

Guidelines for the European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers

for voluntary associations and older volunteers in

- Austria • Belgium • England • France
- Germany • Greece • Luxembourg
- The Netherlands

Financial support in the pilot phase:

- European Commission, Employment and Social Affairs General Directorate
- Bundesministerium für soziale Sicherheit und Generationen, Austria
- Ministerium der deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, Belgium
- Espace Seniors asbl, Belgium
- Home Office, Active Community Unit, England
- Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité, France
- Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, Germany
- Hellenic Red Cross, Greece
- Ministère de la Famille, de la Solidarité Sociale et de la Jeunesse, Luxembourg
- Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, The Netherlands

Preface

The involvement of volunteers in the activities of organisations in the fields of social, cultural, health and environmental work is becoming an ever more important fact. In this context, the fact that above all older people facing retirement or having raised their families are becoming increasingly interested in voluntary work so as to be able to apply the know-how and experience they have gained in life for the benefit of others must be seen as a special opportunity. What is more, these older people have a particularly valuable asset: time, which they want to invest in meaningful activities, plus in many cases the desire to learn new things and broaden their horizon.

Not least in view of the positive experience with the European Volunteer Service for Young People, the European Commission and the governments and charitable organisations listed below are supporting the pilot phase in the European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers with a view to examining the conditions for its establishment on a long-term basis. The deployment of older volunteers for several weeks in another countries of the European Union has the potential to promote the trans-border exchange of expertise, broaden the charitable organisations' range of practical activities by introducing new and future-oriented features, and facilitate networking between European non-government organisations. Furthermore, participation in the Exchange Programme offers the respective organisation the opportunity to effectively present the contributions to social welfare made by their older volunteers to the media locally and internationally.

Objectives and advantages

A European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers offers a number of personal, practical and socio-political advantages.

Through a European Exchange Programme, *older volunteer workers* would have the opportunity

- to acquire additional specialist, practical or linguistic qualifications,
- to receive new stimulus for their own personal development,
- to gain recognition of their volunteer involvement,
- to directly experience the fruits of their efforts, as the generation who helped to put the European idea into practice in the last forty years.

A European Exchange Programme for older volunteers would offer *non-profit organisations* the opportunity

- to improve their older volunteers' qualifications in their respective fields by sending them to another European country, and on their return, to avail themselves of these qualifications for their own work,
- to implement a transfer of know-how for their full-time and volunteer workers by receiving a foreign volunteer into their organisation,
- to make contacts at European level and establish trans-national links and co-operation.

From a socio-political viewpoint, a European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers would contribute towards

- promoting the integration of citizens within the European Union and their identification with the Union,
- accelerating the European learning process in terms of measures in favour of people who are socially excluded or under threat of becoming socially excluded,
- intensifying the social attractiveness and recognition of volunteer work and thus people's willingness to assume a voluntary post,
- contributing to the construction of a new European "culture of volunteering" by transferring good ideas on how to carry out volunteer work,
- overcoming negative stereotypes associated with the social role of older persons and promoting dialogue between the generations at trans-national level,
- transporting the idea of life-long learning and offering an incentive towards its realisation.

A few examples should serve to illustrate the fields of volunteer work in which a European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers can contribute to a trans-national exchange of ideas and strategies:

