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YOUTH programme

Action 2 – European Voluntary Service

EVS Volunteer Training

**Guidelines and
Minimum Quality Standards**

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1. Introduction

European education programmes are constantly challenged to prove their potential for an added educational value. They shall promote European awareness, active citizenship and might eventually lead to the shaping of a European identity. They shall encourage young European citizens to take an active role in social action and community development; they shall offer a once-in-a-lifetime experience for personal development. Like the other Actions of the YOUTH programme, the European Voluntary Service (EVS) addresses directly to the individual young person as a learning person. One of its features is a range of training provisions guiding young volunteers through a learning process during their service period abroad. This document takes up the question what should be the framework, the contents, the methods and the possible achievements of training for EVS volunteers.

Volunteer training is not a stand-alone subject. Information and support for the volunteer's project, continuous counselling and guidance before, during and after the service period, training for project managers, mentors and trainers add up to a complex set of measures, accompanying volunteers, promoters and organisations all through the experience called European Voluntary Service.

In order to monitor the developments and current situation related to EVS volunteer training the Commission has carried out a study on related documents, previous reports from seminars and conferences tackling the topic of volunteer training and a survey, in which the National Agencies and the European Non-governmental Youth Organisations (ENGYOs) were requested to contribute with working material they developed for volunteer training. The survey led to a grand collection of different documents, written for different purposes and not necessarily meant to represent an official statement. Nevertheless, it constituted a valuable resource serving as a base for developing the Minimum Quality Standards for EVS Volunteer Training.

Findings from the collected material acknowledge that there is a real variety of providers implementing fairly different volunteer training activities. During the course of their service period, volunteers would often get different types of training offered by different providers. For this reason, volunteer training needs to follow a complex of minimum standards, implemented in a structured learning process, and complementing other support offered during the voluntary service period. The term "EVS Volunteer Training", should be here and after understood as a 4-format concept comprising the pre-departure training, the on-arrival training, the mid-term meeting and the final evaluation.

The aim of this document is to promote a common approach to EVS Volunteer Training through a set of minimum quality standards. The minimum quality standards are based on the conclusions from the above-mentioned survey and represent a response of the Commission to the needs and recommendations presented by the YOUTH Programme National Agencies, ENGYOs, EVS training providers, and by young volunteers themselves.

The main objective is to provide minimum quality standards for each of the four formats of EVS Volunteer Training adding up to a coherent approach to training of EVS volunteers. In addition one can find an overview on the current training practices reflecting the variety of EVS project types and activity formats. This includes training for volunteers in individual EVS projects, in multinational EVS projects, at local, national or European level, in International Cooperation with Partner Countries and the Mediterranean partner countries of the Euro-Med Youth Programme.

This document and supporting material is available for download in the SOS Volunteer Helpdesk section at <http://europa.eu.int/youth/>



2. Volunteer training: overview on current practices

2.1 Provisions, structures and providers

This chapter summarises general findings on the background and framework for EVS Volunteer Training in project practice. It includes observations on the actual EVS project types and implications relevant for EVS Volunteer Training, formats and providers of the training.

One-to-one projects within Programme countries

The majority of EVS activities take place in the framework managed by National Agencies for so-called one-to-one projects with partners and volunteers in the Programme countries of the YOUTH programme. Based on a project agreement between Sending Organisation, Host Organisation and volunteer, National Agencies both at sending and hosting side offer financial support as well as information, support and guidance throughout the entire process of project realisation. Part of the shared responsibility between project promoters and National Agencies is the training for volunteers. It is considered as integral part of the voluntary service period. Project promoters and National Agencies have to ensure training sessions for all volunteers in service. It is obligatory for volunteers to attend the training sessions.

National Agencies and promoters follow a common approach for the general features of EVS Volunteer Training. They follow the lifeline of a voluntary service project and guide the volunteer along preparing, entering and completing a service period:

- Pre-departure training (sending country)
- On-arrival training (host country)
- Mid-term meeting (host country)
- Final evaluation / follow-up (sending country)

This setting relies on the existence of National Agencies in the sending as well as in the host country. They would organise the training activities taking place in their country. Due to the large volumes of volunteers to include, National Agencies can opt to delegate EVS Volunteer Training to external organisations, partners at national or regional level. National Agencies often involve former volunteers in the training of new volunteers.

