



News

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Letter

Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments
in Europe

Voluntary services: a topical issue, not only in Germany

The discussion on the introduction of a national voluntary service (Bundesfreiwilligendienst) following the suspension of compulsory military service and alternative community service in Germany has brought voluntary services back into the focus of public attention. In other European countries, too, there is a great variety of voluntary service programmes. The Observatory wants to take the European Year of Volunteering as an opportunity to look around Europe and introduce voluntary services as they exist in other countries.

Voluntary services can take various forms; as a rule, however, the term 'voluntary service' refers to a voluntary, temporary full-time commitment that takes place within an organisation or project. A period of voluntary service might last some weeks or even years. To ensure their livelihood, volunteers normally receive financial compensation and/or room and board. They can be deployed in several fields of activity, e.g. environmental protection, social services, or culture and history. There are government-run programmes (that are often regulated by law) and others that are carried out by individual organizations. Voluntary services are distinct from 'normal' volunteering on the one hand and gainful employment on the other.¹

The best known example of a voluntary service is the European Union's European Voluntary Service (EVS), which was launched in the mid-1990s and is intended for the 18 to 30 age group (see last page). Although voluntary services are often associated with young people, other target groups can also be addressed: the new German

national voluntary service, for instance, is aimed at people of all ages, and one form of the French voluntary service has been designed for the over-25s (see p. 3). A European example of a voluntary service that is explicitly not addressed to young people are the senior volunteering projects of the EU Grundtvig programme. This scheme allows people who are at least 50 years old to spend three to eight weeks volunteering for an organisation outside their home country.²

Much like Germany, Italy introduced a national voluntary service when compulsory military service was suspended. The Italian voluntary service (Servizio Civile Volontario) is aimed at men and women aged 18 to 28. They receive a monthly allowance of €433.80 for a twelve-month service period. 20,701 volunteers took part in the programme in 2010. Since the

voluntary service was launched in 2001, a total of nearly 300,000 people have participated in Servizio Civile Volontario.³

A new short-term voluntary service for 16-year-olds is being launched in England this summer. This National Citizen Service is aimed at young people who have completed Year 11 at school and obtained their first secondary school certificate (GCSE). Around 11,000 places will be available when the scheme starts in summer 2011, and more places will be added in future years. The National Citizen Service is part of the British government campaign for the so-called "Big Society". One objective of the campaign is to enable people to contribute to society in their home areas. In this sense, the idea is for young participants in the National Citizen Service to implement a project in their local community. The voluntary service will run for three weeks



Editorial

DEAR READERS,

WE AT THE OBSERVATORY ARE TAKING THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE VOLUNTEERING THE FOCUS OF THIS NEWSLETTER: ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTRODUCTION OF THE GERMAN NATIONAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE, WE LOOK AT OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND ASSESS THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH VOLUNTARY SERVICES. THE FIRST ARTICLE OF THIS NEWSLETTER IS BY BIRGIT SITTERMANN, WHO OFFERS AN OVERVIEW OF VOLUNTARY SERVICES IN EUROPE. AGNES UHERECZKY, DIRECTOR OF THE ASSOCIATION OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS, EXPLAINS WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO "ASSESS" THE EFFECT OF VOLUNTARY SERVICES. JEAN-BENOÎT DUJOL OF THE FRENCH AGENCY FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE INTRODUCES THE VOLUNTARY "SERVICE CIVIQUE" AS IT EXISTS IN FRANCE.

THE LAST PAGE OF OUR NEWSLETTER PRESENTS ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND A CURRENT BIBLIOGRAPHY ON VOLUNTEERING IN THE EU.

AND AS USUAL, YOU CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION ON OUR WEBSITE!

THE TEAM AT THE OBSERVATORY FOR SOCIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE WISHES YOU PLEASANT READING!



full-time, including two weeks away from home as a group. In these three weeks, the young people will plan their projects and be taught the skills to implement them. After that, they will need to complete another 30 hours working on a part-time basis realising their project – which could, for instance, involve renovating a playground.⁴

Like in other voluntary services, one of the aims of the National Citizen Service is to give its volunteers a learning experience that is not limited to the seminars normally attended within the scope of the actual service. Rather, the voluntary activity itself, i.e. the assumption of a new task in a new environment, creates a non-formal learning context. To ensure that participants' newly acquired skills are recognised and can be used by the volunteers themselves in other contexts, the European Union has, in connection with the EVS, created the "Youthpass". After the end of the voluntary service, the tasks assumed by the volunteers are recorded in this certificate along with the special skills they have acquired. Former EVS participants can, for instance, use the Youthpass in job application.⁵

BIRGIT SITTERMANN, ISS e.V.

