

AVSO—Association of Voluntary Service Organisations
174, rue Joseph II, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium
Website: www.avso.org E-mail: info@avso.org

Editorial

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As you probably have noticed, AVSO's Newsletter changed date. From now on, the newsletter will arrive at the end of the month. This change has just a practical reason for facilitating our tasks. In addition, all your comments regarding the shape will be introduced in the next issue. We thank you very much for all your comments and we are looking forward to hearing more about your opinion and remarks. We would like as well to invite you to contribute to the Members Corner; you can post articles, announcements, communicating results of projects, etc.

We would like to remind you, that on the 13th June AVSO organises a Conference at the European Parliament called: "Shaping policy for voluntary service through research" - Investigating the effects of research in voluntary service for forming European and global policies. AVSO will present the research results of "The impact of young voluntary service in Europe" but we will have interventions as well from VOESASA an organisation based in South Africa, doing research and lobby for voluntary activities in the region of SADC, the European Commission and the United Nations Volunteers. Contact us if you want attend and you have not register yet, more information is followed in the AVSO this months.

Enjoy the newsletter!

The AVSO team

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★ When can we put the “Action”, into the “Youth in Action” programme?

Seems like the initial enthusiasm concerning the “new” Youth in Action programme is wearing off, and is giving way to frustration and hard feelings. There are a few issues our members and other partners are battling with at the moment, so we just wanted to give an overview, and hear from you on these issues.

Our German members started a national and European level lobbying action concerning the compulsory National Agency training of the EVS volunteers. There is a great consensus in Germany and some other countries, that this is the wrong approach of the EC, basically a step back in the evolution of the EVS programme. We have to remember, that some of these programmes and organisations have existed for more than 20, if for more than 50 years, sending, hosting and training volunteers. Training has always been an integrated part of the programme, involving not just the usual “survival” issues, but also true to the original nature of voluntary action the ideological and sector specific guidance of the volunteers. The training of the volunteers is also the opportunity for the volunteers to get to know their organisations, identify potential mentors, and build a support network that will help them along their journey. Now, the Youth in Action programme, and thus the Commission claims, that for ensuring a better quality EVS programme, the volunteers should all be trained pre-departure, on-arrival, mid-term and debriefed by the National Agencies, since these structures are already in place. The suggestion, that then those organisations, which are not happy with this solution can hold extra trainings, is simply not a good enough excuse. Can the EVS trainers of any NA really cover in the trainings all the varieties and topics of the hosting projects of all their volunteers? From environmental, through disability, to anti-discrimination and racism issues? Not mentioning peace and reconstruction work, post-conflict regions, religious tensions...etc, all topics, which can make a truly fantastic volunteer experience. The fear is, that the trainings will be a bland, dumbed down version of what trainings could and actually should be, and also taking away a role of civil society, that it has been set up to do, and did very well, now is being handed over to the public sector. It means replacing an existing infrastructure basically. What was an extra blow, is that this “rule” came out after the official start of the new programme, in February, when all the lobbying and advocacy work for the programme has been considered finished by the stakeholders.

This however, is not a point of concern for our Italian colleagues; they still do not have a running National Agency.

On a brighter note, we just learnt that the European Commission gave the green light to the National Agencies, so they have now received the model contracts for their beneficiaries - your projects! Even if the projects have started in May or June, those costs are eligible and the contract should cover them. (There is a section on this in the user's guide, about “Non - retroactivity”). The Commission will also shortly sign and send the contracts to the operational National Agencies, and they will be fully operational!

These are our observations about the programme, for which we try to gather the maximum amount of information from the stakeholders, and the Commission and the Executive Agency. We encourage all of you to let us know about potential problems and challenges with the implementation of the new programme. In fact we are organising a seminar in July in Brussels exactly about this: the feedback about the first 4 deadlines and new procedures in the Youth in Action programme, which we will structure and hand-over to the Executive Agency and the European Commission for feedback. The Commission will hold a first evaluation of the new programme in the second half of 2007, so there is hope to make some changes for features, which we would hardly be able to cope with until 2013.

If you have any other concerns, observations, challenges concerning the new programme, please let us know, we want to hear from you too!

