

German Voluntary Service Organisations

c/o Action Committee Service for Peace e.V., rue Joseph II 174, 1000 Brüssel

Statement on the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme as seen by German Voluntary Service Organisations and European partner organisations with due consideration of the promotion of the European Voluntary Service (EVS)

1. Important political cornerstones for the European Voluntary Service

1.1 The EVS strengthens the European Union, and a civil society engagement for peace, social justice, as well as for human rights, democracy, and European cohesion.

There are many longstanding partnerships among service organisations of international voluntary services in different European countries. Through these partnerships organisations learn from one another not only on the level of civil society organisations, but also through educational preparation and support of volunteers, who are sent or hosted abroad.

Therefore, within the framework of EVS the activities of and cooperation among civil society organisations should be reinforced. Accordingly, the guidelines for funding as well as the practice of national agencies should be adapted to the different countries, i.e. regarding seminars and support of volunteers provided by service organisations as well as the application process and funding practice.

1.2 The EVS strengthens non-formal education and open-ended learning processes of young people

The volunteers acquire personal competences and competencies which will improve their future chances on the labour market in a substantial way, by encouraging life long learning. European societies will benefit greatly. However, it would be too much to expect, that all labour market related and / or socio-political goals of the EU can be met by the EVS programme. On the one hand the EVS programme already has become more labour market-oriented, which is useful for certain countries. On the other hand, the programme has lost some momentum as far as an educational and orienting year are concerned.

1.3 To visualize the EVS as a specific form of civil engagement and non-formal education

First, through the EVS programme (international) voluntary services have become known in many EU-member states.

However, only very few states have their own national and international funding programmes. Therefore, it is important to visualize EVS as an independent funding programme. The anniversary year 2016 (twenty years of EVS) offers a very good opportunity to do just that. However, by its attribution to the Youth in Action programme as part of Erasmus+, EVS runs the risk of not being perceived in its own independent significance, especially if its «brand name» is not displayed in all EU media and public relations in an autonomous way. We would like to see a greater visibility of EVS within the Erasmus+ Programme and Youth in Action.

Because of the high unemployment rate of young people in non EU countries and EU countries, only a small part can afford to travel to foreign countries. Therefore, we underline the importance of insuring and enhancing the visibility of EVS and its additional options in all Programm and Partner Countries.

2. Feedback on the European Voluntary Service with regards to content and programme

2.1 To stay in step with the programme:

- It is of good and lasting importance to engage volunteers from third countries (Partner Countries) in the programme – this is, of course, of increasing importance vis à vis the crises and the conflicts on the borders of the EU.
- The EVS takes into account the specific effort it takes to support people with special needs.
- National agencies and Salto Youth offer a wide variety of informational meetings and training.
- The EVS offers sufficient funding, in order to give many young people the possibility of participation in a voluntary service.

2.2 Request for more responsibility of the service organisations

Voluntary service organisations wish to participate in the EVS funding programme in a self-determined manner that respects and promotes a diverse field of service organisations. Seen from an EU perspective, the EVS is, in regard to its content, an independent programme. For service organisations with volunteers' programmes with their own profiles this leads to competition and parallel structures, for example in regard to seminars. Because of the EVS funding, volunteers are obliged to take part in parallel training cycles. For the service organisations it is difficult to explain why it has to be that way. Service organisations are not administrative agencies, they have their own political and social agendas and values. These, of course, correspond to the European idea. Many voluntary service organisations have a long tradition of providing voluntary services of high quality. From our perspective this is not perceived clearly enough by the funding programme and the national agencies. We request a more independent funding by the EU that will allow many good ideas to become reality.

This also includes the obligation to participate in EVS-seminars. Volunteers, whose voluntary services are funded by the EVS, are obliged to participate in EVS-seminars as well as in seminars provided by the service organisations. We are in favour of letting the service organisations decide if the volunteers should participate in the seminars of the service organisations or in those of the EVS.

2.3 Understanding the role of volunteers, of partners and of service organisations

We understand a voluntary service as an interaction of volunteers, service organisations and their hosting organisations, respectively projects. From our point of view, only the volunteer should take the centre stage within EVS. This may cause conflicts between service organisations and projects. For us it is of utmost importance to have a triangular cooperation. Especially in case of difficulties, all involved parties shall be heard.

3. More flexibility for service organisations in regard to funding of the services

The EVS funds voluntary services proportionately and only in part. Therefore, service organisations must acquire funds on their own in order to finance their activities. It should be possible to let volunteers participate in funding, for example through a solidarity contribution and finding other contributors by creating a circle of friends or «God parents». Please note, in this context a principle prevails: no one shall be excluded from a voluntary service for financial reasons.

3.1 Funding of personnel costs

The expenditure of time and the amount of work for coordinating organisations for the application and settlement, as well as for other tasks are very high. It would be very desirable to have a grant for personnel costs. Through the new programme, extra platforms have come up (Participant Portal, Mobility Tool, Youthpass, OLS, etc.). These require much more effort, as the hosting organisations and the volunteers need more support. Unfortunately, some of the platforms don't function as they should, and the national agencies and the executive agencies often give very little support.

