



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Education and Culture
Youth and Sport

Youth in Action

EVS TRAINING AND EVALUATION CYCLE

GUIDELINES AND MINIMUM QUALITY STANDARDS

Youth in Action Programme

Action 2 – European Voluntary Service

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1. Introduction

The Commission recognizes participation in the Youth in Action Programme as a non-formal learning experience providing the participants with new experiences and skills. This is particularly true for the European Voluntary Service (EVS) which enhances the participants professional skills and competences, thus contributing to their employability. At the same time, it increases their sense of solidarity, develops their social skills and promotes active participation in society.

Volunteering supports young people's employability by being a practically oriented learning experience which contributes greatly to the development of both personal/social skills and specific/professional competences. It is also stimulating their sense of initiative and social entrepreneurship.

One of the features of EVS is a range of training and evaluation provisions guiding young volunteers through a non-formal learning process before, during and after their Service period abroad. To support and strengthen the learning dimension of EVS this document provides the minimum quality standards for the training offered to EVS volunteers by looking at what should be the framework, the content, the methods and the possible achievements of trainings and evaluations for EVS volunteers.

Training and Evaluation Cycle (TEC)

In order to harmonise and professionalise the training and evaluation for EVS volunteers, the Commission has established a Training and Evaluation Cycle for which the National Agencies or regional SALTOS are responsible in Programme Countries and Neighbouring Partner Countries in Eastern-Europe and Caucasus or South-East Europe.

This Training and Evaluation Cycle also facilitates contact between volunteers, promoters and National Agencies/SALTOS. The TEC is complementing other ongoing support offered by the Sending, Host and Coordinating Organisations before and during the Service period. The "EVS Training and Evaluation Cycle", is comprised of two sessions:

- on-arrival training
- mid-term evaluation

Volunteers have a right and an obligation to participate in both sessions and the promoters must ensure that their volunteers take part in the TEC, which is considered as integral part of the voluntary Service period.

National Agencies/SALTOS have to ensure training and evaluation sessions for all volunteers in Service in their country/region (included those from centralised projects). Due to the large volumes of volunteers to include and to particular situations, National Agencies can opt to delegate all or some of the training/evaluation sessions to subcontracted organisations, but the National Agencies should be as present as possible in the sessions and keep regular contacts with the trainers. A good practice also consists in involving former volunteers in the training and evaluation of new volunteers.

Training and evaluation events are expected to complement each other, corresponding to the different stages the Service and the non-formal learning process of the volunteer.

The Training and Evaluation Cycle and the minimum quality standards also apply for Partner Countries which do not have a National Agency or a SALTO organising the TEC. In these countries, the training and evaluations sessions are organised by EVS Host or

Coordinating Organisations. Additional financial support is available for this if requested in the application form.

Additional training and support to be provided

The EVS Training and Evaluation Cycle is not a stand-alone subject. Volunteers receive continuous counselling and guidance before, during and after the Service period, while training for project managers, mentors and trainers add up to a complex set of measures, accompanying volunteers and promoters all through the European Voluntary Service experience.

The Sending, Host and Coordinating Organisations are responsible for preparing the volunteers prior to departure and to provide language training and personal and task-related support during the Service period. A full description of the responsibilities of the promoters can be found in the Programme Guide, whereas the only part of the promoters responsibility covered by this document is the pre-departure preparation to be provided by the Sending Organisations.

In addition to the pre-departure preparation handled by the Sending Organisation, certain National Agencies may offer a one-day information session to volunteers prior to their departure.

National Agencies are also responsible for organising annual EVS events for volunteers who have completed their Service. These events serve as evaluation meeting, alumni meeting and promotional event.

2. Minimum Quality Standards for EVS Training and Evaluation

The aim of volunteer training within EVS 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 and evaluation concept also serves as a mean of conflict resolution, risk prevention and evaluation instrument.

EVS Training and Evaluation Cycle consists of two parts: on-arrival training and mid-term evaluation. In addition, the Sending Organisation is responsible for pre-departure preparation and National Agencies organise annual EVS events, and may in some cases organise pre-departure info-days. All sessions have the same aim but specific objectives. They complement each other and correspond to the different stages of the project and the non-formal learning process of the volunteer. All volunteers receive training and evaluation from different providers. Quality standards have the task to help connecting and harmonising one and another format of training and evaluation. They indicate which topics and issues volunteers and trainers can trust to have been covered in the respective training/evaluation session. They help creating a consequent and coherent covering of different topics at the appropriate phase.