Training events are expected to complement each other, corresponding to the different stages of project development and learning process of the volunteer. One of the characteristics in this system is that different providers deliver training for one volunteer. A volunteer coming from Denmark will receive pre-departure training from Danish trainers and attend on-arrival training and mid-term meeting provided by Slovak trainers. The organisation of the training sessions also varies from country to country, depending on level of establishment, geographical dimensions, numbers of volunteers, existing training structures and the role of promoters for the implementation of EVS in the country.

One-to-one projects with Partner Countries

Project promoters with partner organisations in the framework of International Cooperation follow the same set of training provisions. In Partner Countries the conditions are however different: the number of volunteers is smaller and so is the range of active organisations. There are no National Agencies who would be organising the training events. SALTO Resource Centres become increasingly involved in volunteer training. Project administration and management remains in the responsibility of the applicant only (Programme country).

Volunteers coming from Partner Countries to a Programme country, for example from Russia to Denmark, are however expected to join the training offered by the Danish National Agency. This is possible only for



training taking place in the host country. Pre-departure training and final evaluation at the sending side are to be organised on individual basis and in collaboration with the Sending Organisation and local project partners.

Volunteers doing a service in Partner Countries can rely on National Agency support only for pre-departure training sessions. On-arrival training and mid-term evaluation are to be organised on individual basis and in collaboration with the Sending Organisation and local project partners.

Projects in Euro-Med partner countries face a similar situation. They are expected to follow the features once developed for training of volunteers in Programme countries, but the conditions are similar to those in another Partner Country. National Coordinators can make a difference by organising joint training activities. One should however bear in mind that for most National Coordinators volunteer projects represent only one of many tasks to fulfil. It is not necessarily their role to cover for volunteer training.

EVS projects with several volunteers, sending and host countries

This strand refers to a whole variety of different project formats with groups of volunteers, including Europe-wide and multilateral projects involving several Programme countries and Partner Countries. They are characterised by a common theme and/or area of activity in host projects. There is a defined group of volunteers staying together for the different phases of project implementation and training events. Those would be organised in several “volunteer meetings” including pre-departure training, on-arrival training, mid-term meeting and final evaluation.

The majority of EVS projects with several volunteers and countries are implemented by European networks, ENGyOs and well-experienced volunteer associations. They bring along a number of advantages for offering fairly advanced training activities:

- Projects involving several volunteers and host projects have a joint approach and common theme for their activities. Volunteers share a common interest in a specific area of activity, e.g. environmental protection or working for a specific campaign. There is opportunity for a strong networking within the group of volunteers.
- The different stages of volunteer training take place with the same group of volunteers.
- The different stages of volunteer training are prepared and organised by the same coordinating organisation, often the same trainers.
- Volunteer training does not rely on the offers by National Agencies or National Coordinators. In particular in Partner Countries they can provide adequate training in collaboration with local partners such as members of the same international association.

2.2 Volunteer training - most common thematic areas and recommendations

This section summarises observations on thematic priorities outlined for volunteer training activities. It should be noted that the indications are based on session reports, guidelines, programmes, reports as well as specific statements for the above-mentioned survey. This section refers to training activities provided by 27 National Agencies, several European networks and other NGOs, who helped identifying the general preferences for thematic areas across different project formats. They also helped pointing out topics that appear in several training events. Overlaps or repetitions seem to be a phenomenon of EVS volunteer training. Further in this document, the minimum quality standards will suggest the appropriate type of training for each of those topics.



Pre-departure training

The majority of pre-departure training events are organised with groups of volunteers shortly before departing from their home country to different host countries. Many of them would have a duration of 3 days and involve between 3 and 40 participants.

