

Summary : “Youth Volunteering in a Changing Europe”

The three-day international seminar “Youth Volunteering in a Changing Europe”, took place in Istanbul 24th- 28th November. 55 Young people from 21 local, national, and international youth organizations came together for the purpose of sharing different approaches to volunteerism as a tool for youth participation in the changing circumstances of Europe.

TOG, a youth NGO, has been working to spread the idea of volunteerism amongst young people living in Turkey since 2003. Young people volunteer at self-created social projects. Some young people volunteer with the purpose of developing their own skills, while others volunteer to help others. This duality of self-serving reasons versus altruistic ones was discussed during the seminar. Furthermore, the seminar fostered the ideals of the “European Year of Volunteering” – to create a space for participants to share their experiences on youth volunteering and active youth participation in democratic life from a local level to an international seminar.

While discussing volunteerism, young people, citizenship, youth organizations and youth participation, the seminar participants were able to share successes and practices in voluntary youth work. The different topics were discussed in panels and in small groups and, at the end of the seminar, the participants successfully created a declaration on youth volunteering and recommendations on the role of youth volunteering, support and recognition of youth volunteering, the role of youth organizations, the role of non-formal education in the development of youth work and the value of volunteering for the personal and social development of young people.

The main objective of the project was creating a transnational participation area for young people (age between 18-30) coming from Youth NGOs during the international seminar.

And the **objectives** were as follows:

- Sharing the best practices of youth volunteering as a tool of “active participation”
- Learning from each other through experience sharing
- Supporting the European active citizenship
- Supporting the networking of the youth NGOs in Europe
- Celebrating the European Year of Volunteering
- Creating a declaration on youth volunteering for the peaceful society in Europe.
- 55 young people representing their youth NGOs were together during the international seminar.

The project was financed by the National Agency of Turkey and was implemented by TOG in assistance of YEU International. The participation of the partner organizations from the South East European countries was sponsored by TACSO.

Outcomes

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE ROLE OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering addresses the needs of society ranging from (inter-/intra) personal to complex socio-political structures.

1. Youth volunteering takes place where the needs of society are not being fulfilled. Youth volunteering fills this gap that the public and private sector does not (fully) cover.
2. Youth volunteering fills this gap by creating (offering) equal opportunities on all levels of society. Furthermore, it supports and improves existing opportunities and enhances youth participation.
3. Youth volunteering builds a sense of belonging amongst people sharing common values.
4. Youth volunteering proves that action is possible, overcoming any barrier.
5. Youth volunteering is a pro-active role model for promoting alternative ways of actions and developments to the public and private sector and to civil society.
6. Socio-economic empirical research is necessary to prove the positive social impact of volunteering for the welfare state.
7. Youth volunteering gives an accurate picture of society. It raises the awareness of society and increases the visibility of people's needs.

SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTEERING

1. European, national and local authorities should actively promote volunteering and its social and economic value in public sphere (e.g. through campaigns) and initiate a collaboration process with NGO sector in order to develop a support structure of volunteering.
2. International institutions and national governments being in dialogue with civil society should recognize volunteering and the legal status of volunteers, their rights and responsibilities.
3. The values of volunteering, such as active participation, should be integral part of the formal education system. In order to achieve this aim, authorities should support partnership between the institutions of the formal education system and civil society.
4. National governments should develop a supportive tax system for volunteers and NGOs (e.g. free taxes for volunteering projects, deduction of taxes for personal incomes and companies).
5. Governments should remove legal obstacles for volunteering (e.g. simplified visa procedure, internationalization of health care system in Europe).

6. European, national and local authorities should provide sustainable funding (particularly in the form of administrative grants) for organizations involved in voluntary work.

7. Voluntary organizations should use various tools for increasing the recognition of skills, knowledge and attitudes developed through volunteering. The use of these tools should be promoted by institutions.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

1. Youth organizations should be transparent for everyone by using active communication and a common language in order to reach a more diverse group of young people.

2. Youth organizations should promote a framework for organizational sustainability by balancing the participation of youth with managing resources, organizational structures and action plans.

3. Youth organizations should promote a framework for organizational sustainability by creating an institutional memory containing experiential reports, past evaluations and publications.

4. Youth organizations should build personal and organizational capacity by offering training opportunities within relevant fields (e.g. project management and communication).

5. Youth organizations should motivate volunteers and members by supporting and mentoring them in an accessible and transparent environment.