1 Cf. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (2009): Bericht zur Lage und zu den Perspektiven des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements in Deutschland. Published by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Berlin. Here p. 79f. Hereinafter referred to as WZB (2009).
Uherezcky, Agnes (2011): Voluntary Service at the Crossroads 2011. Document of the Association of Voluntary Service Organisations on the occasion of the official opening of the European Year of Volunteering 2011.

2 For further information cf. http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc986_en.htm, (retrieved on 13 May 2011).

3 Cf. www.serviziocivile.gov.it (retrieved on 17 May 2011) and European Commission (ed.) (2010): Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Country Report Italy. Available online at: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/eyv2011/>

[doc/National%20report%20IT.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/doc/National%20report%20IT.pdf) (retrieved on 17 May 2011).

4 Cf. Cabinet Office (no year): Big Society. Available online at: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society>. Direct gov (no year): Taking part in the National Citizen Service. Available online at: <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/Workandcareers/Workexperienceandvolunteering/NationalCitizenService/index.htm>. Cabinet Office (2011): Pioneering teenagers to help build the Big Society: National Citizen Service now recruiting. (16 February 2011). Available online at: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/pioneering-teenagers-help-build-big-society-national-citizen-service-now-recruiting>. (retrieved on 17 May 2011)

5 Cf. WZB (2009): p. 79f. as well as the websites: <http://www.jugend-in-aktion.de/youthpass/> und <http://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/> (retrieved on 17 May 2011).

Guest Column

The challenge of measuring voluntary service

We all know someone, or have even experienced it ourselves: a young woman or man just returns from a voluntary service abroad, is bursting with stories to tell, experiences to share and they usually repeat the same impression, „this experience changed my life“. And we all know it does. But the most important question, that the sector is unable to answer properly, is how to measure and demonstrate this change.

If for the sake of the argument we only take into consideration young people (as the impact of voluntary service on older generations is a little bit different), we are already encountering the most burning paradox: are young people, who sign up to do a voluntary service already different? Are they already significantly more open, tolerant, courageous, and communicative than others, who do not contemplate doing it? In addition, we mustn't forget, that young people, especially between the ages 17–30

change significantly. This can be due to a new hobby, a new school environment, new friends, or just growing up, being more responsible, more organised. So how can we prove that someone participating in a voluntary service project over the course of 6–12 months would not have changed in the same way, or had the same experiences in a school setting or working in a supermarket?

There are many questions related to firstly understanding what is, or could be the impact of voluntary service, and secondly, on how to measure the impact. One thing is absolutely certain, without proper measurement and demonstration the sector will never be taken seriously by decision makers, to allocate the funds that would be necessary for running quality programmes for a significant portion of the population. Because voluntary service projects are expensive.

Firstly, when an organisation or an institution advertises their voluntary service programme they usually offer a long list of perceived impacts and programme objectives. Suffice to take the programme guide of the Commission run EVS¹ programme. Among others they list the following: "The aim of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) is to develop solidarity and promote active citizenship and mutual understanding among young people. It fosters solidarity among young people and is a true 'learning service'. Beyond benefiting local communities, volunteers learn new skills and languages, and discover other cultures." If you look at the AVSO website, the AVSO members took a couple of days wording the AVSO mission and vision, because we either wanted to mention all the good that voluntary service does, or we just mention the key features. Not to mention the great variety of sectors where volunteers are active, from environment protection or climate change, to e-mentoring and website editing. So it is a challenge when lobbying towards politicians and decision makers not to portray voluntary service as a "cure for all ills" in what is wrong with young people in today's societies, when at the same time listing all the attributes.

Secondly, it is all well in listing them, but how can we measure and prove these different aspects, and the impact and benefit of a voluntary service project on all these dimensions? To me the

biggest challenge is carrying out rigorous impact assessment in a sector that continuously struggles for funds.

In an ideal situation, and some of this is actually done in the United States with some of their programmes, there would be a baseline measurement before the service, to all potential candidates, those who then decide to do a voluntary service, and those who decide not to. The latter group would then form the comparison group in the ex post assessment phase. Once the volunteers have finished their service they would fill in the "after" questionnaire and a follow up questionnaire 1 year and another 5–10 years down the line. Of course the questions are also important. But here comes the great aha moment, of yes, but how do we measure tolerance, solidarity, intercultural awareness and skills, life skills, and all the other aspects in a simple questionnaire? Some practitioners claim, which is mostly true, that the volunteers themselves are not aware of the impact the service had on them, and what they have learnt, and therefore swear by an exit-interview, which is very effective, yet not very comparable.

