



Report of the Elderly Volunteer Network Meeting « Mobility project – Golden Age »

**Tuesday 13 October 2009
Paris, France**

1) Latest news and prospects:

- The Mobility project is going well. The first exchange trips for European volunteers took place in May 2009 supported by the enthusiasm and hard work of the national Contacts and the participants themselves.
Many countries are involved in the project. We must continue to extend the number of exchanges, with as many European countries as possible.
The reports from the trips are very good, and the participants over 50 are talking about their excellent experiences, and seem more motivated to carry out new projects in their own countries.

- A few figures from the projects:

- Number of registrations since May 2009: **19 in total**
- Number of exchange trips carried out since May 2009: **10**
- Number of evaluation questionnaires received: **8**
- Number of exchange trips being planned: **5**

Communications: the website www.ssvpglobal.org is updated regularly with items about the Mobility project or reports of trips put on-line as they become available.

- 2010 will be a year for evaluating, reporting, collecting the results of the Project. All the experience gain during the exchange trip must be gathered to create a usable document: the Exchanges manual. We now have to ask ourselves about the benefits of this project, and how to carry it forward.
The next European volunteers' network meeting will take place in Spring 2010.

2) General assessment of the first trips:

- **Reports on first exchange trips**

The feedback from the exchange trips from the volunteers has all been very positive. The results from the first evaluation questionnaires underline a real desire from the participants to draw inspiration from the projects they have visited to renew their own activities at home. The volunteers also believe it is important to share their good experiences for better service of the weakest, and to form and strengthen new contacts among volunteers at a European level. Most of the participants found no problems while organising the trips or during their stay in the host country. On the contrary, they mainly report an excellent welcome and the desire to encourage retired people to join in voluntary work.

Several articles have also been written following the exchange trips, and communication initiatives have already been taken or are being prepared in Conferences or National Councils. Some very comprehensive and informative reports will be put on line soon. They were available to read at the network meeting in Paris. We must continue to inform about the Mobility Project and distribute our experiences to more people over 50 years of age.

Reports from countries:

- *Spain*: For particular reasons, relating to the National Council of Spain, the exchange trips had to start later in this country. Concha de Tuero Alvarez, the Contact in Spain, described the various actions carried out in Madrid and Spain (**See APPENDIX 1**)
- *Italy*: Maurizio Ceste, Contact for Italy, issued an invitation for the next gathering of the Family Conferences in Marina di Massa which will be from 28 May to 30 May 2010 at Marina di Massa (Tuscany).
- *Austria*: Erwin Derler, Contact in Austria, reported on the study trip to Scotland of two Austrian Vincentians, for a prison visiting project.
- *Romania*: Eva Maria Peter, Contact in Romania, gave four reports of trips between Romania and Austria, Hungary, England&Wales, and Germany.
- *England and Wales*: It is important to note that the Contact's address has changed. Please contact Kevin McDermott as follows:

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Alton, Hampshire, England
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kevin.mcdermott@gmx.co.uk

In addition, England and Wales would be very pleased to welcome European volunteers. So far there have been no proposals for exchange trips, and they would like to welcome Vincentians or volunteers from other associations to present their projects. Please contact Mr. McDermott.

➤ **Communication**

Since the last meeting of the European volunteers' network on 12 March 2009, communications took place, particularly reports from conferences or National Councils published on National Council websites or in National Vincentian newsletters. Please send us at CGI a copy of the article or the webpage about the Mobility Project.

Briefings about the progress of the Mobility project and articles appear regularly in the site newsletter on the Saint Vincent de Paul Society international website: www.ssvpglobal.org
The first 3 reports on exchange trips are already available on line, in French, English and Spanish. Further reports will be put on line in the coming days and weeks. Thank you for sending them to CGI as soon as possible after the study visit, to provide better communications about all the exchange trips.

Finally an article describing the Mobility project appears in Newsletter n° 78 on the Internet site of the European Volunteering Centre (CEV): http://www.cev.be/25-cev_news-FR.html

The CEV is a European network which presently brings together 74 volunteering centres and development agencies, normally operating at a national or regional level in Europe, which work together to support and promote voluntary activities. The purpose of the CEV is to create a Europe in which volunteering might become a central factor in social cohesion, founded on principles of solidarity and active citizenship.

➤ **Associations or organisations outside the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul**

Reliable contacts have been established with organisations working in similar areas to ourselves. These first moves towards non-Vincentian organisations are very important in opening the Mobility project up to other associations.

We are presently in contact with 3 non-Vincentian organisations interested in taking part in the Mobility Project.

- *Caritas Malta*: *Caritas Malta* was established to relieve poverty and promote human development and social justice, by witnessing to Christian faith and gospel values. Preparation is underway for two groups of volunteers. They would like to make exchange visits with Great Britain or Italy in December 2009 and January 2010. We are awaiting further information.