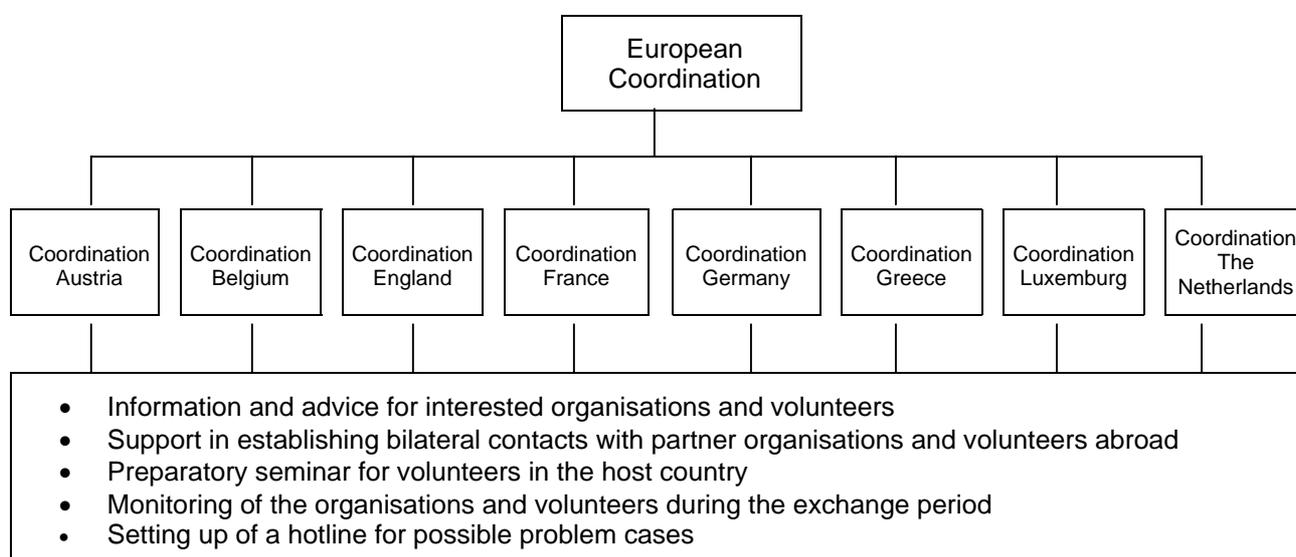
- ❖ Many volunteer initiatives undertake cultural activities with groups of the population threatened by exclusion, for example, migrants. This can involve drama work, reading, playing music or painting together, activities which promote and communicate an understanding of different cultures in ways other those that rely on language.
- ❖ Volunteer work with and for the unemployed is a particularly interesting sector, as it addresses one of the key problems facing the European Union. Here initiatives devoted to the vocational integration of young unemployed people, to training courses, to providing help with applications for trainee positions, or to the social care and guidance of adolescents could exchange their knowledge and experience.
- ❖ Another attractive option are contemporary witness projects, in which older people recount their own life stories and answer questions from young people about the past. Here, not only language barriers could be overcome, if, for example, a French volunteer takes part in French classes at a German school. This would also represent an appropriate combination of trans-national and inter-generation activities.

Organisation

To ensure the smooth operation of the Exchange Programme, each of the countries involved in the project sets up a *National Coordination Office* responsible for the organisation and realisation of the exchange. A *European Coordination Office* assumes these tasks at transactional level and informs the organisations about the respective requirements and offers.

Non-profit organisations either despatch or provide a place for a volunteer from another country for several weeks. These organisations function as both despatch and reception points. Prior to the exchange, the National Coordination Offices help to initiate personal contacts between the organisations and volunteers involved. In the course of the exchange period, both volunteers and organisations are monitored; a hotline exists for possible problem cases.

Older volunteers work for a period of time agreed between them and the respective organisations in a participating European country of their choice and in a capacity similar to the one they already have in their home country. Before starting work, they participate in a 3-day preparatory seminar in the host country during which they are familiarised with the social framework and the cultural aspects of their work – also in connection with project visits.



Schedule

The following schedule has been drawn up for the pilot phase in the implementation of the European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers:

<i>January - August 2001</i>	Information and preparation of organisations and volunteers
<i>September 2001</i>	Introductory seminar for volunteers in the host country
<i>September - October 2001</i>	Deployment of volunteers in the host organisations
<i>November 2001 - April 2002</i>	Follow-up and evaluation of the deployment

Conditions of deployment

The following conditions apply to the content, organisation and financial framework within which the older volunteers work during the pilot phase in the exchange programme:

- *Duration of deployment:* A deployment period of between 2 and 4 weeks can be agreed between the organisations and the volunteers depending on their respective requirements and interests. The expenses this gives rise to are not the responsibility of the volunteer. Should a longer stay of up to a maximum of 8 weeks be desired, then the issue of the costs to be assumed must be jointly clarified between the volunteers and the despatch or reception organisations.
- *Volume of work:* The volume of voluntary work to be done is freely negotiable; it is orientated around the equivalent of a part-time job. Should the organisations or volunteers want the work to be done on special days at special times, this must be agreed in such a way as to satisfy the wishes of all the parties involved.
- *Fields of activity:* There should be as few fixed guidelines as possible concerning the fields of work in which the transnational transfer of know-how takes place, the main thing being that the work is aimed at avoiding discrimination and social exclusion and promoting social integration. This can be pursued either directly in work with groups on the social periphery, or indirectly through activities in sectors such as sport, culture, music, ecology etc.
- *Accommodation for the volunteers during deployment in host country:* The National Coordination Offices shall ensure that the volunteers receive suitable accommodation. Within the framework of the pilot phase, funds shall be made available for bed-and-breakfast accommodation in a separate room in private households. Furthermore, the National Coordination Offices – in agreement with the despatch and reception organisations – will investigate the possibilities at local level of inexpensive accommodation in apartments, such as in church or trade union residences. The additional costs that possibly arise by comparison with accommodation in private households will be assumed by the volunteer who chooses this kind of accommodation.
- *Insurance against risks during deployment:* The European Coordination Office shall take out a health, accident and liability insurance for the participating volunteers from the moment they leave their home to the moment they return. Details are provided on a separate sheet. Neither the organisations nor the volunteers shall incur any charges for this.

Prerequisites for participation

In order to ensure the productive and smooth operation of the European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers the *volunteers* should fulfil the following prerequisites:

- *Expertise*: This includes a sound knowledge in his or her own field of voluntary activity and a good command of the language of the host country. If desired, a subsidy can be provided from European funds for a course at a public training institution to refresh the volunteer's knowledge of the language.
- *Personal suitability*: This refers primarily to the desire to gain new experience and the capacity to adapt flexibly to new situations and demands. A good state of health is also required and must be certified by a doctor on a separate form for the purposes of the AXA Royale Belgium insurance company.

In addition, the *despatch and reception organisations* should fulfil the following requirements:

- *Appropriate working conditions in the host organisations*: It must be guaranteed that the volunteer has a workplace and the necessary working tools, and that the organisation provides competent support and monitoring and is willing to integrate the foreign volunteer into the working procedures. Generally speaking, the same framework conditions should exist for the foreign as for the local volunteer workers.
- *Help in finding suitable accommodation for the volunteers*: In view of the fact that the cost of accommodation is an important factor for each volunteer exchange programme, the National Coordination Offices need to be informed by the reception organisations about inexpensive accommodation solutions at local level.
- *Reimbursement of travel expenses incurred locally during volunteer work*: It has become standard practice in the realm of volunteer works that the organising body reimburse the costs for travel to and from the deployment point. Furthermore, it would be desirable if the reception organisation placed a weekly or monthly public transport commuter ticket at the disposal of the volunteer for the duration of his or her stay and which can also be used in their leisure-time.
- *A possible maximum 50 Euro share in the travel expenses incurred by the volunteers*: If volunteers choose to be deployed in countries with above-average travel expenses, then in accordance with the guidelines of the European Commission the despatch organisation may be required to assume part of the costs. This would not, however, exceed the sum of 50 Euro; financially weak organisations may be exempt from bearing this possible share.

Outlook

The pilot phase in the European Exchange Programme for Older Volunteers is currently being carried out in eight European Union countries. The medium- and long-term aim is to include all the EU member states.

In a future perspective, some of the concept's basic elements could be extended, complemented or adapted. The current approach concentrates on a transfer of know-how by older volunteer workers which involves learning processes on both sides, that of the organisation and that of the volunteer. Alternatives are conceivable and could be considered at the appropriate time:

- Organisations could request the support of foreign volunteers who would advise them on the setting up of certain fields of volunteering and forms of organisation.
- Under certain circumstances, both the organisations and the older volunteers might wish to offer or assume a long-term exchange up to 12 months, as is the case with the European Volunteer Service for young people.
- The possibility of deployment abroad as a volunteer worker could be used as an instrument to introduce older people to the idea of volunteer involvement.

These and other issues relating to a future firm establishment of the programme - particularly as regards the promotion of social integration - are to be revised by a project advisory council, in which representatives of the European Commission, the national ministries responsible for European policies for senior citizens and European associations in the fields of welfare, volunteering and senior citizens will participate.

Important addresses

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