Now please imagine me, dear reader, walking down the corridors of the European Parliament, grabbing the attention of Members of the European Parliament, who could potentially have a great say in the future of the voluntary service world. Even those, who initially show a lot of interest shy away, as soon as it turns out, that I cannot even answer very simple questions such as how many volunteers are serving now in Europe. Or how many of them are women, or have university degrees, or have gotten a job immediately after they finished the service, or have chosen to continue in education after the service? I don't know the answers to these questions. Because at European level, there isn't a lot of comparable data which would show the different programmes and the sector all together. We have of course pockets of data, for example within the EVS programme, or the German service programmes or the French new Civic Service programme, but these only cover a percentage of all the volunteers.

If we want to advocate and fundraise for more and better programmes, we as a sector need to collectively start asking better

questions, meticulously collecting and analysing answers and packaging them with the right messages. Otherwise, there is a danger of discontinuation or scaling down of programmes, or misusing programmes solely for the purpose of enhancing employability in young people.

AGNES UHERECZKY

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¹ European Voluntary Service, http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc/how_to_participate/programme_guide_11/guide_en.pdf

Sociopolitical Developments in Europe

Voluntary service in France

The French voluntary service (Service Civique) was established by a law enacted on 10 March 2010. The Service Civique incorporates most of the numerous existing volunteering programmes (alternative community service, voluntary service in associations and organisations, European Voluntary Service, international voluntary service etc.). The Service Civique programme is developed and co-ordinated by a dedicated agency, the "Agence du Service Civique". This body is above all responsible for officially approving institutions or organisations wishing to deploy volunteers.

The approval process regulates the number of volunteers an institu-

tion can deploy and the tasks that can be assigned to them. On the one hand, the Agency ensures compliance with quality standards in the areas of deployment: these must serve the general interest and may not, for instance, displace regular jobs. The Agency also monitors the supervisory structures in place in the institutions themselves, ensuring that each volunteer has a tutor.

Young people can volunteer in the following nine areas that have been defined by Service Civique as priorities: social solidarity, culture and recreation, international development cooperation and humanitarian action, education, environmental protection, disaster relief, cultural and historical heritage, health and sports.

Volunteers work mainly in the field of social solidarity (28.3%), which includes all personal assistance and support services. The distribution of volunteers across other areas is fairly homogenous. Only disaster relief, as a result of its unique characteristics, deploys lower numbers of volunteers.

More than 10,000 young people did voluntary service in 2010. This number is expected to grow to 75,000 by 2014. In 2010, one thousand positions were approved as suitable volunteering positions for young people.

The main form of the Service Civique ("engagement de Service Civique") allows young people aged between 16 to 25 to contribute to the common good by donating their time to their fellow human

beings and to their communities. Until now 7,607 young people have signed a contract for the Service Civique. For them, the voluntary service represents an opportunity to develop and acquire new skills. During their service, the young volunteers receive a monthly allowance of €440 to 540 (depending on their personal situation). Allowances are paid by the government, with host institutions contributing at least €100. Volunteers are covered by social security for the entire period of their service, which also counts towards their pension. 57% of young volunteers are women, 43% are men. Their average age is 21, and less than 2% of volunteers were minors when they signed their voluntary service contract. In 2010, 36% of Service Civique volunteers were students when they signed their contract, and 40% were looking for jobs.

The Service Civique is a scheme aimed at fostering the development of young people, social cohesion and diversity. It is open without restriction to all 16- to 25-year-olds, regardless of educational levels. The profile of volunteers indicates that the objectives of social cohesion and social diversity have already been fully met: 24% of Service Civique volunteers have low educational qualifications, in a context where the law sets a target proportion of 20%. Moreover, nearly 6% of volunteers receive additional government support to make up for their own or their family's low income. The Agency is responsible for providing an interface between the young volunteers and the host institutions; the main link is its web-

site at www.service-civique.gouv.fr. There are now over 45,000 young people registered on the site.

Young people over 25 can also benefit from the volunteering experience by participating in the Service Civique ("volontariat de Service Civique"). This form of voluntary service is formally the same as the scheme for younger volunteers, but the framework conditions are not identical. Here too, the Agence du Service Civique is responsible for approving participating institutions, but in this case it no longer functions as the interface between the volunteers and the institutions. Moreover, the institution deploying the volunteer bears full responsibility for paying its older volunteers. However, the Agency once again ensures compliance with agreements and the smooth operation of the voluntary service.

In France, the popularity of the Service Civique scheme has been steadily growing, and its success is clearly measurable. It is obvious that the programme meets the expectations of a large number of young people who are eager to help others while benefitting from this important experience in their own life journey.