Website: <http://www.caritasmalta.org/>

- *Association Promotion et Solidarité - Centre de Service pour le Volontariat du Lazio (SPES)* : The main aim of Spes, the association of « Promotion and Solidarity » associations is to encourage distribution, growth and quality of volunteering and solidarity in the Latium region of Italy by providing free services that combine professional skills and provision of specific requirements for volunteering. SPES would be very interested in sending volunteers aged over 50 to Vincentian projects relating to community and inter-generational activities, local initiatives to help the most deprived, help in neighbourhood activities, social insertion work and support for the sick and their families.

Website: <http://www.volontariato.lazio.it/spes/>

We encourage you to contact the CGI, via Marie Grosjean, if you have projects in your country to suggest for the volunteers of *Caritas Malta* or *SPES*.

- *Mains Ouvertes*: This association formed in 1979, becoming a Federation in 2006, is intended for men and women normally excluded from society, to help them reintegrate in human, social and professional terms, with the help of items given by individuals or from businesses.

From 15 to 19 October 2009, a Belgian couple and 5 Hungarians will attend meetings, site visits and workshops with people involved in reintegration, through the Mobility project.

We would encourage you to continue with this work, forming other contacts with non-Vincentian associations such as HOPE in Scotland (visiting prisoners and supporting their families), through which the Mobility project can reach the greatest number of European volunteers.

3) The evaluation questionnaire: introduction

We thought it useful to restate the various sections of the evaluation questionnaire and stress the usefulness of this document. This document must be available for the rest of the Mobility project and for writing the Exchanges manual.

As the Contact, we would like you to ensure that the evaluation questionnaires are properly filled in. We would also remind you that this document must be distributed to the participants before they leave, so that they can reflect on it beforehand.

What is the evaluation questionnaire used for?

- For the participant: a way of making a report, finding out what worked and what didn't, specifying how the study trip will help in the volunteer's own work on returning home. This is important information that is also interesting to national Contacts.
- For the European Union (EU): the evaluation questionnaire is a mark of trust and the effective completion of the cross-border exchange trips.
- For the Project organisation committee: it is also feedback for the CGI, necessary to find out if the project has been fruitful, and if the specified objectives are achieved.
- For writing Exchange manuals: these evaluation questionnaires will be used as the initial basis for writing the Exchange manuals, to draw on experience, to suggest good practice and to provide a concrete illustration of what a European volunteers' network could be.

- Question 1: Reasons for the trip and lessons drawn: the participants must provide information and the most detailed explanations available of the subject and reasons for the trip.

- Question 2: Description of activities: this relates to the precise content of the study trip. As far as possible, a description of the daily activities would be ideal for the CGI. This also provides an example for other volunteers, Vincentians or otherwise, who have not so far ventured to take part, and understand the need for cross-border exchange visits for voluntary organisations and for the volunteers themselves.

- Question 3: What about follow-up to the trip? This part covers reporting and publicising the project. The Mobility project organising committee needs to know how information will be distributed to other volunteers. This uses publishing of articles, an account given within their conference, organisation of a social evening about the project. This report might also be shared with other organisations working in similar fields to our own.

- Question 4: influence from the trip on the voluntary work of the participants: this is one of the most important parts of the questionnaire. It links directly to the project results. What is the Mobility project for? What do we want to do with it? Are we forming the network of European volunteers we hope for? Are the Vincentians and other volunteers more motivated? Do they want to play a greater part in their Conference or organisation? It is very important to know if the dynamic experienced during the trip has concrete effects later, if new projects can be carried out, new 50+ volunteers recruited who are active for the poorest people.

- Comments and photos: the comments and photos are very important for the reports to appear on the SVP's international website and will be very useful for writing the Exchanges manual.

4° Exchanges manual: result of Mobility project and the need for a working group

From here on, we must consider the results of the Mobility project that we are expecting, as well as identify ways to ensure its durability. In Spring 2010, it would already be too late to consider the contributions made by the exchange trips and the benefits of the European volunteers' network for people over 50. For this reason, the national Contacts, divided into two discussion workshops, began to reflect on the benefits and durability of the Mobility project, answering the following three questions:

- What do the participants consider to be the benefits of the project?
- What will the results be at the end of the project?
- How will the SSVP and the European Union benefit from the experience of the study trips in the Exchange manual? What will the specific benefits be to Vincentian volunteers? And on the development of the volunteers' network involving other groups?

The two rapporteurs emphasised the major benefit of setting up shared projects among older, active European volunteers, on the importance of mutual acquaintanceship across Europe, on funding and the search for grants, on communications and finally on the extension of the project to other age groups and other countries where the SVP is present. **(See all responses in APPENDIX 2)**

**Thank you to all of you for your enthusiasm, your commitment to the project,
and your steady, hard work!**

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1: Description of projects in Madrid and Spain

APPENDIX 2: Report from workshops on the benefits and durability of the Mobility project