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Y.E.S. Forum Contribution

to the Commission's Green Paper

“Promoting the learning mobility of young people”

Scope and goals of the Y.E.S. Forum

The Y.E.S. Forum can contribute to the policy process as its strength is in its day to day work for young people through its member organisations and partners. The Y.E.S. Forum is a network of 22 organisations in across 14 countries in the EU. It is bound together by a commitment to the social inclusion and active participation of all children and young people who experience disadvantage and exclusion.

The Y.E.S. Forum aims to foster a sustainable dialogue about the needs and interests of young people with fewer opportunities amongst the various stakeholders including young people themselves, youth and social workers, as well as decision makers. Hence the Y.E.S. Forum seeks:

- to encourage professional networking and exchange of good practice amongst youth workers, social workers and other professionals,
- to support peer-to-peer contact and greater mobility between young people from different European countries,
- to develop and promote new ways of thinking in youth social work and
- to transfer experience and knowledge from the practical field to actively influence European politics on youth and social affairs.

In order to contribute to these goals the Y.E.S. Forum organises trainings, seminars and conferences that provide space for exchange of good practice and critical thinking. Using web community tools, the Y.E.S. Forum facilitates Forums for discussion and consultations. It also strongly encourages the involvement of the members in transnational project cooperation involving young people and practitioners.

Positive approach to reach ambitious aims

The Y.E.S. Forum welcomes the Commission's initiative to launch a discussion on learning mobility and its attempts to improve the conditions for transnational mobility of the young people. In particular, the broad scope of the Green Paper is seen as positive: it examines the situation of the young people in different learning contexts - in school and university education, in voluntary service or vocational training. Furthermore we welcome the Commission's approach giving the same value to the experience and skills acquired in both, formal and non-formal context.

For many years and despite the announced aim of the European Commission to increase the percentage of disadvantaged young people taking part in transnational activities, the mobility is still accessible rather for the well-situated and better educated groups of the young people like university students and is out of reach for others, such as apprentices, school drop-outs and unemployed youth. Based on the rich experience of its members the Y.E.S. Forum presents the important conditions that needs to be fulfilled, in order to ensure that the mobility and its benefits do not remain an exception and become open for all young people in Europe.

Why do we need mobility for disadvantaged young people?

Skills such as tolerance and intercultural understanding, foreign languages and social skills, creativity and self-determination, flexibility and adaptability, as well as school and professional competences are considered as important implications of the transnational mobility.

Disadvantaged young people benefit very much from transnational mobility. Thanks to various forms of transnational mobility, often for the first time in their lives, they receive a chance to go abroad. Transnational mobility contributes to the acquisition of the language skills, which are getting more important for the future professional life in the globalised world and which are often a neglected subject in school education of this target group. The stays abroad are a place for learning social values and norms, individual potentials and self-reliance. The young people with lack of formal qualifications get new prospects on the labour market and their employability is significantly improved. Sometimes for the very first time in their lives they get a chance for a new start in a totally new environment - without the burden and prejudices of the past.

Raising motivation to go abroad

To reach disadvantaged young people and to encourage them to go abroad, the different mobility possibilities need to be promoted in the places where they have access to, e.g. the youth and social work, street work, charity organisations and other organisations and activities oriented on this target group. To maintain the motivation throughout the duration of the whole mobility project, they need a constant and qualitative support before, during and after the stay abroad. The work with disadvantaged young people in such a European framework needs an individual-oriented approach. Therefore, a direct contact and knowledge of the life situation of the concerned person is very important to provide tailor-made offers that makes them feel save, believe in them and emphasise the benefits of the mobility.

Matching the expectations of both sides

The matching of the exchange groups or the placements for the young people should be done with a special care, which is even more important in the case of the young people with special needs. The experience of our members shows that it is very important to provide the young people with clear picture about their future responsibilities and conditions of the working and learning period abroad. This could take place through the prior information meetings between the potential hosting organisations and the young people. Another very useful method for the young people at risk being prepared for a long-term stay abroad is a sort of "trial stay". Before making the decision of going abroad for several months or even the whole year, the young people have an opportunity to visit the hosting organisation or company for a couple of days or weeks and to learn on the spot about their future work. Through the better matching of expectations of the hosting organisations and the hosted young people one minimises the risk of drop-outs and preterm return home in case of the

disadvantaged young people, which may have less perseverance and weaker defined objectives.

