

EUROPE REGION OVERVIEW: AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR

EUROPE REGION EGM DOCUMENT # 4

November 2020



INSPIRING GIRL SCOUTS AND GUIDES ACROSS EUROPE

WAGGGS Europe Region Overview: an extraordinary year

Introduction

The year to date has been fraught with challenges caused, in great part, by the COVID-19 pandemic. At global and regional level, WAGGGS has taken key decisions in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organisation and protect the health of staff and volunteers. In this fast changing work environment, the region has also welcomed Olivia Funnell as the new Head of Europe and Evelyn Dick as the Committee Treasurer who have worked hard to manage the Brussels office and respond to Member Organisations' (MO) calls for greater financial transparency. The Regional Committee, volunteers and staff team are adapting work strands in order to continue to deliver an effective value proposition to our Members in the context of the pandemic's impact on Members' activity within the region.

Governance and Management

In order that the region remains financially viable with positive reserves at the end of the triennium in 2022, we have taken a number of initiatives to reduce regional overheads. By the end of September 2020, we will have moved our operations out of the current office space located in the centre of Brussels and will seek a more cost-effective, long-term workspace for our staff team. We currently anticipate that this will be early Spring 2021 once the risks of a second wave of the COVID-19 are understood more clearly and in keeping with the Belgian government's guidelines.

We took advantage of the Belgian government's temporary unemployment scheme for our Projects Coordinator, Eirini Kappou and our Office Assistant, Claire Denton from 1st May until 31st August 2020 whilst face-to-face activity was suspended and future activity modified.

In line with the WAGGGS no-travel policy for 2020, the Regional Committee is preparing to conduct its biannual governance meeting online in November. In addition, the EGM, which was due to take place at the World Conference in Uganda in the summer, will be held online following a series of supporting webinars.

Support for MOs and the region

As we strive to help our Members navigate the complexities of operating in these extraordinary circumstances, our work has focussed on gathering information from the region to understand how we can respond effectively to our Members' changing needs. Against the backdrop of a WAGGGS global restructure, the foundation, training and output of our WAGGGS regional working groups this year has enriched our services to the region. Some highlights from across the groups include the well-received resource

to support MOs with the re-opening of their activities after the first COVID-19 lockdown produced by our Capacity Building group and anticipation of their webinar on Fund Development. Our External Relations group ran an informative high-level panel discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on girls and young women with contributions from European institutions and MOs which demonstrated WAGGGS Europe as a convening power on youth and gender within the region. Our Communications team researched and produced a blog to support Guides and Scouts in their endeavours to remain active and true to the movement's principles during lockdown. Thank you to the Membership for responding to research enquiries and surveys and especially to those Members who have generously shared their strategies and experience for the benefit of the network.

Joint work with WOSM

At the time of writing, we are excited about the prospect of our first Academy online this year. This new endeavour will test our skills to adapt to change and is an opportunity to involve a wider community of delegates. So far this year, the partnership has delivered an IC forum, an online CEO network meeting and the foundation of joint volunteer teams to focus on the joint partnership strategy, and Refugees and Human Rights.

Looking ahead to 2021

The region will continue to face challenging times and we are aware of the need to remain flexible and adapt to the limitations imposed by the pandemic on our Members and on the WAGGGS staff and volunteers.

We have tabled two motions at this year's EGM in recognition of the concerns about the European Voluntary Contribution voiced by large and small Members across the region who have been equally affected. We believe these motions will ensure continued and consistent contributions from all our Members. Our budget reforecast takes into account the original pledge agreed at the Regional Conference 2019 to end the triennium with healthy reserves of €85,000. In order to achieve this as closely as possible, we will continue to keep our administrative costs in check without compromising on the quality of our tailored services to our European MOs and the wellbeing and effectiveness of our small, Brussels based team. Internally, priority will be given to diversifying our income and to this end, budget has been allocated to hiring a fundraising consultant to work with staff to secure external funding. We will also focus on strengthening the ties between our team of four core staff members, global staff experts and our 45 strong network of volunteers. The expertise that we can provide together will be channelled in particular into a strong capacity building offer for the region to help maintain and grow our Membership and act as an international hub.

We assume that restrictions on travel will continue into the first half of 2021 and whilst some activity can continue online throughout, we aim to bring together lead volunteers and the Regional Committee face-to-face in the second half of the year. Current

experience shows that the online format cannot fully replace the warmth, energy and discussion kindled by meeting together in person.

Our partnership with WOSM remains central to the delivery of our strategic themes. At the time of writing, we plan to continue preparations for the European Jamboree in August 2021 together with ZHP and WOSM, subject to participant numbers, circumstances of the pandemic and government policy in the host country of Poland. We look forward to leading on the development of the Academy in Wiesbaden, Germany in partnership with the host rdp (the German Federation for Guiding and Scouting), and using the learning from our virtual Academy 2020 to enhance the experience for our MOs and delegates.

Preparation will begin for our Regional Conference in 2022 in the Netherlands where we anticipate a momentous and vital congregation of the network at the end of this extraordinary triennium.

It is difficult to provide a clear overview of how our activity will unfold into 2022 given the continued uncertainties of the pandemic. For this reason we propose to reconvene next year to discuss our budget and activity for 2022. However, we have decided that it will be necessary to cancel or postpone the WAGGGS Camp 2022, partly due to the absence of proposals from our Members to host the event. In addition, it would be a challenge to plan such a large event with significant financial implications whilst the long-term implications of the pandemic remain unknown and particularly as we are aware that many MOs will have postponed their camps. Nonetheless, we believe that there is still interest for such an event to take place in Europe, and we hope that it will be possible in the next triennium.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the region faces many challenges and that the pandemic will to a certain extent define this triennium. However, as we reconsider how to deliver our services to our Members, we hope that this will result in new and creative ways of working. Unsurprisingly, the spotlight has focussed on our regional finances as we scrutinise our income and expenditure in the light of the pressures we and our Members face. In this regard, we have worked hard to provide clearer financial reporting for this EGM in response to a justified demand for greater transparency.

Thank you to our Regional Committee, our volunteers and our Brussels staff team - Giulia, Eirini, Claire and Olivia - for being flexible, patient and remaining committed to keeping the show on the road as we all face extraordinary individual and collective challenges. Thank you to our Membership for your contributions to the network and we look forward to continuing our services through to the end of this triennium.