Most wanted thematic areas

National Agencies, European networks / ENGYO and other training providers present a similar set of favourite thematic areas for this type of training. The most common ones are:

- Information on EVS, the management of the projects: the project life cycle, the actors, rights and responsibilities of volunteers, sending organisations and host organisations
- Expectations and motivations of the volunteers
- Practical and technical information: insurance, pocket money, working hours etc.
- Intercultural learning, getting prepared for the cultural shock
- Crisis management and problem solving
- Philosophy & goals of EVS, the concept of volunteering
- The 'parcours' of the volunteer, working on identity

Some National Agencies add the following topics to their pre-departure training:

- To be a volunteer and developing the personal project
- Perspectives after the EVS experience, Future Capital
- EVS and EU youth policies

Pre-departure training by several European networks / ENGYO includes the following additional topics:

- Information on the host country
- Presentation on the host project, the host organisation and the coordinating organisation
- Thematic issues related to the project, e.g. working with disadvantaged people, environmental work, and presentation of working techniques and training methods

Recommendations

The following recommendations for the further improvement of pre-departure training were gathered:

- Provide more precise information on the rights and legal situation of the volunteer (holidays, working timetable, work responsibilities etc.).
- Provide the volunteer with a practical guide to help facing possible problems or difficulties.
- Meet other volunteers that do the same type of voluntary service.
- Invite a former volunteer to illustrate voluntary service reality, share experience and give advice.
- If ex-volunteers cannot be present at the meeting, it might be useful to have an ex-volunteer handbook.
- Have anecdotes and real experiences (especially for the intercultural learning sessions).
- Methods should focus on "learning by doing" activities, in accordance with the background and the needs of the volunteers; focus on experiences and creative learning.
- Organise the pre-departure training at least a month before the departure so that the volunteers have the time to think about their involvement in the project and to cancel their participation if they are not ready to go.



On-arrival training

The majority of on-arrival training events are organised with groups of volunteers shortly after arriving in their host country. Many of them would have duration between 5 and 14 days. In EVS projects involving groups of volunteers a combination of elements from pre-departure and on-arrival training is frequently realised. Before going to their host countries all volunteers would gather for a first meeting dealing both with the individual preparation as well as with joint work on the overall project or theme.

Most wanted thematic areas

Again National Agencies and European networks / ENGyOs and other training providers share a similar set of favourite thematic areas. The most common ones are:

- Information on EVS: philosophy, procedures, actors, project life-cycle, EVS in the hosting country
- Rights & Responsibilities / the role of each partner in the project: volunteer, sending organisation, host organisation and mentor
- Intercultural learning & communication
- Presentation of the host country: culture, political structure, institutions, administrative procedures
- Personal motivation, expectations and fears
- Basic elements of language learning
- The concept of volunteering, to be a European volunteer
- Crisis management and risk prevention

Some training events include further topics:

- Information on the YOUTH Programme and the European Union
- Defining personal aims within the EVS project, skills development
- Insurance issues and emergency cases
- Presentation of the host organisation & of the hosting project (European Networks / ENGyOs)
- Follow-up opportunities, Future Capital

Recommendations

The following recommendations for the further improvement of on-arrival training were gathered:

- Include field visits and outside activities. They are much appreciated.
- Give the opportunity to the volunteers to meet local young people.
- Invite external experts (e.g. from the local community)
- Local environment and community should be used as a resource.
- The discovery of the local environment should help linguistic practices.
- Foresee an individual session with each volunteer to speak about more individual questions or the personal project.
- The volunteer should learn to learn. Provide tools and encourage continuing the learning process.
- Pre-departure and on-arrival training could be given at the same time. There is a benefit in exchange of experience among volunteers coming and going.
- The training should take place soon after arrival, even if this is difficult in countries with only few volunteers.



Mid-term meeting

The majority of mid-term evaluation sessions or mid-term meetings would be up to three days. Representatives of National Agencies and the mentors of volunteers often join the meetings. In countries and/or projects with frequent communication between promoters, National Agencies and volunteers, they are replaced by regular meeting in groups or on individual basis.