The importance of good preparation and mentoring on the spot

Besides the proposed “trial stay” the young people at risk should get an intensive preparation before going abroad. Unfortunately their organisations not always have the necessary capacity to carry it out. Therefore the preparation phase needs the same attention and in consequence the same financial and personnel support from the European and national funds as the mobility measure itself.

A thorough and extensive preparation increases chances not only for the success of the learning process, mentioned above, but also for the success for coping in a foreign country. Young people should be adequately and extensively informed about the host country and its people. Language skills should not be a prerequisite for going abroad and some types of transnational mobility, such as youth exchanges, are possible without language and can take through artistic and cultural forms of communication. Nevertheless some linguistic preparation before a long stay abroad is of great importance and can be an aim in itself. Especially vulnerable young people, whose school career is often not successful, have lower language skills and the linguistic preparation must therefore be an integral and financed part of any mobility project for this target group.

Disadvantaged young people have an increased need for assistance during the implementation of the mobility measures. Our experience shows that they need more support and stronger structures for otherwise obvious things of the everyday life, which should be secured by additional funding and staff for mentoring and care at the work place and during the leisure time. The care of disadvantaged young people in foreign countries requires highly skilled and trained personnel. Permanent contact persons in the home and in the hosting country are essential, which should be appointed already during the preparation phase.

Proper information and training of multipliers

The experience of the Y.E.S. Forum members confirms that mobility is often hindered by lack of information, whereas too much information also seems to be a problem. It is indeed very difficult to get an overview all mobility programmes and funding opportunities at the European, national and local levels. A better presentation of the information and the dissemination targeted on disadvantaged young people and youth and social workers, as well as on enterprises, social and educational authorities is required. Advisory and information services need to be further decentralised to reach the local level. Education and training of multipliers is necessary to enable the local organisations to adequately inform young people about the possibilities to learn abroad and to accompany them in the mobility measures. The multipliers act as a source of information and motivation for the young people. Transnational mobility therefore should become an integral part in the training of multipliers such as teachers and social and youth workers and be taken into account in the job descriptions and work plans.

Strengthening structures to assure continuity and stability

As mentioned, already the acquisition of disadvantaged young people for mobility measures requires an increased number of staff. The success rate among the young people with special needs is smaller so that more young people need to be contacted to find the same number of participants interested to go abroad.

Mobility of disadvantaged young people is usually possible thanks to the dedicated staff of organisations that are willing to go through the jungle of information and take the effort of learning the funding rules and applying for the grants. In the most cases these tasks are additionally to obligatory tasks of staff and on volunteer basis) The infrastructure of the public and non-governmental organisations working with youth needs a solid structural financing in order to initiate and develop different mobility activities on the project basis. Unfortunately in most countries the mobility of the less privileged young people remains to be a "special offer", which does not fit into the strictly defined "mandatory" activities financed by the national and local authorities. The necessary personnel capacities assuring a permanent access to European mobility for disadvantaged young people should be funded on a constant basis by local and national funding institutions. The European Commission could play a greater role by setting priorities and indicators and taking over a driving and coordinating role.

Assuring quality through well-organised partnerships

The proven and well-organised partnerships originating from European networks or previous projects are important to assure quality of the mobility measures. Working with disadvantaged young people requires special expertise and experience, especially in the transnational context is a challenge. These challenges can be better managed through long-term proven partnerships and well-organised networks. The networks are advising its members in finding partners and proper funding, assisting in project development and writing applications, coordinating communication and project activities. They are a successful link between the sending and receiving organisations.

Our experience shows however that the trustful partnerships are seen as an obstacle for funding, as they are "contradictory to the requirements of innovation". This is unacceptable and the Y.E.S. Forum demands that the networks and proven partnerships should be further supported and developed, and not restricted through requirements that focus on innovative approaches of different programmes.

