



## **“Study visit to Poland – Voluntary Service across Europe”** **Warsaw 19-22 September 2006**

### **Summary**

The objective of the project was to visit Polish NGOs and other organizations working with volunteering, voluntary service and youth programmes with a group of voluntary service professionals and youth workers from all over Europe. The participants gained insight into the lives of Polish NGOs, their challenges and activities, the situation and legal framework for volunteering and youth policies and the Third sector in general in Poland, and to establish relationships with these organizations for future projects within the Youth programme.

### **Day 1 - TUESDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER**

Participants arrived on the 19<sup>th</sup> September in the morning, and they had the possibility to check into the hotel. At lunchtime participants gathered at the Centrum Wolontariatu and enjoyed a sandwich lunch while waiting for the last participants to arrive and thus were able to already get to know each other. The afternoon started with the introduction of the participants that have been asked to introduce themselves and their organisations briefly.

Then we had a short presentation of the programme and Paulina Koszewska, coordinator of the Warsaw Volunteer Centre provided the participants with practical information on the study visit and presented the hosting organisation Centrum Wolontariatu and her work, their projects. She gave an overview of the activities lead by the Centrum and she especially focused on the advertising campaign they realized to promote volunteering in the country. It was interesting the fact they managed to involve in this campaign one of the most famous polish sportsman.

Later on, Agnes Uhreczky, AVSO director, presented AVSO, its vision –promotion of full-time, long-term voluntary service by lobbying governmental institutions and by networking with other non-governmental and public organizations-, its mission – offering of support services to volunteer organizations such as policy monitoring, organizing of training and partnership-building events, identifying best practices and imparting expertise- and its main activities -lobbying, partnership building, information and research- to the participants, as some of them didn't belong to AVSO members. Before dinner time the participants that arrived in the afternoon had the opportunity to check in into the hotel. Then the whole group went for dinner, where we continued the networking.

### **Day 2 - WEDNESDAY, 20TH SEPTEMBER**

In the morning of the second day, the participants visited a very interesting association: Campaign Against Homophobia which is a non-governmental organization operating throughout Poland. Only volunteers work for the Campaign and they focus their efforts on a broadly understood fight against homophobia. This association has a special status of Public Benefit Organization. Its mission is the

prevention of the exclusion of the marginalized groups, especially LGBT people. LGBT is short of "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. The participants had the chance to meet the Latvian EVS volunteer of the Campaign who made them aware of the hard situation of the homosexuals in Poland. The testimony of the volunteer had a really deep impact on the participants who showed a strong appreciation of the work of this association.

The second part of the morning has been spent visiting the NGO's centre Centrum Szpitalna, an organisation hosting many NGOs involved in different fields: fight against the corruption, relationship with ex-communist countries, legal advices, human rights, equal opportunities, ... Some of these NGOs are umbrella organisations themselves, while some others work at a grass-root level. After a general introduction of each NGO, the participants got better acquainted with one of them: the Klon Jawor NGO, a Polish NGO working with voluntary service. The representative of Klon Jawor provided the participants with the results of a study conducted in 2004 on the "Situation of the non-governmental sector in Poland in 2004".

At lunch time organic vegetarian meals were provided before visiting a local volunteering project: Diakonia Kosciola Ewangelicko –Augsburskiego (Diakonia of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland). From 1999 it has been recognized as an NGO and is actually a member of Eurodiakonia and the European Diakonal Year network, one of AVSO's member organisations. They lead many activities – youth centres for children and teenagers, counselling for victims of family abuse, house of tolerance and culture, - but it's especially involved as a sending and hosting EVS organisation. After a brief introduction about Diakonia and its activities lead by the EVS responsible, 6 new EVS volunteers who have just arrived in Poland shared with the participants their different experiences, motivation and expectations hosted volunteers by the Diakonia Kosciola Ewangelicko –Augsburskiego in different local projects all over Poland.

During the second half of the afternoon, the group has been given the opportunity to sightsee the historical centre of Warsaw. This second day was concluded with dinner of traditional Polish food and a Polish group playing traditional Polish music. This has been highly appreciated by the participants.

### **DAY 3 - THURSDAY, 21ST SEPTEMBER**

The third day started with a visit to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy - Department of Public Benefit (Legal and policy framework for volunteering in Poland). The delegate from the Ministry, Katarzyna Kolodziej, illustrated to the participants the Polish "Act of Law of April 24<sup>th</sup> 2003 on Public benefit and Volunteering" and she especially went through the topic of the insurances provided or not to volunteers in Poland according to the 2003 law. This law has been written during 10 years with the cooperation of the volunteering associations in order to legitimate and protect their work.