Most wanted thematic areas

The most common topics for mid-term meetings by National Agencies, European networks / ENGYOs and other training providers are:

- Project evaluation (organisational aspects, relation between the actors, the activity, the support, the integration into the local community, etc.)
- Presentation of the volunteer's experience, review of his/her expectations and personal objectives
- 'Me and my project' - how does the volunteer cope with the personal challenges: being in a new country, intercultural aspects, evaluation of the personal development and the learning process
- Planning for the coming months, recommendations for further improvement
- Perspectives after EVS, Future Capital
- Conflict resolution

Some training events add the following thematic areas:

- Intercultural learning
- Presentation of the host project
- EVS philosophy and procedures
- Rights and responsibilities

Recommendations

The following recommendations for the further improvement of mid-term meeting were gathered:

- Ideally, host projects / project supervisors should also meet in order to evaluate the voluntary service activities from their point of view.
- The mentor should be present during the evaluation.
- The volunteer should 'learn to learn'. Provide tools for continuing the learning process.
- Local environment and the local community should be used as a resource.
- Invite other National Agencies to participate to their meetings for better understanding of the EVS philosophy and project practices in the countries.



Final evaluation

Final evaluation meetings do currently not belong to the obligatory part of the training activities to be provided. Only 8 out of 27 National Agencies mention organised offers in this respect. In many cases final evaluation is organised on individual basis between a sending organisation and a volunteer. Group meetings for final evaluation usually take place over a weekend.

Most wanted thematic areas

National Agencies, European networks / ENGYOs and other training providers are in favour of the following thematic areas for final evaluation:

- Evaluation of the EVS project: practicalities, the activity, the input of the volunteer within the hosting organisation; Evaluation of the project concept and approach
- Perspectives after EVS: future prospects and plans, Future Capital, future possibilities of involvement in project work
- Evaluation of the personal and professional skills and abilities acquired during the experience
- Feedback and recommendations to National Agencies and coordinating organisations
- How to share and disseminate information on the experience made during the EVS project



3. Minimum Quality Standards for EVS Volunteer Training

The aim of volunteer training within the Action 2 of the YOUTH programme and Euro-Med Youth Programme is to provide the young volunteers with continuous guidance and support throughout the long-term perspective of a voluntary service period. Training of volunteers contributes to the education process and the personal development of the individual young person. The volunteer training concept also serves as a mean of conflict resolution, risk prevention and evaluation instrument.

EVS Volunteer Training consists of four parts: pre-departure training, on-arrival training, mid-term meeting and final evaluation. All four sessions have the same aim but specific objectives. They complement each other and correspond to the different stages of the project development and the learning process of the volunteer. Many volunteers receive training from different providers. Minimum quality standards have the task to help connecting and harmonising one and another format of training. They indicate which topics and issues volunteers and trainers can trust that they have been covered in the respective training session. They help creating a consequent and coherent covering of different topics at the appropriate project phase, and they help avoiding repetition of subjects over and over again.

Minimum quality standards outline the least that should be covered by a training session. They do not limit trainers and organisers in terms of adding country or project specific features that they deem necessary or interesting for the participants attending their training event. Minimum quality standards clarify what can be expected as achievements from a training session; be it the organisers of the next training event, the project supervisors, the mentors or the volunteers themselves. Training providers can build a connection between the different phases of training while avoiding overlaps of topics and contribute to the creation of a continuous learning process for the volunteers before, during and following their service period.



Pre-departure training

Objectives of the training

Pre-departure training provides the volunteers with information about the YOUTH programme, specifically Action 2 – EVS, project management, project life cycle and the different parties involved. The sessions allow volunteers to share expectations, motivation and also concerns with regards to their future project.

It is inevitable to provide information on the rights and responsibilities of all project partners - as well as basics of conflict prevention and crisis management. Volunteers might face various difficult situations during the project. Pre-departure training takes into consideration the characteristics of an EVS project, in which the volunteers would integrate and interact with the local community in a foreign country, being confronted with different cultures, lifestyles. It is therefore essential to lay the grounds for guidance through the intercultural learning process.

