Mobility opens opportunities for encounter between all people living in Europe with their very different backgrounds to bridge these gaps. Encounters with the unknown neighbour help reflecting prejudices and building friendship. For young people from non-EU countries in the eastern and south-eastern part of Europe, mobility is specifically important to open doors – in both ways! Mobility programmes facilitate abroad experiences for young people and help to overcome bureaucratic barriers, but they also motivate young people from EU countries to know better the non-EU regions. Therefore, formal mobility programmes are of an enormous importance to getting integrated in European societies instead of being excluded from it because of the historical past or the current political situation. It also opens doors to young people from all countries to discovering other parts of Europe. Young people are today's and tomorrow's Europe and mobility helps to build up a new sense of what Europe is. "For the churches, the cultural and spiritual dimension of this relationship is of crucial importance... The EU has a responsibility to avoid rebuilding a new "iron curtain" on its eastern border and to foster a peaceful dialogue between peoples and nations, as well as between cultures inside and outside its own borders." (CEC, European Integration, p.43)

Referring to the ECHR Art.14 of Non-Discrimination we emphasise that nobody should be excluded from exchange opportunities because of his or her sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status. We especially underline that nobody should be excluded from mobility opportunities because of his or her legal status.

Education is a fundamental and universally recognised **human right**: Every child is entitled to it - regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity or economic status. Education enhances lives. It ends generational cycles of poverty and disease and provides a foundation for sustainable development. A rights-based approach to education can address some of societies' deeply rooted inequalities. These inequalities condemn particularly girls and women all over the world to a life without quality education – and, therefore, to a life of missed opportunities.

Concerning the particular situation of women in higher education within the EU countries, the EU institutional programme for gender equality says: "Over the last few decades, women in the EU have closed the education gap and even surpassed men in terms of numbers of university graduates. Women are more likely than men to go on university education and to graduate. But there are still large differences in the fields of study chosen by women and men. Men greatly outnumber women in science and engineering, while women dominate in arts and humanities. There remain education sectors seen as 'female', which normally lead to lower paid jobs. The elimination of these stereotypes is one of the

EU's priorities."¹ Inequalities in access to education and significant gender differences in subject areas persist, hindering women and girls' education and life chances. Women's key role as carers for family needs represents a major structural barrier to adult women's education and training. In the field of learning mobility special attention has to be paid to the situation of students who are in charge of children or other persons in need and thus are less mobile. Women are especially concerned.

We therefore underline the importance of equal opportunity for all learners, taking into consideration the diversity of life situations among young people. Learning mobility as a benchmark should not lead to deepening the still existing gender inequalities in education and thus on the labour market.

We also particularly emphasise the importance of formal, **non- formal and informal education** and learning.²

We understand education as more than only prepare young people for the labour market. In our understanding, learning processes should encourage active citizenship, solidarity and personal development for everyone in our societies. Learning is also the learning of values in favour of humanity. This implies intercultural learning experiences for all age groups as we can partly find in the EC'S definition of Life Long Learning³. In the understanding of Christian anthropology, intercultural exchange and relationships between people are at the heart of human being. Therefore the EC's mobility approach should not limit itself towards a certain age group. It would be appropriate to increase the possibilities of aged persons and pensioners to participate in formal and non-formal exchange programmes.

Peace and voluntary services are part of the non-formal youth and adult education and should be recognised as such by employers and institutions. The introduction of the Youth Pass as part of the Youth in Action programme is a first step to recognise non-formal learning experiences. It should be possible to extend it to all voluntary services (not only EVS) and improve its features and access in cooperation with voluntary service organisations.

3. Examples

We work mainly in the area of non-formal and formal education, training, European and international exchange programmes and integration activities.

Our member organisations represent international non-governmental organisations and Churches.

Our main activities in the area of ecumenical dialogue, human rights and peace education and non-discrimination at European and international level specifically foster non-formal and informal learning experiences.

Christian based organisations put a specific emphasis on **ecumenical and inter-religious lifelong learning**, mostly in the non-formal sector. Not only young persons but persons of all ages gather in various contexts and in visible diversity. For young people specifically, our organisations have various programmes who allow them to meet and discover ecumenical and cultural diversity in Europe.