Simplified and faster application and approval procedures

The experience of our members shows that the organisational and administrative efforts invested in mobility projects are still too high compared to the value of the mobility experience, particularly taking into account the mentioned limited capacity of the personnel. The application process therefore must be simplified. The approval process should be faster, especially in the case of disadvantaged young people, as they do not plan in a long term. After the taken decision on the mobility project abroad young people should not wait too long.

The European and national public and non-governmental organisations could play a bigger role in assisting the local organisations dealing with transnational mobility. Already now they support local organisations with information about funding possibilities, partner matching, project development and assistance in the application process. Therefore their existence and further growth also needs to be secured through the personnel and financial resources by the structural European funds.

Removing legal and financial obstacles

Through our many years of experience we found that disadvantaged young people are facing much more legal obstacles to mobility than other groups.. Just to mention the visa policy for young people from non-EU countries and problems that have young people with uncertain residence status (e.g. asylum seekers). To reduce these barriers to mobility European

regulations are needed to enable all young people to participate in and profit from the transnational mobility for learning purposes.

While students have an opportunity to transfer their scholarships and loans, other groups of young people are disadvantaged in this respect. Not only they do not get any scholarship or loan for their stay abroad; they even lose what they have in the home country. An example are unemployed young people in many EU countries. As soon as they go abroad for an internship etc. they lose their social security benefits (unemployment benefits, housing or even training place). Although they go abroad to improve their employment chances, the reasoning of the responsible national authorities is that “they are no longer available for the local labour market”. This situation proves to be very negative for the motivation of young people interested in learning and working abroad. This needs to be urgently solved in cooperation between the EU and the Members States.

Validation and recognition of the learning abroad

Any mobility experience of a young person has to be a useful component for his or her educational and vocational pathway. At the beginning of each project it should be clarified with the young people, whether and how the time abroad can be integrated to the existing skills and competencies of the young boy or girl and enrich them. Therefore non-formal and informal learning in the context of transnational mobility must find a better recognition. The Y.E.S. Forum welcomes the efforts of the European Union to launch appropriate tools, such as the Youth Pass, Europass and EQF. However, the implementation of these instruments in the Member States is not smooth and their recognition, both in terms of informal as well as formal learning is problematic. For instance, the Youth Pass, which we consider as an adequate tool of recognition of experience gained within the Youth in Action Programme, is not even recognised by all EU countries.

The experience of transnational mobility should be considered as one of the priorities in the formal education and vocational training. Only then we can count on a financial and institutional support from the national and local authorities, business world, schools and other key stakeholders. The European Commission together with the European NGO's experienced in the field of mobility could play here an advisory role and facilitate the national efforts.

Building partnerships for mobility

There is a need for enlarged cooperation with different stakeholders and structures involved into learning mobility, especially between formal and non-formal education systems, companies, as well as with local, regional and national authorities and politicians.

An example for a successful cooperation and the close networking between various stakeholders, in which the Y.E.S. Forum participates right now, is the German federal ESF Programme – “IDA - Integration through exchange”. The programme aims to increase employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people and unemployed young adults by promoting transnational exchange and mobility activities. The target group of the programme include in particular young people leaving school without qualifications, with a migrant background, in their transition from school / work, with difficulty of access to training or to employment, prisoners, asylum seekers etc. The involvement and cooperation of the relevant labour market actors, like social workers, the labour office, youth authority, related NGO's and companies within the funded projects is an important concern of the programme.

Another example for building partnerships in mobility is the transnational project EuropeMobility supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme. This project focuses on

quality and quantity in learning mobility in order to support sustainable structures of partners in this field. EuropeMobility is establishing a community of practice with public and private organisations involved in and promoting learning mobility. In particular the project is composed by different stakeholders representing European networks in the field of vocational training and informal learning, e.g. schools and mobility players, social and economic actors.

Conclusions

European mobility for learning purposes brings many important and positive changes and developments in the lives of the young people. Mobility of disadvantaged young people requires however special conditions: greater efforts and increased attention and consequently is more demanding from the staff and the financial point of view. It needs continuity, stable structures and close partnerships. The access to and the conditions for transnational mobility measures must be modified and better adjusted to this target group.