The objective of pre-departure training includes provision of practical and technical information such as insurance, visa, pocket money, or working hours. The volunteers should become aware that the project does not relate only to the very activities they will be doing; moreover the volunteers would identify their involvement as part of an entire project life cycle from preparation until final evaluation and follow-up.

Framework of the training

Training practice up to date indicates an organisational framework apparently serving best the purposes of a pre-departure training. The following indicators should be considered as "ideal"; adaptation to each and every national situation as well as project specificity leads to variations:

- *Timing* min. 1 month before the departure of volunteer.
- *Duration* min. 3 working days
- *Group* 5 - 25 participants
- *Venue* residential

Expected achievements of the training

Differences of national conditions, training practices and organisational possibilities will always prevent pre-departure training from being identical in all countries. It does not need to. Nevertheless, pre-departure training should leave the volunteers to departure with a proper learning achievement in the following aspects:

- Know about concept and framework of voluntary service and its place within the YOUTH programme / Euro-Med Youth Programme,
- Receive basic information about the European Union (policies, initiatives, institutions, etc.) and European developments in the field of voluntary activities of young people,
- Be familiar with the partners in the voluntary service project framework and their role: Sending Organisation, Host Organisation, Coordinating Organisation, Mentor, and where applicable, National Agency, National Coordinator, European Commission
- Know about the rights and responsibilities of all the partners,
- Have shared their motivations, expectations and fears,
- Have received appropriate practical and technical information on visa, residence permit, legal status as a volunteer, insurance, contract, pocket money,
- Understand the meaning of intercultural learning and be aware of the ongoing intercultural learning process,
- Have received guidance or at least hints on crisis management,
- Be aware of that the voluntary service project is not only the activities but the whole project cycle from the preparation to the final evaluation.



On-arrival training

Objectives of the training

The main objective of the on-arrival training is to introduce the volunteers to host country and project environment, giving them the ability to cope with the situation around the service placement. On-arrival training supports the volunteers in adapting to cultural and personal challenges. The training allows volunteers to get to know each other, to build a network, to meet up and stay in touch.

At the same time, it equips the volunteers with skills for good communication, be it in aspects of intercultural learning or actual language. An introductory language course helps the volunteers to communicate and to integrate faster in the hosting community. The training helps the volunteers to become aware of the cultural differences and the different models of behaviour. The training is also a time for the volunteers to plan the coming months and to set their own personal goals towards the voluntary service project.

If volunteers have already spent time in their host organisation, they exchange their first experiences and clarify questions related to their project.

Framework of the training

The following indicators describe the most common operational framework for on-arrival training. Conditions and training practices again determine variations:

- *Timing* within 4 weeks after the arrival of the volunteer
- *Duration* min. 5 working days
- *Group* 5 - 25 participants
- *Venue* residential

Timing is a key factor for on-arrival training. Too much flexibility, e.g. because of organisational constraints are fatal. If the on-arrival training takes place long time after the arrival of the volunteer, it will appear as a meaningless appointment.

Expected achievements of the training

Considering the national conditions, working realities and training practices, on-arrival trainings will not be and shall not be identical. Nevertheless, on-arrival training should leave the volunteer with a proper learning achievement in the following aspects:

- Have received information on the host country: history, political and social situation, key aspects of the host culture,
- Have received information on structures of former EVS volunteers in the host country,
- Be aware on how to deal with cultural differences and with conflicts,
- Be familiar with the role of each partner in the project and her/his own rights and responsibilities,
- Know the basic communication phrases in the host country language,
- Know the meaning of being a volunteer,
- Have identified clear goals and ideas towards his/her voluntary service project.



Mid-term meeting

Objectives of the meeting

The mid-term meeting allows volunteers to evaluate their experience so far and to reflect on the project activities. Mid-term evaluation is an essential tool for risk prevention and crisis management, especially in long-term projects like a voluntary service abroad. In this respect the meeting facilitates a conflict resolution - if necessary! Mid-term meetings are not necessarily “only” crisis meetings. Volunteers share as well positive experiences and find further motivation from other volunteers' reports about their activities.

