

Bringing Down the Barriers

We, the participants of the 1st Africa- Europe Youth summit want to express our concerns regarding the increasing challenges faced by the youth leaders from outside the Schengen area to obtain a visa. In spite of the serious efforts undertaken by the partners of the Summit, numerous participants have been deprived the right to attend our gathering, aiming at a greater solidarity and cooperation in global youth work.

Our vision is a society open for all, a society without barriers. A society which, instead of keeping mobility only as a theoretical opportunity for young people, gives them the possibility to travel and work in other countries and cultures without being discriminated against. Our vision is a society without xenophobia and racism.

Regional cooperation of the future should be about solving global problems by pooling sovereignty and setting up a framework of mutually accepted rules. However, in the current political environment, the dominant theme in political discourse is security. Political ideologies provide different explanations on what the sources of insecurity are, as well as how to provide protection against it. Insecurity may span from economic to social and even cultural fears.

As immigration is seen as a growing threat to economic stability and security, parties from both the right and the left have toughened immigration laws radically. This crackdown on immigrants is probably the most appalling and shameful of the European policies of recent years. Destabilisation through immigration is not a sign that rules are not tough enough, but rather that immigration policies have failed.

Many examples of discrimination, xenophobia and racism start not in the dark corners of streets but in the long queues of some embassies and consulates. There are clear differences in how citizens of countries are treated. Young people taking part in international youth work frequently experience detailed questioning and humiliating treatment at border controls.

Development needs youth and needs intercultural dialogue. Intercultural dialogue can have the best results with people to people exchanges and joint projects that are hardly possible due to visa obstacles.

Problems in obtaining visas have increased as more and more embassies have moved from accepting invitations by fax to demanding only original invitation letters. Sending original letters from hosting organisation to embassies is time-consuming and results in additional expenses for Youth NGOs. Moreover, embassies have progressively changed their regulations for the provision of visas, demanding additional documentation ranging from health certificates to letters authenticating the originality of name.

We, the participants of the Africa- Europe Youth Summit assure policy makers that security will not increase through increased boarder control but through increased development cooperation and poverty eradication.

We call upon the European Union, the Council of Europe, the other European institutions, as well as the National governments, to make coordinated efforts in facilitating the mobility of young people, especially in the field of youth work, by ensuring easier visa procedures and visa waivers.

We want to express our support for a special type of visa providing an easier and consistent procedure for people involved in international youth work, humanitarian work and educational exchanges.