6. Youth organizations should enhance networking with local/national/international youth organizations and other entities such as media, institutions, universities, former volunteers and members in order to exchange best practices and to attract more attention.

THE ROLE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH WORK

1. Formal education has standardized processes and it is knowledge and result oriented. Therefore, non-formal education should complement it so as to increase the SKAs of young people.

2. In order to improve the role of NFE in youth work, trainers\facilitators\organizers\participants should exchange best practices in the learning process.

3. Self-development should continuously be the aim of trainers\organizers and facilitators

4. Trainers should seek for feedback in different stages of the process and use the feedbacks for self-development and organizational development.

5. Youth workers, trainers and facilitators should identify and respect the needs of learners. For example, they should apply different styles of learning accordingly (visual, oral and kinesthetic) and use methodologies which are non-discriminative, respectful to others and to their diversities.

6. Due to the fact that many countries (and their institutions, partners, stakeholders) do not recognize non-formal education, it is important to raise the awareness of the need for NFE.

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING FOR THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Youth organizations should provide a detailed reference of what the volunteer has done and accomplished during the voluntary process with a certificate of participation in order to increase the recognition of the volunteer's personal development.
2. The society should recognize the voluntary contribution with references and certificates of voluntary work given by the organizations and portfolios should be designed by organizations and/or by the volunteers themselves.
3. Youth organizations should make a S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time wised) program and implement it according to these objectives and participants' needs to achieve a higher personal development.
4. Youth organizations should motivate young people (showing them good practices, organizing seminars, training courses, visiting local NGO's, etc) to participate in volunteering projects by promoting personal development opportunities.
5. Local and international NGOs and public institutions should invest in volunteers and youth by sending them to non-formal educational activities, since SKAs (Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes) can have a positive affect on social development.

DECLARATION

DECLARATION: “THE VALUE OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN A CHANGING EUROPE”

Istanbul, 27th November 2011

We, the participants of the International Seminar “YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN A CHANGING EUROPE”, organised by *Toplum Gönüllüleri Vakfı* and *Youth for Exchange and Understanding International* in the frame of the European Year of Volunteering 2011, have developed a declaration on the importance of youth volunteering addressing stakeholders who dedicate their work to young people.

Preamble:

Youth volunteering is a proactive role model that presents alternative ways of actions and developments in the changing Europe by addressing the needs of society, whether they are composed of individual or complex socio-political structures. By building a sense of belonging among people who share common values and by overcoming any barrier, youth volunteering proves that action is possible.

Youth volunteering raises awareness and increases the visibility of people’s needs by creating and offering equal opportunities to all levels of society. It creates positive social impact and contributes to the creation of the state of welfare.

Declaration:

We believe that youth organizations must be accessible to all young people interested in volunteering by reaching out to a more diverse group of young people. The organizations must provide a sustainable framework by keeping a balance between the number of volunteers and the existing organizational resources. Furthermore, it is the youth organizations that must motivate volunteers and members by supporting and mentoring them in a learning environment. It is also of great importance to give volunteers a detailed description of the voluntary process and a certificate of participation in order to be able to measure personal development.

We fully encourage youth organizations to work on the development of programmes that combine formal and non-formal education. In this way the process, outcomes and competences of youth workers such as trainers, facilitators, educators and teachers is improved in order to encourage the human resource development.

We call for joint actions in all European countries to establish a common framework for the recognition of non-formal education and to regard it as a contribution to the personal and social development of young people. European, national and local authorities and institutions dedicated to young people and youth organizations must actively cooperate in promoting the social and economic value of youth volunteering. In this way, they can develop support structures for these organizations and create additional volunteering opportunities.

International institutions especially governments, must support and encourage partnership between formal education institutions and civil society organizations by working with non-formal education to stimulate the exchange of best practice and experiences. Youth organizations must use different tools for the recognition of competences of young people developed through volunteering.

The establishment of the legal status of volunteering in every country in Europe must be recognized as a necessary step to provide a legal frame for voluntary activities. Therefore, we strongly encourage governments to develop supportive tax systems, remove legal obstacles of voluntary work to ease youth mobility and to provide free access to visas and to health care.

In the changing Europe, youth organizations must be supported by European authorities and governments and be provided for by sustainable funding in the form of administrative and project grants in order to empower young people and provide volunteering opportunities.