YOUTH POLICY IN THE LIMELIGHT: Education, youth and Culture meeting of the Council of European Union

★ The last 25-25 May 2007 was held in Brussels the Meeting on education, youth and culture of the Council of the European Union. This is the representatives of the Governments of the Member States. In conclusion to this meeting several public documents have been published regarding different subjects about youth policy in general such an Equal opportunities for young people, , the council conclusions on the contribution of the cultural and creative sectors to the achievement of the Lisbon Objectives, Inclusion, etc.

It seems that youth policy is turning as a priority for the European Union and not only for the European Council. It has been told that youth policy and voluntary activities is a priority for the next Portuguese presidency but as well for other institutions such the European Economical and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Fortunately, not only the interest on youth is growing but as well an important interest in the intergenerational activities, especially concerning voluntary activities, due to the fact that demographically the youth rate is decreasing.

In the papers that has been recently published the Council takes the head drawing the youth policy for the next two years. The Council request to evaluate in 2009 the general framework for European Cooperation in the youth field and to promote and structure dialogue with young people with a view of increasing the involvement of young people in organisation shaping and implementing youth policies.

The Council underlined the importance that the Youth in Action Programme is playing but they would like to see further involved other institutions as the Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions in the initiatives for young people. Within the themes pointed in the documents are: inclusion; intercultural skills of young people-, values such as tolerance, mutual respect, diversity, equality; solidarity; etc.

Inclusion is one of the key points of the declarations. The document underlines the importance role that the youth in action programme has in including people with fewer opportunities into their activities and ask for promote the development of the young's potential for overcoming stereotypes and prejudices within the society. AVSO welcome the interest that the council pays to the

voluntary activities and mutual understanding as one of the priorities request to the European State Members and the Commission. As well they pointed in their conclusions that research, procedures and data should be used for developing youth policies. The Council invites the Members to enhance the cross-sectoral cooperation within youth and other policies.

[More information.](#)

★ [EUROPEAN COMMISSION ANSWERS THE SOCIAL COMMITTEE IN THEIR VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OPINION.](#)

In December 2006 the European Economic and Social Committee published its opinion in Voluntary Activities. Its opinions are forwarded to the larger institutions - the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. It thus has a key role to play in the Union's decision-making process. To its opinion on voluntary service the European Commission published last week a document replying to remarks that the EESC pointed.

Regarding the petition to have a European Year and a white book in voluntary activities, the European Commission replied that they share the aim to give further visibility to the voluntary activities. However, regarding the European year it is foreseen that for the next years: 2008 will be Intercultural Dialogue Year, 2009 probably will be for the education, culture and creativity and 2010 social exclusion. At this point, the position at AVSO is that voluntary service has an incredible potential as a cross-cutting sector and that in fact we see our role in each of the thematic years even if it not exclusively the European year of voluntary activities. It is obvious that voluntary service bring you opportunities to be active in equal opportunities, intercultural dialogue for fighting against the poverty and the social exclusion and to develop creativity and new forms of culture production and expression.

Member States are requested to develop further policies in voluntary activities and not only in the young sector. The EC has foreseen and communication and a resolution of the council about voluntary activities in 2007. As we have brought out several times, we need to get on board member states and national decisional level because they have at the end the last word in policies that are of high interest to the voluntary service sector such according visa to volunteers, legal status of volunteers and quality of programmes developed at national level.

The European Commission pointed that several programmes as "Europe for citizens" pay attention to voluntary activities but recognise a need to develop a civic learning at the schools. Unfortunately, it is not foreseen to create another voluntary service programme different to the European Voluntary Service but to develop a new action with voluntary activities and sport.

The European Commission state that they are aware of the fact that we need develop depth knowledge about voluntary activities and in conclusion to that they have foreseen to launch a study about the situation of voluntary activities in the Member States. This means that they will wait to the results of the research for measuring different extra actions.

More Information:

European Economic and Social Committee Opinion about voluntary activities: [click here](#).

The Answer from the European Commission to the Economic and Social Committee can be request at the AVSO Secretariat (We have only a French version).