Christian based exchange experiences have not only a religious dimension, but also a cultural dimension. With every interfaith or inter-denominational experience, a cultural dimension goes alongside. Questions of common values and existential questions of human life are emphasised in this context. We encourage our young learners to develop a

1 http://www.gender-equality.webinfo.it/results/european_union.htm

2 Under non-formal education we understand extra-curricular and extra-mural activities provided by educational institutions (public or other). By informal education and learning we understand hidden curricula (peer learning, emotional or leisure experiences) as well as learning through media.

3 http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11090_en.htm

critical view on their own traditions and the traditions of the other, and at the same time we encourage them to be aware of the rich heritage religious tradition brings to the individual and to the community. Value and faith education, coming along with non-formal exchanges in the ecumenical field, is crucial for young people to develop their own beliefs and values and the feeling of belonging.

a) Steward's programme in CEC:

At all big ecumenical Assemblies young people from the CEC member churches are invited to participate as stewards. From 15th to 20th of July 2009 took place the 13th CEC Assembly in Lyon (<http://assembly.ceceurope.org>). The steward's programme reads as follow: "Stewardship is designed as an initial gateway for young people to participate in the work of CEC, and in international ecumenical affairs more generally. This stewards' programme brings together 50 young people from different churches, countries and cultures, who share their faith, backgrounds and visions in an ecumenical experience of learning, discussion and friendship. Being a steward is a challenge, fosters involvement and participation, and may change your life. The stewards' programme should be the beginning of a journey. It encourages young people to get involved in further ecumenical ventures beyond the end of the assembly. In fact, many of the key participants in this year's assembly have been stewards at past events... As a steward, you are here to help ensure the Assembly runs smoothly at a practical level, as well as participating in the ecumenical experience it offers. The work can be exhausting and intense, and without young people putting their energy into their roles, the Assembly could not happen. Before the assembly starts, there is a stewards' orientation programme (11th-14th July), designed to introduce you to the work of the various ecumenical organisations involved in the Assembly, to discuss the theme and aims of the Assembly, and to prepare you for your particular tasks... An important part of the stewards' programme both before and during the main assembly, is the opportunity to talk and socialise with fellow stewards and with various other participants. The team spirit is always strong and the memories lasting.

As stewards, you are young people committing time, energy, skills, knowledge and vision to building up the ecumenical movement in all its aspects, and as such your participation is highly valued." (http://assembly.ceceurope.org/uploads/media/Stewards_brochure_02.pdf)

b) Interreligious dialogue in EYCE:

Inter-religious dialogue (IRD) is a key element in creating a peaceful and respectful world. Yet we realise that actors in this dialogue often face fundamentalism. During work on IRD done by Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) it became clear that many societies and organisations throughout Europe are challenged by the phenomenon of fundamentalism. As an appropriate contribution to the need to be equipped to face it, EYCE decided to launch a three-year (2008 - 2010) inter-religious campaign to promote among its members and partners awareness, practical tools and good practice on overcoming (not only) religious fundamentalism.

The Campaign has been built upon strong emphasis on wide participation of young people coming from various religious communities and backgrounds from all around Europe. EYCE has invited its partners to participate, such as Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO), European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) and European Interfaith Youth Network (EIYN).

In the year 2010 the special focus of the campaign will be on role of religious communities in promoting European citizenship, open dialogue and reconciliation. Concrete activities of the campaign include meetings and training courses, to which member organisations are invited to send participants. Apart from that, the Campaign features dissemination visits, an interreligious conference to be held 2010 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, publicity materials and the publication "Fundamental Issues" published by EYCE three times per year in the Campaign's duration.

The coordination is taken care of by a Leadership Team, whose members are appointed by the EYCE Executive Committee, taking into consideration religious and gender balance. The Leadership Team consists of young people all aged under 30, who are spread throughout Europe. It is supported by a Pool of Anti-Fundamentalist Creativity, which is open to all young people who would like to contribute anyhow to the Campaign even while having little time.

For a European-wide campaign to be successful, it is necessary to have not only structures on European level, but mainly on national and grassroot level. The LT together with EYCE office, member and partner organisations are responsible for enhancing active participation of young people and connecting local activities to the overall flow of the Campaign. This results in plurality of approaches and actions in the framework of the Campaign.

c) Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP) is a voluntary organisation actively fighting against discrimination, racism and anti-semitism. In its voluntary programme, intercultural learning is one of the main goals. To enlarge its engagement in local communities, ARSP has established the intercultural learning programme with women from various social and cultural background in disadvantaged areas of Berlin. www.asf-ev.de