Thus, to support interested people with special needs (persons with physical disabilities and psychological problems, educationally disadvantaged applicants, etc.) in the best possible way personnel costs should also be subsidised.

3.2 Improving the application and accreditation process

The applications are complex, and especially for those who apply for the first time, they are a big challenge. Three hundred pages of guidelines are more than dissuasive.

Because of the extensiveness of the programme, the guidelines are often unclear and in large parts much too global.

We would very much appreciate the possibility to apply for several years in advance.

In many countries the procedure of accreditation is very slow. For the hosting organisations they are very elaborate (obligation to participate in extra seminars, visits from representatives of the national agencies).

We appreciate the offer of further training for hosting organisations and service organisations! At the same time we think an obligation to participate in these trainings is problematic, particularly since hosting a volunteer from abroad is always a surplus load. Sometimes we have experienced national agencies (or similar organisations like SALTO) overburdened by their communication: it is difficult to get an appointment; deadlines for accreditations aren't met with the consequence that applications cannot be filed.

Furthermore, we would very much appreciate the improvement / development of effective monitoring and evaluation systems for accredited organisations in all countries participating in the EVS-programme.

In addition, the quality and impact of EVS projects should be increased. In the Programme Countries this is done in cooperation with national agencies, but in Partner Countries a similar system should be put in place.

Shorten the application process / enable long-term planning

The assessment of an application takes place quite late (applications of April are processed as late as July, sometimes even August). Especially for volunteers of smaller organisations this necessitates short-term planning and a high risk of not being able to leave their country. Furthermore, this makes it difficult for the hosting organisations to plan. We would welcome deadlines that can be met by the national agencies. Respectively, we would be happy about a much shorter duration of the assessment process.

Transparency in decisions about applications

The reasons why an application is refused are not always clear. Also, in some countries there are requirements which we find inadequate, i.e. the requirement that hosting organisations cannot cooperate with long- term and steady partner organisations or are obliged to host volunteers from different countries. From the point of view of service organisations and hosting organisations precisely this longstanding cooperation provides the basis for developing and safeguarding the quality of voluntary services.

Also the constant demand for ever new and innovative constellations is not very helpful in creating continuous, high quality and durable cooperation. Already existing and consistent partnerships as well as new ones should be promoted.

There is too little flexibility on the e-forms. Some of the multiple choice answers are too determined, thus it is not possible to indicate the nuances involved in such a project.

We are aware of the complexity of adhering up to the laws of a country as well as to the rules of national agencies. To encourage European partners to participate in the EVS and carry out the European idea, a larger standardisation would be necessary, this also in order to keep the faith in the national agencies. Right now national agencies have many possibilities to interpret the programme in their own ways, which leads to incomprehension and uncertainties on the side of service organisations.

3.3 Transparent and prompt communication of changes in the EVS-programme

Communication of changes in the programme is often unsatisfactory. The introduction of the Online Language Support, for example, has caused much confusion. First, it was communicated that volunteers should use this tool instead of participating in paid language courses, later it was confirmed that extra language courses should still be paid by service organisations or hosting organisations. The guideline regarding this matter was not clear. It is important that the promotion of learning the new language is clearly stated.

3.4 Adjust the lump sum for pocket money

The standardised lump sum for pocket money for Partner Countries is with 55 euros per month too low. The lump sum for pocket money should be adjusted to the actual spending capacity or gross domestic product of the respective country.

We look forward to discussing these issues with the relevant stakeholders in the European institutions.

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This statement is signed and supported by the following organisations:



Aktionsgemeinschaft Dienst für den Frieden e.V., Germany



AFS Interkulturelle Begegnungen e.V., Germany



Associazione per la formazione, gli scambi et le attività intercultural, Italy



Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste e.V., Germany



Christliche Dienste e.V., Germany



Centrum Volneho Casu, Slovensko



International Cultural Youth Exchange, Danmark



DC Pangeya Ultima, Ukraine



Ekumenicka rada cirkvi v SR Dobrovol'nicky program, Slovakia



Eine Welt e.V. Leipzig, Germany



Eirene- Internationaler Christlicher Friedensdienst e.V., Germany



Evangelische Freiwilligendienste gGmbH, Germany



Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiners e.V., Germany



Friedenskreis Halle e.V., Germany



ICJA Freiwilligenaustausch weltweit e.V., Germany



International Cultural Youth Exchange United Kindom



International Cultural Youth Exchange, Switzerland



Internationale Jugendgemeinschaftsdienste e.V., Germany



Karpataljai Reformatur Önkéntes Diakóniai EV, Ukraine



Lastochki, Russia



Maailmanvaihto, Finland



Narkone- Udruzenje za Prevenciju ovisnosti, Bosnia



Panevezio Jaunuoliu Dienos Centras, Lithuania



Nashe Podilia, Ukraine



Rock Soli Foundation, Netherlands



Slezská diakonie, Czech Republic



Service Protestant pour la Jeunesse, Belgium



SVITAC, Bosnia



Time for God, United Kingdom

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VIA e.V., Germany



Visa- ad, France