Our colleagues from CEV organised an excellent conference on the 23 and 24 May in Brussels entitled: „**MOVE - Mutual Recognition of skills and competences learned through volunteering**”. AVSO is one of the partners of the MOVE project consortium, and we also participated, alongside with our colleagues from YAP and Solidarités Jeunesses. Most of the participants represented the volunteering sector, but the conference was jam-packed with highly interesting and professional interventions from different stakeholders from the voluntary sector, business, formal education and government as well as accreditation bodies presenting their tools and experiences in the field of identifying, assessing and recognizing skills gained through volunteering. The main objective of the conference was to exchange experience and good practices, with an eye on future cooperation at European level.

As a point of view of AVSO, and representing its members of the voluntary service and youth organisations, the conference had a few very interesting outcomes. Firstly the realisation, how many interesting tools have already been developed to help the volunteers assess their skills and competences at the end of their volunteering. Some of them are completely self-assessment tools, also on-line versions; some of them need a coaching, guiding structure to facilitate the process. Some of them are just easy simple questionnaires, where the volunteer chooses and matches the skills he/she wants to point out, some more elaborate, with which the volunteer can constitute a real portfolio of his/her skills and competences acquired through the volunteering experience. Everybody acknowledges that volunteers do acquire skills and competences, but the question is how to measure them and how to recognise them.

Skills assessment can be part of the reciprocity, meaning that the volunteers get something tangible at the end of their volunteering, a portfolio or certificate listing their newly acquired skills and competences, such as organising working time, communication skills...etc. All the presenters at the conference were assuring the participants, that it is not about evaluating/judging the performance of the volunteers, but more empowering them through making them aware of the skills they do get from the volunteering experience. It boosts their self-confidence, facilitates their career-change or their search for a new job.

This on the other hand brings us back to the perhaps changing nature of volunteering, especially the motivation of volunteers. For some it is in the true spirit of volunteering, giving something back to the community, but for some it is about preparing a career change, or perhaps because they are unemployed, or looking for a job. The non-formal educational value of volunteering is more and more recognised by the formal education and training bodies, by even encouraging and awarding volunteering with credits. Even if we consider, that volunteering enhances employability and that an assessment and certificate is what employers are looking for – you would still need someone to prove that these skills and competences were actually acquired, and that the volunteer indeed was exposed to quality learning opportunities and coaching.

The question is: does the youth voluntary service sector think such skills assessment of value? Should we ask our volunteers participating at an EVS, AFS, work-camp or other voluntary service project, whether they would be interested in being made aware at the end about the skills and competences acquired, and how this influences their chances on the labour market? Is this perhaps a tool that could help during the mid-term seminars to further motivate and boost the volunteers' self esteem and appreciation of their projects and experiences? **If you have any ideas, please let us know, we would love to hear from you.**

★ **SHAPING POLICY FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE THROUGH RESEARCH- EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 13th JUNE: ASAP REGISTRATION!**

Next 13th June, AVSO and MEPs Gisela Kallenbach and Marian Harkin have the pleasure of inviting you to a conference in the European Parliament entitled: "Shaping policy for voluntary service through research" - Investigating the effects of research in voluntary service for forming European and global policies.

During the event will be presented the two last AVSO's research: "The Impact of Young Voluntary Service in Europe" conducted by Promente and "Empowering minorities through International voluntary services – a case study on Intercultural Competencies" conducted by Sonia Haapanen. AVSO has started recently depth cooperation with VOSESA, organisation working in document voluntary activities in the region of SADC. We have invited them to present their "Five-country cross-national study on service and volunteering in the SADC region" at the event. This will help us to further understand differences within volunteering in Europe and African countries.

The second part of the conference will be dedicated to channelling research to mainstreaming policy at the European and Global level. Karin Lopatta- Loibl, official at the European Commission DG EAC will present how voluntary activities are a priority regarding youth policy. In this panel Mae Chao from United Nations Volunteers will explain how to turn potential into policy on the global agenda.

We think that this is an invaluable conference and throughout session for all of us and we are looking forward seeing you there. The Conference is scheduled at 14.00h to 17.30 and will be followed by a reception. Please, if you are interesting on attending and you don't have a permanent card access to the European Parliament Building send to us the registration form ASAP!! If not we will not be able to give you access to the building the day of the Conference.