Returning volunteers from ARSP established a programme for getting engaged against prejudices and racism in their regions in Germany which they called Change of View. As multipliers they want to encourage other people to participate in mobility programmes but also get active in their own communities. (http://www.asf-ev.de/en/getting_involved/project_blickwechsel_change_of_view/)

4. Proposals

In our work we face various **barriers** concerning entry and residence for EU and most non EU citizens who participate in our mobility programmes. This leads to inequalities in the field of social, legal and financial rights. It especially impacts on citizens from non EU European countries and from outside the European continent. In addition we are very concerned about persons with unclear residence permit status living in the European Union being discriminated in their access to mobility programmes. Furthermore, persons with disabilities, persons in charge of others and socially disadvantaged persons face particular difficulties in going abroad. The European Commission should make an effort to take all measures for reducing various obstacles linked to entry, residence and rights. This can be solved by officially recognise mobility as a proper status including social, legal and financial rights for EU and non EU participants.

When it comes to voluntary services, voluntary and peace service organisations face various administrative obstacles in organising voluntary services. We therefore specifically advocate to improve the legal and social status of volunteers who do European and international voluntary and peace services. This implies to define the status of a volunteer in the EU Youth mobility programme. It will allow member countries to adapt their national regulations and reduce discrimination of volunteers. International and European volunteers are not employees, students etc. but they are “learners” who are following a non-formal learning programme. Volunteers and peace-volunteers should be recognised as such in all European countries.

It is still a reality that most of the mobility programmes are limited to individuals with a wealthy background and certain educational level. Besides appropriate access to financial resources we insist on improving the access to information for those persons mentioned above. Access to information can not be limited to internet information but has to be accompanied by promotion and support for teachers, parents, trainers, and youth workers etc. These persons can positively influence the interest and curiosity of young people to make abroad experiences and meet young people from other European regions. Also young people who return from abroad can motivate their peers in sharing experiences.

We underline the importance of equal opportunities in access to mobility for everyone. We recognise that mobility is a point of qualification increasing employability on the labour market. On the other hand it bears the danger of discriminating those without formal mobility experience and can reinforce already existing imbalances. We strongly emphasise that learning mobility should not only be considered as a necessary tool for employability but most importantly enhances intercultural dialogue and understanding, social behaviour and personal development, which is at the basis of European integration and sense of belonging to Europe.

We welcome the initiative of the European Commission and its member states to increase and improve the access to voluntary services for young people and adults facing physical, mental, social or cultural inclusion. The inclusion idea in the European Voluntary Service

programme is one step in right direction. Our organisations are keen on improving access to people facing obstacles. In cooperation with our partners, the AGDF also promotes for instance voluntary services for people +30 (www.internationale-freiwilligendienste.org)

We would however like to underline that much more resources are needed to support people with special needs. The current schemes are not sufficient to guarantee good quality preparation and support for instance for persons with disabilities. In addition, a sound legal status for volunteers would improve the access to social security and benefits and thus enhance disadvantaged young people to do a voluntary service.

Intercultural skills can also be learned by engaging in programmes in the home country or in multicultural environments (family, school and neighbourhood). We therefore encourage the European Commission to highlight these learning experiences and to encourage employers to recognise their relevance. Intercultural learning is needed in encountering other people, groups and cultures but also in reflection up on ones own culture. The results of a successful learning are not necessarily immediately visible but do bear a fruit in the end.

According to article 165 and 166 of the EU Lisbon Treaty, we encourage the EU to make use of its supporting competences in the field of education. Even if the EU has no legally binding competences in the field of education, the education systems in Europe are influenced and shaped by the phenomenon of “Europeanization” (Peter Schreiner, ICCS). Mechanisms should be used in a horizontal way, not in a vertical. We also think that it would be counterproductive if the states would become too self-defensive. Instead they should be seeking for fruitful cooperation, especially with NGO organisations and religious communities, and complementing one another. Moreover, we call on the EU to give input and develop guidelines together with civil society to improve the possibilities of individuals and organisations who engage in mobility processes. This implies to enable member states to find new ways in dealing with mobility and increase their bilateral and multilateral state and non state cooperation.

Furthermore, we ask the European Commission for guaranteeing transparency in the consultation process and to take into consideration civil society proposals for the formulation of further recommendation and policies. Our network of ecumenical organisations engaged in formal, non-formal and informal learning is willing to support the European Commission for developing a European mobility policy which is accessible for people of all age and background and in all life situations.

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References:

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 18 December 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning [Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006].

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11090_en.htm