The meeting provides the opportunity to learn from everybody's “EVS story”. The meeting enables the volunteers to work on developments and/or further improvements in their projects. This includes the “What next”, dealing with the volunteer’s perspectives beyond the project. Already at this stage volunteers should have access to knowledge about future possibilities, such as Future Capital.

Overall, the mid-term meeting should offer a relaxed and informal atmosphere so the volunteers feel comfortable to share and say whatever is important for them.

Framework of the meeting

The following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for mid-term meetings. Conditions and training practices again determine variations:

- *Timing* min. 2 months after on-arrival training and max. 3 months before project end,
- *Duration* min. 3 working days
- *Group* 5 - 25 participants
- *Venue* residential

The nature of the event as a meeting with other volunteers is essential for this event. Volunteers go to mid-term meetings long enough after their arrival in the project, so that they have enough experience for reviewing the project situation, as well as soon enough before the end of the project so that there is time for turning ideas for improvement still into the ongoing activities.

Expected achievements of the meeting

Considering the national conditions, working realities and training practices, mid-term meetings will not be and shall not be identical. Nevertheless, mid-term meetings should leave the volunteer with a profound learning achievement in the following aspects:

- Have done a personal evaluation of the individual project and reflected on the scope of activities,
- Have shared personal experiences (being part of community life, living within a different culture, using the language, having found new hobbies, discovered places),
- Have identified problems, difficulties, conflicts faced or about to face and consequently received satisfying support and clues on “next steps” to solve problems,
- Have worked on an individual action plan referring to the further development of the individual project (during the project),
- Have received information and guidance on what is Future Capital (philosophy, formal criteria, content) and how/where to apply,
- Enjoyed the meeting and have relaxed and freed their minds.



Final evaluation

Objectives of the meeting

The final evaluation of a voluntary service period plays a significant role in the project life cycle. It focuses on bringing together volunteers and their sending organisations to conclude the project, to look back and reflect on what happened during the project. The framework of the evaluation enables participants to address the actual realisation of the project: aims, objectives, motivation, expectations, actual activities, self-initiative, own project development, learning aspects - very much the volunteer's contribution to the "action" in the host organisation.

One topic is the personal support and supervision provided, hence the overall pedagogical approach within the project, both from host and sending organisation. The volunteers and the sending organisation assess their communication and the support provided by the sending organisation to the volunteers during the service period.

A key question addresses the learning effect of the service period. What is it that the volunteers bring back to their "home" community? The final evaluation meeting facilitates the "home" reintegration of the volunteers, guiding onto the next steps: involvement in voluntary work back home, preparation of a Future Capital project, contact with national structures of former EVS volunteers etc.

Last but not least, the meeting asks the volunteers to share experience and to contribute with recommendations referring to the qualitative development of future voluntary service projects.

Framework of the meeting

The following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for final evaluation meetings. Conditions and training practices again determine variations:

- *Timing* max. 3 months after end of the service period,
- *Duration* min. 2 working days
- *Group* min. 5 participants; the sending organisation should at least be represented
- *Venue* residential

Expected achievements of the meeting

Considering the national conditions, working realities and training practices, final evaluation meetings will not be and shall not be identical. Nevertheless, final evaluation meetings should leave the volunteer with a profound learning achievement in the following aspects:

- Have evaluated the entire project life cycle together with the Sending Organisation, including the cooperation between the volunteer and the sending organisation,
- Have reflected specifically on the service period: activities, own projects, personal contribution to the host organisation and the host community, personal support and supervision obtained, the overall pedagogical approach of the organisations involved,
- Have assessed their learning achievements (personal, professional, social), be aware of their personal capacities and skills,
- Have reflected upon their increased knowledge on Europe, understanding for cultural diversity and their attitude towards Europe,
- Have elaborated the idea of using the skills to contribute within their home community, their sending organisation, and/or the national structure of former EVS volunteers,
- Have shared their EVS experience with peers,
- Have had the chance to present their recommendations related to qualitative improvement of future EVS projects.