Further Information:

[Invitation and Agenda](#)

[Registration form.](#)

Further information, please contact Helena at helena@avso.org or Phone +32 (0)2 230 68 13.

★ **Expert seminar on exchange of information and best practice in working with the EU Youth Programme, 3rd 6th July 2007, Brussels, Belgium. OPEN REGISTRATION PROCESS**

The seminar has been officially approved by the European Commission. The registration is open for all of you who applied. However, there is still place available even if you are not a partner.

The main objective of the seminar is to bring together AVSO's members and other voluntary service organisation to evaluate their experience with the previous Youth Programme, as well as to discuss the first impressions about the new Youth in Action Programme. The participants will have the opportunity to exchange experiences about some main topics: from the relationships with the National Agencies to the application and accreditation procedure, from the projects management to the role of the coordinating organisations and the follow-up... etc.

If you are interesting on participate, please contact Cristina Agrillo at Cristina@avso.org as soon as possible.

★ **"Hand-in-hand" – Expert seminar on reinforced mentorship in voluntary service project, 25TH-29TH September 2007, Rome, Italy . OPEN REGISTRATION PROCESS**

The hosting organisation will be our Italian member AFSAI. The objective of our seminar will be to gather voluntary service professionals, youth workers, current and future mentors, sending and hosting organisations to offer a learning experience on mentoring and reinforced mentorship. The target are especially organisations working with young people with fewer opportunities, in the broadest sense of term, namely young people living with disabilities, coming from poor families or care homes, juvenile offenders, ethnic minorities, refugees, immigrants, etc. Professional trainers will give participants an overview on what is mentoring, and what it isn't, what are the requirements to set in place a reinforced mentoring structure, how this can be achieved even by the smallest organizations.

The Seminar has been officially approved by the European Commission. The registration is open till the 15th June for official partners and AVSO Members. If you are interested and you do not belong to the two mentioned cases, please contact Helena at helena@avso.org as soon as possible.

OPEN DAYS EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS.

Last 5th May AVSO was represented at the Open Days of the European Institutions. Different organisations and institutions working on active citizenship participated. Within them the Youth in Action Programme, the Youth Forum, Cafe Babel and other volunteering organisations at local level.

The theme for this year was active citizenship. It was an opportunity for us to reach a public very interested in voluntary service and volunteering. We share our stand with Youth Action for Peace which was represented by Doreen Vorndran, Secretary General of YAP. We distributed a lot of information about the members, given folder, fliers, and work camps opportunities.

AVSO' 27 -THE UNITY MAKES US STRONGER - NEW MEMBERS 2007.

Welcome to AVSO! The registration campaign for new members was officially open in January. If you are working with volunteers and voluntary service, if you are interested in sharing your best practice and worst practice, if you want to join us in promoting voluntary service and lobby at the European Level, if you want to improve your programmes and organisation, if you want to invest in further knowledge about voluntary activities, if you want to get first hand information and news, if you want to receive our services, to sum up if you want to be stronger in Europe: You must ask for the information pack at the address info@avso.org and join us! We will be very pleased to receive you as new member. We look forward to hearing from you soon!



MEMBER'S CORNER

LUNARIA AWARDED GOLDEN PRICE GRUNDTVIG IN THE LIFELONG LEARNING AWARD WINNERS 2007.

The Multilateral Project "Still Active! - Performing Voluntary Service after 55 Years Old" developed the concept of and operational approaches to implementing an international voluntary service for older people. This voluntary work is not only conceptualized as a way to be active and useful to others, but also as a recognized vehicle for informal learning.



The project has been a success, they have demonstrated that volunteers mustn't be only young and there is not a limited age for participating at exchanges programmes. As Lunaria and recently the Member States started to point, the demographical change which show that there is less and less young people in Europe should invite us to reflect on further possibilities to develop active citizenship for +55 people.

The key successful factor of Still active has been the underlined of informal education for volunteers and for hosting organisations. Lunaria has developed a series of manuals for senior volunteers and hosting organisations using the results of the Project. The best proof of such success is that Lunaria has been approached for a lot of institutions interested in launch new opportunities for senior volunteering.