Quality is the main objective of preparation, training and evaluation. Obviously, all quality indicators may not be met for every session of each volunteer, in particular in case of small countries, lately registered volunteers, short-term Service, etc. The National Agency (and the promoter) should as far as possible try to ensure that the training/evaluation opportunities offered to each volunteer are in line with his/her specific needs.

Minimum quality standards outline the least that should be covered by a training/evaluation 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/evaluation event. Minimum quality standards clarify what can be expected as achievements from a training/evaluation session; be it the organisers of the next training/evaluation event, the project supervisors, the mentors or the volunteers themselves. Training providers can build a connection between the different phases of training/evaluation 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 preparation (By Sending/Coordinating Organisation)

Objectives of the training

In order for the project to be successful and the EVS experiences to be positive and enriching for the volunteer, it is crucial that the Sending Organisation provides adequate preparation for the volunteer prior to departure.

This preparation should take place at least one month before the departure and should be tailored to the individual needs of the volunteer and the specificities of the project, the Service and the Host Country.

Pre-departure preparation provides the volunteers with information about EVS, the project life cycle and the different parties involved. The preparation allows volunteers to discuss expectations, motivation and also concerns with regards to their future project with their Sending Organisation.

It is inevitable to provide information on the rights and responsibilities of all promoters - as well as basics of conflict prevention and crisis management. Volunteers are likely to face various difficult situations during the Service period. It is therefore essential to lay the grounds for guidance through the intercultural learning process preparing the volunteers for the fact that living in a different country, interacting with people from a different culture and often in a foreign language will at times be difficult. Providing information on the support available during the Service is also vital.

The objective of pre-departure training includes provision of practical and technical information such as insurance, visa, pocket money, or working hours.

Each volunteer receives an Info-Kit from the National Agency prior to the departure. The pre-departure preparation is an opportunity for the Sending Organisation to go through and discuss the different parts of the Info-Kit with the volunteer. The Coordinating Organisation is responsible to ensure that the Info-Kit is provided to volunteers from Countries without a National Agency.

Expected achievements of the preparation

The pre-departure preparation will be different depending on training practices, organisational possibilities and volunteer needs. Nevertheless, pre-departure preparation should ensure that the volunteers depart with a proper learning achievement in the following aspects:

- Know about concept and framework of the European Voluntary Service and its place within the Youth in Action Programme,
- Be familiar with the partners in the Voluntary Service framework and their role: Sending Organisation, Host Organisation, Coordinating Organisation, mentor, and where applicable, National Agency, European Commission,
- Know about the rights and responsibilities of EVS volunteers,
- Have shared their motivations, expectations and fears, and have reflected on goals, included for learning
- Have received appropriate practical and technical information on visa, residence permit, legal status as a volunteer, the insurance, pocket money, the EVS Agreement,
- 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,
- Understand the importance and usefulness of getting a Youthpass.

On-arrival training (By Host National Agency)

Objectives of the training

The main objective of the on-arrival training is to introduce the volunteers to the host country, empowering them for the Service period and the EVS experience. On-arrival training supports the volunteers in adapting to cultural and personal challenges. The training allows volunteers to get to know each other and to build a network. Volunteers should receive guidance on conflict prevention and crisis-management.

At the same time, it equips the volunteers with skills for good communication, including aspects of intercultural learning. 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 develop their own personal goals for the Service, in line with the non-formal learning philosophy of EVS.

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:* on average 7 working days
- *Group:* –up to 25 participants
- *Venue:* residential

For the training to have a maximum benefit it should take place shortly after the arrival of the volunteer.

For volunteers doing a Service of less than 2 months, the National Agency may offer a reduced and shorter on-arrival training, or exceptionally exempt volunteers from the NA/SALTO-organised on-arrival training. In the latter case, the Host or Coordinating Organisation is to organise the training in line with these minimum quality standards, although possibly with a shorter duration.