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www.service-civique.gouv.fr/



Background Information

"Volunteering in Europe"

The European Voluntary Service

The "European Voluntary Service" (EVS) was introduced in 1996/97, initially as a pilot action for young people aged 18 to 25. In 1998, the pilot project was then established as a permanent programme.¹ The EVS was implemented with the goal of fostering solidarity, active European citizenship as well as mutual understanding among young people.²

Since then, the EVS has given young people aged between 18 and 30 – regardless of education or employment status – the opportunity to volunteer abroad for a twelve-month period, and during this time to gather experience and get to know another culture and language. There were 5,900 participants in the EVS programme in 2008. The average age of the – mostly female – participants is 22.³ Participants can take part in special courses and in language training during their EVS. The experience they gather is officially attested by the Youthpass. EVS can take place in a wide range of areas, e.g. culture, youth work, sports, environmental protection etc.; one prerequisite, however, is that the project must have a European and intercultural learning dimension.⁴

Info on EVS is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc82_en.htm (retrieved on 5 May 2011)

Additional reading

SPES – Volunteer Support Centre of the Lazio Region (from 2005 onwards): Volunteering across Europe <http://www.spes.lazio.it/volunteeringeurope/default.asp#testo> (retrieved on 5 May 2011)

The study offers national reports on volunteering in the Member States of the EU.

European Commission (ed.) (2010): Volunteering in the European Union 27 national reports, summary and full study available at: http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/news/news1015_en.htm (retrieved on 5 May 2011)

The special sector study on volunteering in sports can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/news/news900_en.htm (retrieved on 5 May 2011)

The study explores the current situation of volunteers in all 27 Member States of the EU. In addition to the national fiches, the study contains a comparative analysis as well as a special study on volunteering in sports.

Committee of the Regions (ed.) (2010): Mobility of Young Volunteers across Europe <http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/DocumentTemplate.aspx?view=detail&id=29ccc402-ca21-466e-9859-4e9203d9b9ae> (retrieved on 5 May 2011).

The main objective of this study was to document obstacles to the mobility of young volunteers in Europe. Analysing the cross-border mobility of volunteers is particularly difficult as there are often problems with missing data or lack of comparability of existing data. This is the challenge which the study attempts to meet.

DID YOU KNOW how long there have been special European years devoted to specific themes?

Every year since 1983 (European Year of SMEs and the Craft Industry), the EU has chosen a theme for a campaign aimed at raising public awareness of and drawing national governments' attention to a specific social issue.⁵ A group of various European umbrella organisations, the EYV 2011 Alliance, has been formed in preparation for the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (2011).⁶ The formal decision on the theme for each year is taken by the European Council on a proposal from the European Commission.⁷ 2012 will be the "European Year of Active Ageing".⁸

VERONIKA PFEIFER, ISS e.V. 

¹ European Commission (1996): *European Voluntary Service for Young People. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing the Community Action Programme European Voluntary Service for Young People. COM(96) 610 final, 23 December 1996.*

Cf. also: European Commission (2006): EVS History – How it all began, http://ec.europa.eu/youth/archive/evs2006/download/EVS_History.pdf (retrieved on 5 May 2011).

² Official Journal of the European Communities (1998): *Decision No 168/98/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 July 1998 establishing the Community Action Programme "European Voluntary Service for Young People", <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:1998:214:0001:0011:EN:PDF> (retrieved on 5 May 2011).*

³ Committee of the Regions (ed.) (2010): *Mobility of Young Volunteers across Europe, Annex I, European Voluntary Service, <http://www.cor.europa.eu/pages/DocumentTemplate.aspx?view=detail&id=29ccc402-ca21-466e-9859-4e9203d9b9ae> (retrieved on 5 May 2011).*

⁴ European Commission (2011): *Youth in Action programme - European Voluntary Service, http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme/doc82_en.htm (retrieved on 5 May 2011).*

⁵ A list of past European Years can be found at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?language=EN&id=1005> (retrieved on 5 May 2011).

⁶ Information on the Alliance can be found at: <http://www.eyv2011.eu/> (retrieved on 5 May 2011).

⁷ For instance here for the EY11 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:017:0043:0049:EN:PDF> (retrieved on 5 May 2011).

⁸ For further information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/ey2012.jsp?langid=en> (retrieved on 5 May 2011).

Note

New on our website at

www.sociopolitical-observatory.eu :

Our website offers additional information and publications on the topic of volunteering in the EU, e.g.:

Volunteering in the Member States of the European Union – Evaluation and Summary of Current Studies, Working Paper no. 5, Annette Angermann, Birgit Sittermann, 11/2010

The "Bulletin of European Policies on Senior Citizens", which reports on our website at regular intervals about trends in policies for the elderly in selected EU Member States, is also interesting reading.

And finally, we would like to invite you to attend our **international conference on "Eldercare Services in Europe – Family Support and Domestic Services for Older People"**, which will be taking place in Berlin on 15/16 September 2011. Additional information on the conference venue and programme can be found on our website. Contact Annette Angermann for details: angermann@deutscher-verein.de.

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