BRIEFING

Brussels, 10 May 2007. First-ever European strategy for culture: contributing to economic growth and intercultural understanding. The European Commission today adopted a policy statement on the role of culture in a globalising world. It proposes the first-ever European strategy for culture. The Communication affirms the central role of culture in the process of European integration and proposes a cultural agenda for Europe, and for its relations with third countries. Its adoption follows an extensive consultation process involving decision-makers and interested parties from all over Europe. [More Information.](#)

Brussels, 14 May 2007. EESC called for a depth compromise of the civil society and a better inclusion of immigrants. EESC took part for the first time in an Informal Meeting of the Ministries on European Affairs of the EU. Its participation is the recognition for its work in the involvement of the civil society at the local level and the work regarding migrant people. The ministry of Portugal invite to the EESC in taking active part in the next months when the presidency will be held by his country. [More Information.](#)

Brussels, 22 May 2007. Civil Society is responding to Climate Change. On 16 May the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised a public hearing on climate change. A large number of representatives of civil society and the EU institutions gave presentations on what is being done, what can be done and what should be done to combat climate change. The speakers list included representatives from the industry, trade unions, NGOs, and professional organisations. [More Information.](#)



CALL FOR PROPOSALS AND TENDERS

★ **Call for Tender in PROGRESS: Service contract for the establishment and maintenance of a network of experts in gender equality, social inclusion, health and long-term care. Deadline 12/07/2007** The contract therefore entails the constitution of a network of experts in gender equality, social inclusion and health and long term care. The duration of the contract is for one year and can be renewable 3 times. Countries included Europe'27 and EFTA countries. More information in Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. [More Information](#)

★ **EU-Canada Call for Proposals 2007 - Transatlantic Exchange Partnerships (TEP) Deadline 12/06/2007**

The European Commission is pleased to announce a new call for proposals to develop Transatlantic Exchange Partnerships (TEP) between the European Union and Canada. This call is subject to the renewal of the EU-Canada co-operation agreement in higher education, training and youth. The call for proposals covers the following action: EU-Canada Joint Study and/or Training Programmes. This Action provides support for consortia of EU and Canadian higher education institutions and vocational education and training institutions to promote and develop joint study and/or training programmes and to implement student/faculty mobility. [More Information](#)

★ **European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. Open call for proposals –DG EAC/07/07. Deadline 31/07/2007.** The Commission is launching this call in order to co-finance a series of emblematic actions on European Scale aimed at promoting Intercultural Dialogue, reaching as many people as possible. The objectives should be arise awareness of the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 and understanding the meaning and importance of the Intercultural Dialogue. Financial contribution from the Commission is 80% of total eligible cost of each project. [More Information](#).

★ **European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. Restricted call for proposals- DG EAC/08/07. Deadline 31st July for projects co-financed on 2007 budget and 14 September 2007 for projects co-financed under 2008 Budget.** The Commission is launching this restricted call for proposals in order to co-finance events and initiatives at national level and regional level with a strong European Dimension aimed at promoting the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, through directly involving or reaching as many people as possible. With particular attention to civic education and learning to appreciate other people and their differences. The bodies responsible for submitting Projects to the European Commission for financial support. Financial support will be granted to 27 projects (1 by Member State). It is foreseen to co-finance 4 to 7 national projects out of 27 in 2007 and to 20 to 23 national projects in 2008. 50% of total eligible cost of each project. [More Information](#)

★ **Call for proposals for projects promoting innovation and quality in the youth sector youth in Action Programme. EACEA/02/07 Deadline 30 June 2007.** Action 4.4 Youth in Action Programme. The intention is to support projects that seek to adopt, implement and encourage innovative and good quality approaches in the fields of non-formal education for young people and youth work. The projects will aim to support the integration of young people with fewer opportunities living in suburban areas in Europe. Eligible countries Member States, EFTA and Turkey. Projects must included 4 different countries. Co-financial cooperation no more than 65% of the total eligible cost. [More Information](#).

For more information and to subscribe or unsubscribe to the AVSO Newsletter, please write to info@avso.org.