Expected achievements of the training

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

- Be aware of and had the chance to discuss questions related to visa, residence permit, legal status as a volunteer, insurance, EVS Agreement other rights and responsibilities of volunteers and promoters,
- Know the insurance and crisis management systems (documentation of AXA/EBA and procedures)
- Know what support is available; National Agency, SALTO, EVS Helpdesk,
- Have received information on the host country: history, political and social situation, key aspects of the host culture, how to get involved in the local community,
- Be aware on how to deal with cultural differences and with conflicts,
- Be familiar with the role of each partner (SO, HO, CO, volunteer) in the Activity and her/his own rights and responsibilities,
- Have had the chance to meet and network with other EVS volunteers,

- Receive basic information about the European Union and its policies and programmes in the field of youth,
- Have learned about the objectives and principles of EVS and the Youth in Action Programme,
- Know the meaning of being a volunteer,
- Have identified clear goals and ideas towards his/her Voluntary Service (and future achievements which could be included in the Youthpass)

Mid-term evaluation (By Host National Agency)

Objectives of the evaluation

The mid-term evaluation allows volunteers to evaluate their experience so far and to reflect on the activities, the role and support of the Host Organisation, and the volunteers' own contribution. The mid-term evaluation is essential for risk prevention and crisis management. In this respect the evaluation facilitates conflict resolution - if necessary! In addition, volunteers share positive experiences and find further motivation.

The evaluation provides the opportunity to learn from everybody's "EVS story" and enables the volunteers to work on developments and/or further improvements in their Service. This includes dealing with the volunteer's perspectives beyond the Service. The evaluation should also raise awareness of the personal learning process, linking it to the key competences of Youthpass.

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

Framework of the evaluation

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

- *Timing:* min. 2 months after on-arrival training and min. 2 months before end of Service
- *Duration:* on average 2,5 working days
- *Group:* -up to 25 participants
- *Venue:* residential

The nature of the event as a meeting with other volunteers is essential. Volunteers go to mid-term evaluation long enough after the arrival to have enough experience for reviewing the situation, as well as soon enough before the end of the Service so that there is still time to improve the situation when necessary.

The mid-term evaluation is only for volunteers doing a Service of 6 months or more.

Expected achievements of the evaluation

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

- Have done a personal evaluation of the project and reflected on the scope of activities,
- Have shared personal experiences (learning new skills and competences, being part of community life, living within a different culture, using the language),
- Have identified problems, difficulties, conflicts faced or about to face and consequently received satisfying support and clues on "next steps" to solve these,
- Have worked on the development / improvement of the activities the volunteer is involved in,
- Have received information and guidance on what they can do after the Service,
- Have understood how to draft the Youthpass,
- Have received information about the Final Report to be produced.

Annual EVS Event (By Sending National Agency)

Objectives of the meeting

The Annual EVS Event is a meeting place for former, current and potential volunteers and serves as evaluation meeting, alumni meeting and promotional event. It is particularly important for those who have finished their voluntary service during the last year as a place to discuss and evaluate experiences, and to transfer experiences to current and potential volunteers.

One of the objectives of the event is to ensure that the National Agency receives feedback about the projects, promoters, the practical arrangements and the overall impression of EVS. A key question addresses the learning effect of the Service period.

Framework of the meeting

The following indicators outline the most appropriate operational framework for Annual EVS Events.

Conditions and practices again determine variations:

- *Timing:* normally once per year in each country, although some NAs may decide to organise regional events.
- *Duration:* 1-2 days
- *Participants:* Costs can be covered for volunteers who have finished their Service during the last year, although the event may gather a much wider group including promoters, previous, current and potential volunteers as well as media and other stakeholders.

Expected achievements of the meeting

Considering the national conditions, realities and practices, Annual EVS Events will not be identical. Nevertheless, they should leave the volunteer who have finished their Service during the last year having evaluated the EVS experience, including:

- the cooperation between the volunteer and the promoters, personal support and supervision obtained,
- the Service, own projects, personal contribution,
- the overall pedagogical approach, their learning achievements (personal, professional, social), be aware of their personal capacities and skills, and (if relevant) finalised their Youthpass,
- their increased knowledge on Europe, understanding for cultural diversity and their attitude towards Europe,
- having shared their EVS experience with peers,

Moreover, the Annual EVS Event may be:

- a chance for potential volunteers and promoters to meet experienced volunteers,
- an occasion to promote EVS and the impacts of EVS to stakeholders, decision-makers and media,
- a networking event for previous volunteers to explore and develop new projects and other ways of using their experiences,
- a showcase for successful projects,
- a celebration of volunteering.