Then, the participants continued their visit to the Polish Robert Schuman Foundation. This is a non-governmental, non-political organization whose aim is to encourage Polish citizens to actively participate in the process of unifying Europe. The Foundation develops programs teaching how to make use of the opportunities given by the EU membership. In addition, they cooperate with a variety of institutions within the EU and outside in order to know better and acknowledge democratic values. The foundation aims at encouraging Active European citizenship especially through voluntary service projects. It has been founded in 1999 when

Poland wasn't a European Union member yet, in order to promote EU ideals and to make Poland closer to it.

After lunch the group went to the site of one of the projects of the Polish branch of Habitat for Humanity and Citibank. Habitat for Humanity is an organisation heavily relying on volunteers and also managing Corporate volunteering. It is a non-profit, Christian and charity organisation. HFH seeks to aid low-income families to build their own house. It operates in 100 countries where it has built more than 200 000 houses around the world giving 1 million people the roof over head. In Poland they've helped 71 families. They both renovate and build houses. The participants had the opportunity to visit one of the houses that has been renovated by HFH and most specifically the volunteers of the Warsaw branch of Citibank during a number of weekends, and to enjoy the warm welcome of the tenants of the house. Citibank is a partner of HFH and it means that this company's employees are engaged in HFH voluntary activities in favour of local organizations and communities. Volunteering employees render various types of work for people in need, using their professional abilities and skills, and simultaneously developing their interests. Citibank supports an employee in such activities, i.e. it delegates an employee to work in working hours as a volunteer, provides necessary equipment, as well as logistic and financial support. The volunteers (employees of Citibank) helped paint the internal walls, replaster the outside walls, renovate the surface work in the house. The participants of the study visit were given the opportunity to see some photos of the state of the house before the renovation and the Citibank employees renovating it, as well as we were able to go inside and meet some of the tenants.

As the last visit of the day, the group met some former volunteers of the Polish Humanitarian Organisation – PHO – that shared with the participants their enthusiastic experience as volunteers in Africa. PHO is a non governmental organisation registered in Poland, which works internationally and within the country. Its mission is to make the world a better place through alleviation of human suffering and promotion of humanitarian values. PHO realises its mission by helping communities in crises to regain responsibility for their own future and become self-reliant. It shapes humanitarian attitudes among the public and creates modern culture of mutual help. PHO combines effectiveness with the respect for human dignity. The volunteers were in different African countries, and they showed us a short film about it, as well as they explained the volunteer structure they are managing at the moment, recruiting and preparing new volunteers for specialised missions to African countries. Their enthusiasm and energy really captivated the participants, who were really moved by this presentation and short film.

#### **DAY 4 - FRIDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER**

The last day of the study visit the group first visited the Polish Association MONAR, an NGO working with social problems, homelessness, disabled, addicts... This is one of the biggest and oldest polish organisation (since from 1981). It has more than 100 centres specialized in problems concerning drug addiction widespread all over the country and it developed during the years a strong collaboration with Russia. They are heavily relying on the involvement of volunteers, young and not so young. They presented to us some of their basic activities, such as substance abuse prevention with young people, educating young people and children about the dangers linked with alcohol, cigarettes and other substances. They also explained to us some of their specialised projects for long-term homeless people, how they cooperate with Habitat for Humanity, and also showed us photos of some of their projects. We also had the opportunity to meet with an older Danish volunteer, who is a high-school teacher in Copenhagen, but took a year off, and is now doing a one

year voluntary service at MONAR. He was involved in quite a few activities, but especially in preparing a project aiming at children in Russia, which he was preparing at the time of our visit. This project would start in January 2007, and would aim at educating Russian street children in the bigger cities about substance abuse and their consequences.

The last association to be visited was the Polish Association of the Blind, actively involved as a EVS hosting and sending organisation. There we have met 2 coordinators, who spoke to us about their recent EVS short term project involving a young visually impaired boy from Turkey. Their accounts of the project were very interesting, since the biggest challenge for them was to keep him busy, according to the coordinators the young volunteer was exceptional, as soon as he arrived, without speaking any Polish and being in Poland for the first time in his life, he was walking around Warsaw on his own, exploring the country, even travelling by train to the countryside. The organisation was not prepared for this; they weren't able to give him challenging enough tasks.